

2005

Civil War prisons in American memory

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CIVIL WAR PRISONS IN AMERICAN MEMORY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by

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August 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A considerable amount of people deserve thanks for their help during this project. My advisor, Gaines M. Foster, provided consistent encouragement, keen editorial insight, and a model of scholarship for which I am deeply grateful. The dissertation committee, Wayne Parent, John Rodrigue, Charles Shindo, and Tiwana Simpson offered helpful guidance, and, in the case of Professors Shindo and Simpson, advice and constant support throughout my graduate school career.

For their professional courtesy and assistance in my research, I am indebted to the staffs of Andersonville National Historic Site, the Georgia State Archives, the Library of Congress, Middleton Library at Louisiana State University, the National Archives, the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the United States Army Military History Institute. Several individuals at these institutions merit special thanks. Dale Couch and Greg Jarrell at the Georgia State Archives displayed quintessential southern hospitality and suggested additional avenues of inquiry. Dr. Richard Sommers of the United States Army Military History Institute personally took time to listen to the details of the project, guide me through the library, and locate materials that I otherwise would not have found. At Andersonville National Historic Site, Superintendent Fred Boyles graciously answered my questions and allowed me to roam freely throughout the park's grounds and records. A 2003-2004 Louisiana State University Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship facilitated the research and writing process.

Many friends and family members demonstrated belief in and support for me and this project—instead of listing all of them here I will thank them in person. I would be

remiss, however, if I did not single out some of the most important contributions. Sean and Megan Lumley allowed me to turn their wonderful home into my base of operations for much of the summer of 2002. At Hinds Community College, my colleagues encouraged me in numerous ways. Martha Wilkins allowed me additional time for writing, Loyce Miles insisted that I finish, and Eric Bobo, Ben Fatherree, Sheila Moore, Mickey Roth, Chris Waldrip, and Stephen Wedding made my first year of full-time teaching so much fun that I still had energy left to go home and write. With me every step of the way through graduate school were Court Carney, Rand Dotson, and Matt Reonas. This dissertation might have existed sooner if not for their insatiable appetite for vice in many forms, but it would not exist at all without their ideas and their friendship. My brother Liam was a source of unexpected but welcome companionship and inspiration. As they have always done, my parents provided unwavering support and an infectious intellectual curiosity. The last thank you goes to Katie Cassady, whose example of wisdom, grace, and humor was and remains indispensable to this work and its author.

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ABSTRACT

The memory of Civil War prisons has always been contested. Since 1861, generations of Americans struggled with the questions raised by the deaths of approximately 56,000 prisoners of war, almost one-tenth of all Civil War fatalities. During the war, throughout Reconstruction, and well into the twentieth century, a sectional debate raged over the responsibility for the prison casualties. Republican politicians invoked the savage cruelty of Confederate prisons as they waved the bloody shirt, while hundreds of former prisoners published narratives that blamed various prison officials and promoted sectional bitterness. The animosity reflected a need to identify individuals responsible for the tragedy as well as the stakes involved—how history would remember the Union and Confederate prisons.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when the prison controversy finally bowed to the influence of sectional reconciliation, Americans began exploring the legacy of Civil War prisons against the backdrop of the First and Second World Wars and their even more terrible atrocities. Historians and writers, inspired by the pursuit of objectivity, probed the legacy of Civil War prisons, no longer to blame individual Union or Confederate officials, but instead out of a desire to understand how such horrors could be possible in a supposedly modern society.

In recent decades, a trend developed towards commemorating and commercializing the tragedy of Civil War prisons, culminating in the 1998 opening of the National POW Museum at Andersonville, Georgia, site of the most infamous Civil War prison. The museum presented a universal narrative of the POW experience that interpreted Civil War prisons not as a terrible exception, but as the first in a series of

modern atrocities. In its message of patriotic appreciation for the sacrifice of all American POWs, however, the museum also glorified their suffering as the inevitable cost of freedom.

Throughout the reinterpretation of Civil War prisons, the effort to understand the prison deaths reflected a desire to find meaning in the tragedy. Although satisfactory answers for the prison atrocities of the Civil War remained elusive, the persistence Americans showed in asking the questions testifies to the enduring power of historical memory.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although the Civil War ended in 1865, the controversies it inspired never did. As northerners and southerners shaped the new political, social, racial and cultural world of the postwar nation, together they faced a crucial obstacle to reconciliation—the lingering memories of the brutal conflict. “The contrasting memories of this nation’s most bitter domestic conflict persisted,” historian Michael Kammen has observed. On one subject in particular, the bitterness refused to fade quickly: the wartime treatment of captured Union and Confederate soldiers. Of the approximately 410,000 soldiers taken prisoner, 56,000 died while imprisoned by the enemy. That figure accounted for nearly one tenth of the 620,000 men who perished in the conflict. Both the scale of the casualties in prisons and the accounts of the suffering there enraged Americans, North and South, not just during the war but long after Appomattox. As another historian, David Blight, recently stated, “no wartime experience . . . caused deeper emotions, recriminations, and lasting invective than that of prisons.”¹

The subject of Civil War prisons proved so controversial in the aftermath of the war that the first substantial scholarly exploration of the failures of foresight and policy that doomed so many prisoners, William Hesseltine’s *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology*, was not published until 1930. Considering the massive amount of attention devoted to various aspects of the Civil War since 1865, the absence of any objective analysis of the prison issue for some sixty-five years testified to the continuing sensitivity

¹ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 101; David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 152.

of the subject. Even six decades after the war, Hesseltine acknowledged the delicate nature of his topic and the potential to inflame sectional debate. “It is possible now,” Hesseltine insisted at the beginning of his book, perhaps to convince himself, “to examine the prisoners and prisons of the Civil War in a scientific spirit.” Curiously, the appearance of *Civil War Prisons* simultaneously opened and closed the field among professional historians. For seventy years after Hesseltine, the topic of Civil War prisons remained, at least until recently, almost exclusively the domain of amateur historians.²

The last two decades, however, represent a boom period for Civil War prison studies, as a new generation of scholars attempt to address the old animosities. These recent studies generally take the form of individual prison histories, although prison memoirs continue to appear as well, and invariably share a commitment to reconstructing the details of life as a Civil War prisoner of war. Like Hesseltine’s work, however, the vast majorities of these publications focus on the events of the war and conclude in 1865 or shortly thereafter.³ With the exception of two recent dissertations, Nancy Roberts’s

² William Best Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), xxiii.

³ Some examples of prison studies include: William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); George Levy, *To Die In Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas 1862-65* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1999); Benton McAdams, *Rebels at Rock Island: The Story of a Civil War Prison* (Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Michael Horigan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2002). A sample of recent prison diaries includes: Ezra Ripple, *Dancing Across the Deadline: The Andersonville Memoir of a Prisoner of the Confederacy*, edited by Mark Snell (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1996); Robert Sneden, *Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey*, edited by Charles Bryan, Jr., and Nelson Lankford (New York: The Free Press, 2000); Ted Genoways and Hugh Genoways, eds., *A Perfect Picture of Hell: Eyewitness Accounts by Civil War Prisoners from the 12th Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001). Three other works deserve mention as well: Arch Blakey, *General John H. Winder, C. S. A.* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press,

1996 study, “The Afterlife of Civil War Prisons and their Dead,” and Douglas Gardner’s 1998 work, “Andersonville and American Memory: Civil War Prisoners and Narratives of Suffering and Redemption,” the postwar debate over the 56,000 dead prisoners and the questions of responsibility, intent, and meaning their experiences raised remains largely unexamined.⁴

Although their analysis of the impact of the prison legacy and the public memory of the horrible wartime events contains merit, neither Roberts nor Gardner examines how and why the debate over Civil War prisons changed for Americans of different generations. Roberts concerns herself primarily with the argument that contention eventually yields to reconciliation, while Gardner posits that surviving prisoners’ accounts offered a redemptive interpretation of the war “grounded in biblical and Christian archetypes.” Both these themes deserve attention, and will certainly figure in this analysis, but neither Roberts nor Gardner offers many conclusions other than “the reunification of the nation after the Civil War was a remarkable cultural achievement, and

1990), the only full length biography of any of the major Civil War officers involved in the prison debacle; Lonnie Speer, *Portals To Hell: Military Prisons in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1997), which provides a more thorough if less imaginative overview of the day to day conditions experienced in Civil War prisons than Hesseltine; and Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and its Civil War Prison* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2001), an insightful look at how the creation of a Civil War prison changed the economic future of the town of Elmira, NY.

⁴ Nancy Roberts, “The Afterlife of Civil War Prisons and their Dead” (Ph. D. diss., University of Oregon, 1996); Douglas Gardner, “Andersonville and American Memory: Civil War Prisoners and Narratives of Suffering and Redemption” (Ph. D. diss., Miami University, 1998). One other recent dissertation of note, Charles W. Sanders, Jr., “‘This Sad Business:’ The Union and Confederate Prison Systems of the American Civil War” (Ph. D. diss., Kansas State University, 2001), provides a very thorough examination of the prison structure of the Union and Confederacy. Although he mainly focuses on proving his assertion that the high mortality of the prisons resulted from deliberate government policies on both sides, he does briefly look at the ongoing controversy over the prisons through the late 1870s.

laid the foundation for the American Century.” The vagueness of this statement prevents much insight into how the public debate and definition of the prison legacy evolved over time.⁵

The prison controversy developed during the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. Prior to the fighting, neither side gave much thought to the possibility of caring for large numbers of prisoners of war, and from 1861 on, prisoners experienced difficult conditions in both the Union and Confederacy. And as the conflict grew increasingly bitter, the question of how to exchange prisoners of war became increasingly sensitive, ultimately leading to the collapse of the exchange process in 1863. As the war entered the brutal year of 1864, the Union and Confederacy accumulated thousands of prisoners, and an intense animosity developed as reports of incredible suffering reached the ears of Americans on both sides of the struggle.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the prisoner of war issue provoked intense hostility. Much of the controversy swirled around the trial and execution of Captain Henry Wirz in November of 1865. During the war, Wirz served as the commandant of the Confederate prison stockade at Andersonville, site of 13,000 Union prisoner deaths. As the sole Confederate officer convicted and executed for war crimes, Wirz emerged as a lightning rod for the national outrage over the treatment of captured soldiers. Throughout Reconstruction Wirz, Andersonville, and the subject of Civil War prisons frequently surfaced during political campaigns, as both Republicans and Democrats tried to tarnish their opponents with the memory of the horrors of the various camps.

⁵ Gardner, “Andersonville and American Memory,” abstract. Gardner bases his ideas on only a handful of prison accounts. Prison narratives merit closer scrutiny. *Ibid.*, 253; Roberts, “The Afterlife of Civil War Prisons,” 307-311.

Between 1877 and 1898 the further proliferation of ex-prisoner diaries occurred. The earliest accounts appeared during the war itself, and the publication of prison memoirs, narratives of experiences in Union and Confederate prisons, in various forms continues even today, over one hundred and forty years later. The vast majority of these accounts appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they played a vital role in keeping the national debate over the responsibility and meaning of Civil War prisoners' suffering alive. The interpretation of these texts will assess not only the veterans' descriptions of prison conditions but also the confusion and helplessness created by the shock of what capture and imprisonment meant. And from the 1880s on, the controversy over the prison legacy began to develop more complexity. While much of the sectional bitterness and penchant for accusation remained, these decades also saw the rise of organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic, the United of Confederate Veterans, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Although these and many other organizations often perpetuated the anger created by memories of Civil War prisons, they also memorialized and commemorated the thousands of prisoner casualties.

The onset of the Spanish-American War in 1898 led to an era commonly interpreted as the climactic period of sectional reconciliation. While the creation of monuments to the Civil War dead during this period allowed many Americans to focus on the heroism of the soldiers' sacrifice rather than on maintaining old suspicions of deliberate atrocity, on the subject of Civil War prisons, the old arguments defending the prison record of the Union or Confederacy continued to dominate the debate. Reconciliation, at least as it pertained to the controversy over Civil War prisons, would have to wait.

The traumatic years between 1914 and 1960 represented an important period because World War I and World War II brought an initial recognition of the connections between the horrible atrocities occurring in Europe and Asia and the Civil War prison tragedy. For the first time, Americans, led by William Hesse and MacKinlay Kantor, author of the popular 1955 novel *Andersonville*, revisited the Civil War prison controversy with the realization that the suffering of Civil War prisoners was not unique, unfortunately. By 1960, the influence of these works and the experience of the world wars led most Americans to reject the old argument that prison atrocities occurred deliberately and instead adopt a more objective understanding of the terrible costs of modern war.

After 1960, another aspect of the prison legacy emerged—a burgeoning interest in turning Civil War prison sites into tourist attractions and an accelerating curiosity in the subject overall. Events of the 1960s, particularly the national celebration of the Civil War Centennial, brought a renewed attention to the subject. As the old questions of responsibility and meaning surrounding the prison casualties surfaced anew, the visibility and interest in writing about and visiting the prison camps rose as well. With each passing year, in part because of the intense public interest in the Vietnam POWs, the attention devoted to Civil War prison camps continues. During the last few decades movies, songs, novels, and of course, more ex-prisoner memoirs and individual camp studies appeared on a regular basis. Also in the 1970s, the small town of Andersonville, Georgia, after a century of avoiding and downplaying the grim memories of the prison, transformed itself into a Civil War village devoted to celebrating and selling its past.

As the years passed, Andersonville played an increasingly central role in the prison controversy. The selection of the notorious Confederate prison site for the 1998 creation of the National Prisoner of War Museum on the grounds of the old Civil War prison testified to Andersonville's importance in the public consciousness. Owned by the United States government since the early twentieth century, Andersonville developed over time into more than just a symbol of Civil War atrocity—the old stockade site became a lasting public reminder of the sacrifices made by American prisoners of war throughout our history. Today the national park contains a partially recreated prison camp along with the museum, which honors American prisoners from all past wars. The creation of this tourist attraction heralds the opening of a new era in the legacy of Civil War prisons. Instead of focusing on the old sectional animosities of the Civil War, the interpretation offered by the National POW museum stresses the unifying sacrifice made by all American prisoners of war and celebrates those who endure captivity.

Over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the ways Americans debated the questions of meaning, responsibility, and legacy of these terrible prison camps changed dramatically from generation to generation. Always controversial, even today, with time and especially with the brutal American prisoner of war experiences in twentieth century wars, the suffering of Civil War prisoners no longer just recalled sectional bitterness but rather evoked the common sacrifices of our soldiers throughout the past. While the sectional accusations never disappeared completely, and probably never will, the outcome of that long transition meant that the Civil War prison legacy now contains as much potential for unity as animosity.

The shifting nature of the controversy over Civil War prisons also testifies to the ambiguity of public memory. The important recognition both Roberts and Gardner only hint at involves the fluidity of public memory and the impossibility of approaching a fixed definition of legacy, an insight applicable not only to the history of Civil War prison camps but to all historical memory. By explaining the connections between the way the Civil War prison controversy unfolded during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the evolution of American society during that period, through the rise of organizations, the Lost Cause, and the mass atrocities of world war and Vietnam, among other developments, I hope to shed some light on the complicated relationship between past and present. The long, tangled national discourse over the meaning of these prisons and the questions of responsibility, redemption, reconciliation, organization, monuments, tourism, and heroism they raised provides us a window into both the evolution of modern American society and the indivisibility of past from present.

CHAPTER 2: “AWFUL, AWFUL SUFFERING”

On June 19, 1861, the *Charleston Mercury* denounced a Confederate captain and his men who, after capture, proceeded to take the oath of allegiance to the United States government. The dishonorable action of swearing the oath meant that the captured captain and his men betrayed the Confederacy, thereby forfeiting their “Southern citizenship.” “The United States Government had the right to hold them as prisoners of war,” the editor declared, because “they were not the first, and will not be the last, of mankind who will be subject to imprisonment. It is the fate and the fortune of war.” In a final blast, the paper warned the soldiers of the Confederacy that “war is bloody reality, not butterfly sporting. The sooner men understand this the better.” During the first months of the Civil War, as optimism for a quick resolution of the crisis persisted, reminding the troops of the bloody reality of war remained necessary, because the expected brief duration of the conflict promised at worst a short, if intense, period of suffering or imprisonment, an experience any honorable soldier could withstand. After months of the bloody reality of war, however, both the Confederacy and the Union started to understand that almost everyone underestimated both the length and brutality of the war.¹

In 1861, few people foresaw the need for prison depots, because no one anticipated the capture of more than a handful of prisoners at a time. In the unlikely

¹ *Charleston Mercury*, June 19, 1861, Accessible Archives internet database (accessed February 2003); also see Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). Much of the argument concerning the important role of the press and the brutality of the prison camps relies on his insights about the way Americans experienced the Civil War.

event that large numbers of prisoners accumulated, according to historian Eugene Thomas III, military convention held that upon capture “a prisoner was subject to immediate exchange or release on parole to await exchange at some later date.” Immediate exchange allowed capturing armies to avoid the burden of feeding and sheltering hordes of prisoners by swapping captives after a battle. When paroled a captured soldier swore not to fight, aid the enemy in any way, or visit certain areas, effectively ending his active involvement in the war until officially exchanged. Both exchange and parole returned the captives to freedom, although once exchanged, soldiers were subject to re-enlistment or re-assignment. Although a third fate, imprisonment, possibly awaited captured soldiers, the chances of large-scale prisoner camps seemed far-fetched during the first summer of the war.²

The possibility of imprisonment grew more and more likely as the political ramifications of prisoner exchange became clear. According to Abraham Lincoln’s interpretation, secession from the Union was not possible, which made all Confederates traitors and their army an insurgent force. In practice, his position proved unfeasible, since all captured Confederates technically would face trial and potentially execution for treason. Southern threats of retaliatory executions against captive Union soldiers further indicated the danger of Lincoln’s stance. With reluctance, Lincoln realized the necessity

² For the best discussion of the complexities surrounding the fluctuating process of exchange during the Civil War, see William Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), Chapters 2, 5, and 10; Eugene M. Thomas, III, “Prisoner of War Exchange during the American Civil War” (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1976). Thomas, “Prisoner of War Exchange,” 3-4. This section on prisoner exchange and the organization of the prison systems also relies heavily on my thesis. See Benjamin Cloyd, “Prisoners of a New Bureaucracy: Organizational Failure at Andersonville and Elmira Prisons during the Civil War” (M. A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 2000), 11-23.

for some concessions on the prisoner issue. As a result, the Union, as William Hesseltine pointed out, “held captive men of the South and treated them as prisoners of war, rather than as traitors, but they refused to admit that their captives were other than traitors.” Given this conflicting position and Lincoln’s desire to avoid legitimizing the Confederacy’s existence, from the outset of the war the exchange of prisoners proceeded tenuously. In a cautious attempt to skirt any official recognition of the Confederacy, the Lincoln administration accepted only a piecemeal, informal process of prisoner exchange.³

During 1861, the small numbers of prisoners taken allowed opposing generals to negotiate the terms for limited exchanges while evading the political question of recognition. Despite these special exchanges, many prisoners, especially those captured at Manassas, remained behind enemy lines. In December of 1861, the United States Congress, under increasing pressure from prisoner families and the press, finally consented to “inaugurate systemic measures for the exchange of prisoners in the present rebellion,” since “exchange does not involve a recognition of the rebels as a government.” Its practical impact was minimal, although the Congressional resolution eased the public demands for exchange. It formally allowed exchange, but the resolution did nothing to streamline the process. This “system” essentially permitted special exchanges to continue, according to Hesseltine, who noted that Union commanders still made exchange arrangements “on their own responsibility” rather than as part of a “general system.”⁴

³ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 6.

⁴ Thomas, “Prisoner of War Exchange,” 46-7; U. S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*

Placing the burden of exchange on the shoulders of individual commanders constantly delayed the process by creating a vast amount of clerical work. Military officers were deluged with requests for mercy forwarded to them from congressmen. Exchanges not only had to be cleared by superiors on both sides but also had to be investigated to insure that both parties complied with the terms. The resulting bureaucratic headaches grew even greater after General Ulysses Grant's victory at Fort Donelson in February of 1862, during which he captured some 15,000 Confederates. Although the Union enjoyed the upper hand in exchange negotiations since it held the majority of the prisoners, its advantage deteriorated over the spring and summer under the pressure of holding so many troops. Prisoner exchanges slowed to a trickle as the South insisted on the implementation of a formal cartel and refused the Union's sporadic requests for special exchange. Renewed public sympathy for faster repatriation also spurred the reluctant Union to compromise with the Confederacy, which strained to meet the demands of the thousands of prisoners confined in Richmond. Shiloh and the Peninsular Campaign further burdened both sides with unwanted prisoners, and they returned to the bargaining table.⁵

On July 22, 1862, Union General John A. Dix and Confederate General D. H. Hill concluded several days of negotiations with the establishment of the Dix-Hill cartel, which at the time ended the system of special exchange. The cartel called for two agents to oversee the streamlined process for the exchange of prisoners and established official

(Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894-1899), Series II, Vol. III, 157, hereafter referred to as O.R., with all references to Series II unless otherwise noted; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 15-18.

⁵ Thomas, "Prisoner of War Exchange," 59, 87-88; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 26, 67-8.

exchange locations at Dutch Gap, Virginia, on the James River, and at Vicksburg, Mississippi. At these two places, prisoners would be exchanged according to their rank. Excess captives were to be paroled within ten days of their capture, relieving both sides of the need to imprison soldiers while they awaited official exchange. The cartel's intended permanence, based on the mutual agreement that "misunderstanding shall not interrupt the release of prisoners on parole," implied that exchange would continue on a consistent basis. The wording of the cartel consciously avoided any mention of Confederate sovereignty. Under its guidelines, the accumulation of prisoners gradually dissipated, although the prisons never fully emptied, and the issue of prisoner exchange appeared resolved.⁶

After a few months, frustration and discord resumed between the two sides. Two issues destroyed the exchange cartel. A debate first arose over the validity and terms of paroles issued to thousands of prisoners. Both the Union and the Confederacy already struggled with the reassimilation of paroled troops back into their armies. Many soldiers resisted a return to the line of fire, insisting that their paroles exempted them from service until their exchange became official, but neither North nor South could afford to lose the services of these men indefinitely. Instead of going home to await their official exchange, paroled soldiers soon found themselves in parole camps set up by their own government, where they participated in military activities behind the lines. Although parole camps effectively kept paroled soldiers in the service so that when officially

⁶ Thomas, "Prisoner of War Exchange," 90; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 32-3. The cartel declared that a general-in-chief was worth 60 enlisted men, lieutenant general, 40; major general, 30; brigadier general, 20; colonel, 15; lieutenant colonel, 10; major, 8; captain, 6; lieutenant, 4; second lieutenant, 3; non-commissioned officers, 2; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 25.

exchanged these troops could return to the front lines, the existence of parole camps also created problems for both sides as well. The camps not only occupied valuable space that could have been used for housing actual prisoners, but they also further strained the resources of the North and South. Paroled soldiers required an expensive investment in food and supplies while waiting weeks or months for exchange and a return to active duty. By 1863, the prohibitive cost of caring for parolees led to abuse of the exchange cartel. Immediate parole on the battlefield became an especially attractive option for many commanders, as it placed the burden of caring for the parolees back on the other side. The issue came to a head in September of 1863, when Robert Ould, the Confederate Commissioner of Exchange, declared the paroled prisoners from Vicksburg exchanged, in an attempt both to augment the western Confederate forces while also relieving the pressure of sustaining the idle troops. The Union indignantly declared the exchange invalid, and once again the processing of prisoners slowed to a trickle. For the captured prisoners who still awaited exchange, however, another even more fundamental issue brought the cartel to a complete halt.⁷

Lincoln's preliminary emancipation proclamation, issued in September of 1862, initiated the second, and final, breakdown of the exchange cartel. The Union's commitment to African-Americans, some 200,000 of whom served in the northern armies, extended to the exchange cartel. Under its terms, the Union demanded the exchange of black troops like any other soldiers. The Confederate policy towards captured African-American soldiers, however, not only denied them the right of

⁷ Thomas, "Prisoner of War Exchange," 104-125; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 103-111. Both sides also increasingly found that soldiers happily turned capture and parole to their advantage as a way out of the front lines.

exchange, it insisted that they be executed or returned to slavery. Fearing the possibility of slave rebellion, the Confederacy even declared that captured white officers of black regiments were subject to trial and execution under state law. For the first few months after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, the debate remained quiet, since the Confederacy captured relatively few black troops. But by September of 1863, the Union, buoyed by the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, renewed its demands for the exchange of black soldiers. The Confederacy continued to insist, according to Thomas, on “a full general agreement for the exchange of whites, no exchanges for blacks or the officers who led them.” Neither side could tolerate compromise on the issue, which meant, in the words of Robert Garlick Hill Kean, the Head of the Confederate Bureau of War, that “the question has no solution.” The resulting cessation of the cartel, due officially to the Confederacy’s refusal to treat captured black soldiers as military personnel and not runaway slaves could thus be traced back to the fundamental question of slavery that fueled the war itself. Perhaps even more importantly, from a Union perspective, was the conscious recognition that exchanging soldiers with the manpower-starved Confederacy hurt the Union war effort. As the exchange process remained stalled during 1863 and 1864, before finally resuming in the last months of the war, and prison casualties mounted as a result, public sentiment on both sides blamed the other, not just for intentionally brutal treatment, but also for refusing to compromise on the issue of exchange. Although negotiations and a few special exchanges continued, no meaningful exchange occurred until the last months of the war. Soldiers already held or captured during the upcoming campaigns faced indefinite incarceration in enemy prisons.⁸

⁸ Thomas, “Prisoner of War Exchange,” 297-299. Thomas implies that the Union

As if to insure a permanent suspension of the cartel, in December of 1863, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton appointed a new Commissioner of Exchange, General Benjamin Butler. At the time, “Beast” Butler, the infamous general at New Orleans, was perhaps the most detested Union figure in the South. Although he earnestly desired a resumption of exchange, the appointment of someone with his reputation signaled the Union’s willingness to forego exchange. The Confederacy interpreted Butler’s selection as a direct slap in the face, and with, as Hesseltine described it, “national honor” on the line, many exchange officers refused to deal with Butler, completely eliminating any chance of compromise. By 1864, moreover, many northerners understood that any resumption of the cartel could only aid the disintegrating Confederacy by returning able soldiers to the front. During the summer of 1864, General Grant revealed the feeling of the Union administration, “it is hard on our men held in Southern prisons not to exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in our ranks to fight our battles.” The Union officially remained open to exchange, as long as the Confederacy included African-American soldiers in the cartel, but leaders like Grant recognized that the North, due to its superior manpower and resources, benefited from the absence of a working exchange policy. “We have got to fight,” Grant observed, “until the military power of the South is

refused to exchange prisoners as long as they held the majority of the captives, an interpretation that suggests that the issue of exchange for African-American soldiers gave the Lincoln Administration a convenient excuse for its reluctant exchange policy. Edward Younger, ed., *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean* (1957; repr., Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 102; Thomas, “Prisoner of War Exchange,” 180-211; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 86-89.

exhausted, and if we release or exchange prisoners captured it simply becomes a war of extermination.”⁹

In his comments, Grant also acknowledged that the experience of captured soldiers in 1864 had become particularly harsh. Much of the suffering that occurred in the camps, North and South, resulted from a lack of preparation combined with an unresponsive bureaucratic structure. Despite the sporadic nature of exchange, neither combatant constructed large camps specifically for prisoners until 1864, after the cartel collapsed. Both sides then desperately scrambled to cope as crowds of unexpected prisoners overran the existing facilities and makeshift camps proved inadequate under the strain. The slow reaction of both governments to the crisis sealed the fate of thousands of soldiers, who died from the overcrowding, disease, exposure, and malnutrition endemic in the prisons. The excessive number of casualties from camps on both sides testified to flaws both in the development and administration of the prison depots.

From the outset of the war, the Confederacy channeled most of its prisoners through Richmond, Virginia, and Florence, South Carolina. Although additional prisons existed in Columbia, South Carolina, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and Salisbury, North Carolina, until the breakup of the cartel in 1863 the vast majority of the Union prisoners remained in the Richmond area awaiting exchange. Rather than appoint a specific officer to oversee the captives, in the summer of 1861, the Confederacy placed the prisoners under the jurisdiction of Brigadier-General John Winder, the provost marshal general of Richmond. Although his father, General William Henry Winder, negotiated an exchange

⁹ Thomas, “Prisoner of War Exchange,” 212-6; James MacPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 799-800; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 214.

cartel with the British during the War of 1812, John Winder possessed no particular experience with prison management. As his biographer Arch Blakey points out, by 1862 Winder's enormous duties prevented him from concentrating his attention on the needs of the Union prisoners: "Winder never had more than 2,000 men under his command; yet he was expected to return deserters, enforce martial law in all of its ramifications, guard Federal prisoners, oversee the camps of instruction, and discharge disabled or ill soldiers." For those 8,000 prisoners jailed at Libby Prison and Belle Isle—the two main prisons in Richmond—only the implementation of the Dix-Hill cartel effectively relieved the overcrowding during the summer of 1862.¹⁰

Despite the near crisis and the obvious possibility that exchange might fail again at some point, the Confederacy continued to drag its feet, making no preparations in case of a prolonged need to house prisoners. Because the majority of captives fell under his jurisdiction and no single commander supervised all Confederate prisons, by default, Winder retained most authority over the prisons. Yet his power was challenged by both field commanders and prison officials in other departments of the Confederacy, who often issued orders that conflicted with Winder's, a practice that created a disastrous division of administration. In the absence of coordinated leadership, plans for the construction of additional prison facilities occurred only out of desperation. When the cartel broke down in late 1863, the Richmond prisons soon overflowed. Only then did the Confederacy act, establishing a large stockade in the town of Anderson, Georgia. Rushed into service well before readiness, the mortality at Andersonville prison resulted directly from the Confederacy's failure to prepare, which in turn reflected an absence of

¹⁰ Arch Blakey, *General John H. Winder, C.S.A.* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1990), 120, 136-139.

bureaucratic vision. On November 21, 1864, Adjutant General Samuel Cooper finally appointed Winder the first Confederate Commissary General of Prisons, with authority over “all officers and men on duty at the several military prisons.” His belated appointment further confirmed the Richmond bureaucracy’s unresponsive style of government. As Blakey points out, “the fatal flaw in the appointment was that it came far too late for anyone to be effective in the new command.” Issued almost nine months after prisoners first arrived at Andersonville, the overdue order attempted to address the leadership void at the top of the Confederate prison system, but by late 1864 most of the casualties had already occurred. One line in the order confirming Winder’s appointment was especially telling: “Department, army and other commanders are required not to interfere with the prisoners, the prison guard, or the administration of the prisons.” Although seemingly redundant, the muddled organizational structure of Andersonville made such a statement necessary.¹¹

The Union prison bureaucracy was much more organized than the Confederacy’s. As early as October 1861, Secretary of War Simon Cameron recognized the need for a department to handle prisoners of war. Cameron selected Colonel William Hoffman for the task, and Hoffman filled the post of Commissary General of Prisons for the duration of the conflict. With authority over all matters pertaining to prisoners, Hoffman quickly began issuing orders, with a goal of establishing a well-defined prison bureaucracy. He devised a strict accounting system for prisoner transfers, illnesses, and deaths, which would organize the previously chaotic camps. Prisoners would be divided into messes, enabling the government to care more easily for and keep track of them. Under

¹¹ Blakey, *General John H. Winder*, 158, 196-7; O.R., VII: 1150.

Hoffman's administrative plan, prisoners were to receive standardized rations and necessary articles of clothing.¹²

The establishment of a prison bureaucracy, however, did not translate immediately into efficient management of the camps. General Henry Halleck, the Union Chief of Staff, inexplicably failed to announce Hoffman's appointment to the army until April 1862, severely undermining Hoffman's ability to organize the scattered camps into a cohesive system at a time when the existing facilities, like the Confederacy's, already teemed with captives. Although Hoffman planned the construction of a new prison camp for Confederate officers on Johnson's Island, the design allowed space for only 1,280 men. The camp reached completion in late February of 1862, just as General U. S. Grant captured 15,000 new men at Fort Donelson, immediately rendering Johnson's Island obsolete. All over the North, Confederate prisoners crowded into what had previously been training camps, and the overabundance of captives passed only with the establishment of the exchange cartel that summer.¹³

Despite the creation of a prison bureaucracy, the chain of command still needed clarification. Hoffman's orders did not always ensure compliance. "Military commanders and civilian authorities," maintained historian Leslie Hunter, "went over his head, by-passed him or in many cases simply ignored his office." Meanwhile, Hunter continued, "inexperienced officers apparently remained ignorant of Hoffman's office, and some of the highest officers corresponded directly to the War Department." On September 19, 1863, a frustrated Hoffman complained to Secretary of War Edwin

¹² Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 35, 42-8.

¹³ Leslie Hunter, "Warden for the Union: General William Hoffman (1807-1884)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1971), 28, 43, 58; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 46.

Stanton about his lack of authority over area commanders, many of whom countermanded his orders:

It would facilitate the management of the affairs of prisoners of War, and lead to a more direct responsibility if the commanders of stations where prisoners are held could be placed under the immediate control of the Commissary General of Prisoners. By the interposition of an intermediate commander the responsibility is weakened, and correspondence passing through him is necessarily much delayed, and through frequent change of commanders it is impossible to establish a uniform and permanent system of administration.

Hoffman naturally hoped to augment his power over the prison camps, but his letter also underscored the disordered state of affairs he faced and testified to his belief that only the creation of a centralized bureaucracy could adequately organize the chaos. Authorities outside the military also interfered with the prison system. The influence of state governors undermined Hoffman's department, since many of them used the prison camps as a source of patronage. Despite these obstacles, by January of 1864 Hoffman succeeded in consolidating the prison bureaucracy through the implementation of an elaborate record-keeping system. Every month, at each camp, detailed rolls of prisoner arrivals, transfers, deaths, and prison expenditures were logged and forwarded to Hoffman's Washington office for scrutiny.¹⁴

The increased organization of the department notwithstanding, casualties in Union prisons multiplied throughout 1864. As in the Confederacy, the end of exchange meant an accumulation of prisoners, which in turn strained the resources and available prison

¹⁴ Hunter, "Warden for the Union," 58-9; William Hoffman to Edwin Stanton, September 19, 1863, Personal Papers of William Hoffman, entry 16, RG 249, National Archives.

space in the North. The established bureaucracy should have been able to avoid the high casualty rates of their southern counterparts. Yet at Elmira Prison, the worst of the northern prisons, the 24 percent mortality rate rivaled the 29 percent compiled at Andersonville, and almost doubled the average casualty rates of all prisoners during the Civil War. Both sides clearly struggled in caring for the multitudes of prisoners that they had never expected.¹⁵

That this tragedy within a tragedy seemed preventable inflamed public opinion in the Union and Confederacy. The prolonged controversy over the establishment and collapse of the exchange cartel sparked resentment and frustration against the opposition as both sides complained of atrocities committed against their captured soldiers. On December 23, 1861, the *New York Herald* declared the conditions Union prisoners experienced in Richmond “the most brutal and savage known to modern civilization.” The *Herald* editor justified his assessment with descriptions of half-naked, starving prisoners. Not only did the “unfortunate men” suffer from a lack of care and medicine, the writer claimed, they also served as targets for the rifle practice of the Confederate guards. Although the accuracy of the *Herald’s* information, based on the word of a Richmond Unionist, may be questioned, the article revealed the anger and outrage that the prisoner of war issue aroused. By invoking the suffering of prisoners, and at times exaggerating the harsh conditions that they encountered, both sides further inflamed the already heated emotions. Their antipathy and revulsion for each other proved both intense and durable. Throughout the rest of the war, during the late nineteenth century, and even on through the twentieth century, claims of deliberate atrocity continued to

¹⁵ O.R., VIII: 997-1003.

arise, and later, northerners and southerners, fought to achieve victory by establishing their moral superiority over their opponent. That desire fueled the *Herald* editor's assertion that "the rights of honorable warfare, not to mention those of Christian civilization and tender heartedness, are not...regarded" in the Confederacy, our "brethren of the South act towards their brethren of the North with a barbarity" not witnessed since "ancient times." Not to be outdone, an increasingly outraged *Harper's Weekly* described the "revolting" treatment and "sickening inhumanity" of "the filth" and "poison" Union captives endured. By characterizing each other as purposefully barbaric, both Union and Confederate citizens interpreted the prisoner of war controversy during the conflict as motivation to support the sacrifices of their imprisoned troops and reason to celebrate the relative virtue of their causes.¹⁶

From 1862 onward, the initial acrimony over the treatment of prisoners exploded into outrage as former captives began publishing accounts of their sufferings. Although the earliest memoirs, such as the *Journal of Alfred Ely*, which appeared before the Dix-Hill cartel in 1862, contained little resentment toward the Confederacy or Union, they made clear that the life of a prisoner on either side was not an enviable one. More importantly, these early testimonials heightened the public visibility of the camps at a time when prison casualties started to rise. By 1863, the publication of prison accounts, diaries, and letters reflected and fed the growing obsession with the prison conditions on both sides. Readers in the North, vicariously experiencing the conflict, could not help but feel sorry for Union Captain J. J. Geer, who described how he "lay wounded and

¹⁶ *New York Herald*, December 23, 1861, Accessible Archives internet database (accessed February 2003); Royster, *The Destructive War*, especially Chapter 6, "The Vicarious War;" *Harper's Weekly*, August 30, 1862, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

languishing in the loathsome jails of a merciless enemy.” Along with that sympathy a rising fury emerged, both North and South, against the fact that either side would stand, or perhaps even encourage, such brutality.¹⁷

That fury dominated what Walt Whitman called “the scrawl’d, worn slips of paper” on which Confederate and Union prisoners documented their trials. Although these accounts remained unpublished during the war, the sentiments they contained testified to the horrors experienced by Civil War prisoners and represented the first attempts to understand not only the existence of such misery but also to figure out who bore responsibility for the suffering. The diaries of numerous Confederate captives recounted the hardships they experienced in the North. Captain William Speer, imprisoned at Johnson’s Island, Ohio, during 1862, stated that “the horrors of the prison are so grate...if everybody could Know & feel as I do I think there would be nomore Jales built.” Only the hope of exchange sustained Speer, who held President Lincoln responsible for the suffering. “I do believe,” Speer announced, “if Abraham Keeps me in here much longer that I will be a good lawyer as to asking questions & finding out the truth of all the reports.” Speer’s initial suspicion that something sinister existed in the Union policy towards Confederate captives made him one of the first, but certainly not the last, to blame the Union administration for the harsh prison system. In an 1863 diary entry, Confederate soldier James E. Hall, held at Point Lookout, Maryland, lamented, “nothing that a man can eat. The crackers are as hard as flint stone, and full of worms. I

¹⁷ Charles Lanman, ed., *Journal of Alfred Ely: A Prisoner of War in Richmond* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1862), 281-83; J. J. Geer, *Beyond the Lines: or A Yankee Prisoner Loose in Dixie* (Philadelphia: J. W. Daughaday, Publisher, 1863), 284. For early Confederate prison accounts, see George A. Lawrence, *Border and Bastille* (New York: W. I. Pooley & Co., 1863) and J. C. Poe, ed., *The Raving Foe* (Eastland, Tex.: The Longhorn Press, 1967).

don't believe God ever intended for one man to pen another up and keep him in this manner. We ought to have enough to eat, anyhow." Hall reserved his hostility for the two men he held responsible for the sad state of affairs at Point Lookout, Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. "Dam Old Abe and old Jeff Davis," he wrote, "dam the day I 'listed." The anger Speer and Hall directed at the two presidents, the personifications of the Union and Confederate governments, reflected the mid-nineteenth century belief that powerful leaders could easily bend government organizations and bureaucratic problems to their will. Thus the prisoners perceived their suffering as caused by callous individual decisions rather than as the result of specific policy choices and an inability on both sides to adequately oversee their prison systems.¹⁸

All the while the misery continued. Sergeant Bartlett Yancey Malone, another unfortunate inhabitant of Point Lookout, described the shooting of a fellow prisoner in the head by a Yankee guard. The captive's crime, according to Malone, was "peepen threw the cracks of the planken." At Fort Delaware, Private Joseph Purvis denounced this "wretched place" and expressed fear that the small pox, "Colra," or yellow fever might catch him as it had many of his companions. Robert Bingham, who passed through Fort Norfolk and Fort Delaware before reaching Johnson's Island, summed up the growing Confederate resentment against their experience in Union prisons. "The Yankee nation is the most infamously mean race that blights God's green earth,"

¹⁸ Walt Whitman, *Memoranda during the War [&] Death of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (1875; repr., Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1962), 4. Many of Whitman's notes refer to the horrible treatment of prisoners of war, which demonstrates the widespread acknowledgment and anger over the issue during this period. James B. Murphy, ed., "A Confederate Soldier's View of Johnson's Island Prison," *Ohio History* 79 (Spring 1970): 109; Ruth Woods Dayton, ed., *The Diary of a Confederate Soldier James E. Hall* (N.p.: privately printed, 1961), 92.

Bingham declared. Not only was “there no honor, no truth, no faith, no honesty among them,” but Bingham insisted, “they delight to insult and annoy defenseless captives.” By the last months of the war, a sense of despondency prevailed. Writing from Elmira, L. Leon described the bustling trade of dead rats among the prisoners along with the “frightful” smallpox outbreak that he claimed killed at least twenty men a day. Joseph Kern, at Point Lookout, told the grim tale of one man freezing to death in the winter of 1865 when a tent mate refused to share a blanket with him. On January 22, 1865, John Dooley, imprisoned on Johnson’s Island, finally received the news dreamed of for months. Although he rejoiced at the impending exchange, Dooley remained depressed about his surroundings. “There is continual suffering among the prisoners,” he wrote, and “many go to the slop barrels and garbage piles to gather from the refuse a handful of revolting food. Such is the infamous government we have to deal with, and now I do not wonder if we be overcome in the end.”¹⁹

As strongly as the Confederate prisoners resented their treatment, Union prisoners surpassed their Southern counterparts, at least in terms of volume. Like their Confederate counterparts, Union soldiers demonstrated uncertainty as to who was responsible for their suffering. While they resented the harsh conditions of the enemy’s prisons, more than

¹⁹ William Whatley Pierson, Jr., ed., *Whipt ‘em Everytime: The Diary of Bartlett Yancey Malone* (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, Inc., 1960), 93; Walter L. Williams, “A Confederate View of Prison Life: A Virginian in Fort Delaware, 1863,” *Delaware History* 18 (Fall-Winter 1979): 228, 232; Robert Bingham, “Prison Experience,” p. 7-8, Robert Bingham Papers, Folder 2, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; L. Leon, *Diary of a Tar Heel Confederate Soldier* (Charlotte, N.C.: Stone Publishing Company, n.d.), 68-69; Joseph M. Kern, “Diary and Scrapbook,” p. 33, Joseph Mason Kern Papers, Folder 2, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Joseph T. Durkin, ed., *John Dooley: Confederate Soldier* (Washington, D.C.: The Georgetown University Press, 1945), 165.

one captive wondered at the intermittent nature of the exchange process. The 1862 diary of Second Lieutenant Luther Jackson, captured at Shiloh and held in Montgomery reflected this ambiguity. “This people are so mean in their revenges,” Jackson wrote, “how different from the treatment their prisoners get from us.” Jackson believed in the singular brutality of the Confederate policy towards prisoners and the innocence of his own government. But for all the Confederate cruelty, less than a month before his death, Jackson declared “Ah! Uncle Sam! You don’t do right in not having prisoners exchanged sooner.” “If they care so little for us,” he continued, a few days later, “they had better disband their forces.” Captain Samuel Fiske, however, writing under the pseudonym Dunn Browne, implicated the corrupt Confederate guards at Libby Prison as the main source of prisoner difficulty. “I have been among Italian brigands, and Greek pirates, and Bedouin Arabs,” he declared, but “for making a clean thing of the robbing business, commend me to the Confederate States of America, so styled. They descend to the minutiae of the profession in a way that should be instructive to all novices in the art.” George Comstock, imprisoned at Libby and Belle Isle, acknowledged that “some are cursing the Government for not doing more for us.” Comstock, however, refused to attack the Union administration and remained hopeful despite his deteriorating health. “It is a stiff battle now against insanity,” he stated during the summer of 1863, “we are so hungry.” He directed his anger at the Confederate guards, whom he sarcastically referred to as “noble southerners...pacing to and fro, and keenly watching for an excuse to shoot.” “It is horrible,” Comstock insisted, days before his exchange, “that men should be treated this way.” Fred Laubach, a Pennsylvania private fortunate to only spend one day at Belle Isle before his exchange, found the prison “very lousy and dirty.” Corporal Newell

Burch decried the “awful, awful suffering” in Richmond, and described how prisoners died from small pox only to be replaced by more prisoners. Another inhabitant of Belle Isle, J. Osborn Coburn, found the conditions so appalling that he asked his diary, “Why does a just God permit them to continue evil doing?” Treated as “beasts” by the Confederacy, Coburn believed that “a terrible retribution awaited” the South. Although he retained faith in his “benevolent government,” by the winter of 1863, Coburn’s prospects seemed grim. “We are literally freezing and starving,” he despaired, “surely our country will not permit much longer. We must have something done or all shall perish in a little while.” But for all the detailed accounts of Belle Isle and its miseries, the new Confederate prison built at Andersonville in 1864 soon replaced Richmond as the ultimate symbol of southern savagery.²⁰

Although horrifying accounts of prisons such as Libby, Macon, and Columbia detail the suffering encountered there by Union prisoners during the last months of the war, from 1864 on Andersonville represented the nadir of the Confederate treatment of their captives. As Lieutenant Thomas Galwey noted in his diary, the prospect of ending up at Andersonville held such terror that it “nerved many a man to one more effort to escape capture.” Despite their best efforts, however, thousands of men found themselves

²⁰ Ted Genoways and Hugh H. Genoways, eds., *A Perfect Picture of Hell: Eyewitness Accounts by Civil War Prisoners from the 12th Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 71, 78-9; Samuel Fiske, *Dunn Browne in the Army* (Boston: Nichols and Noyes, 1865), 157; Ted Genoways and Hugh H. Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hell*, 209, 212, 207, 213; Fred Laubach, “Diary of Fred Laubach,” p. 238, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Pennsylvania, Box 4, United States Army Military History Institute; John Quinn Imholte, “The Civil War Diary and Related Sources of Corporal Newell Burch 154th New York Volunteers Covering the Period August 25, 1862 to April 21, 1865,” p. 108, Michael Winey Collection, United States Army Military History Institute; Don Allison, ed., *Hell on Belle Isle: Diary of a Civil War POW* (Bryan, Ohio: Faded Banner Publications, 1997), 57, 65, 81, 65, 82.

crammed into the Georgia prison. There, according to Private John Sawyer Patch, “one could see sights & sounds that would make his blood run cold.” Sergeant Henry W. Tisdale described the chaos during the summer months, when Andersonville’s population peaked. “The prison is one mess of human beings,” he wrote, and the disorganization and overcrowding manifested itself in the pollution of the stream, the lone source of drinking water, with human excrement. The water, Tisdale noted, “is never cleaned up and is a good deal of the time one seething mass of maggots.” According to Private Charlie Mosher, “the fleas, lice and maggots are holding high carnival in here.” Mosher related the appearance of one unfortunate prisoner “with not only the lice and fleas feeding on him, but out of every aperture of his body the maggots were crawling.”²¹

Many Union diarists spent their time puzzling over who exactly bore the responsibility for their grim situation. Sergeant Charles Ross suspected that the deteriorating conditions, particularly the disease and absence of food, were not accidental. The Confederacy, he thought, intended “to starve us clear down to skeletons and then kill us outright.” Charles Lee, like Coburn at Belle Isle, mused that “it does seem as though the curse of God would rest upon a Government which treats their

²¹ Thomas Francis Galwey, *The Valiant Hours*, ed. W. S. Nye (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole Company, 1961), 200; John Sawyer Patch, “Diary of John Sawyer Patch,” p. 17, Andersonville Subject Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Henry W. Tisdale, “Civil War Diary of Sergt. Henry W. Tisdale,” p. 112, Civil War Prisoner of War Resource Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Wayne Mahood, ed., *Charlie Mosher’s Civil War* (Hightstown, N.J.: Longstreet House, 1994), 240. On other Confederate prisons in 1864-5, see Thomas M. Boaz, *Libby Prison & Beyond: A Union Staff Officer in the East, 1862-1865* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1999); Philip N. Racine, ed., “Unspoiled Heart:” *The Journal of Charles Mattocks of the 17th Maine* (Knoxville, Tenn: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994); Margaret W. Peelle, *Letters from Libby Prison* (New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1956); Joseph Ferguson, “Civil War Journal,” Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, United States Colored Troops, United States Army Military History Institute.

prisoners in this way.” Mosher blamed the brutality on Captain Henry Wirz, commandant of Andersonville, and his guards. Particularly galling to Mosher was the use of dogs to capture Union escapees, a practice which to him indicted not just Wirz, but southern society as a whole. Mosher bitterly wrote, “It must have taken years of education for men who claim to be civilized and Christianized to have reached this high state of trying to capture prisoners of war with blood hounds. None but a slaveholding people could or would do such things.” Although Wirz proved a popular target for Union criticism, many diarists reserved their venom for other Confederate officials. Francis Shaw referred to himself and his fellow prisoners as the unwilling “subjects of Old Jeff,” yet another indication that the prisoners associated the Union and Confederate governments with the strong leadership of Davis and Lincoln. But not only did the prisoners believe that the government would free them, they felt rejected as the months passed without exchange. In the eyes of Amos Stearns, the Union government abandoned him to a miserable fate. “Day after day passes,” he worried, “and nothing is done about taking us out of this bull pen. Can it be that our government does not care for men who have served it faithfully for most three years?” George Read exclaimed, “if our government allows us to remain here...don’t talk to me of patriotism after this,” and angrily declared that “somebody will, must receive an awful punishment for this. No human thing could be guilty of placing men in such a situation. I trust the ones that are to blame for it will receive a hard and just punishment.” Despite his resentment towards the Union government, it was Read’s plea for consequences that eventually struck a chord with the shocked public.²²

²² C. M. Destler, ed., “An Andersonville Prison Diary,” *The Georgia Historical*

As the atrocity accounts accumulated, the diaries from the camps cemented, on both sides, the realization that something terrible occurred in the prisons of the Civil War and began the complicated process of interpreting that horror. These early records, written in environments of extreme stress, represented the first efforts to assess responsibility for the suffering. What the diarists revealed was a world of deprivation and cruelty, and they maintained strong but, importantly, distinctly varied opinions about who they felt deserved blame. In the minds of various prisoners, Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Henry Wirz, the government, the Union, the Confederacy, and prison guards all deserved criticism. This lack of consensus on the issue of responsibility set the tone for the prison controversy—from the outset discussion of Civil War prisons took place in an environment of recrimination, confusion, and discord. For all the division and uncertainty, however, on one point the diarists demonstrated a sense of unity. They

Quarterly 24 (March 1940): 65; Paul C. Helmreich, “The Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *The Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41 (January 1976): 19; Wayne Mahood, *Charlie Mosher’s Civil War*, 220; Francis M. Shaw, “Transcription of Diary,” p. 12, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, 3rd series, Box 5, Pennsylvania, United States Army Military History Institute; Leon Basile, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Amos E. Stearns, a Prisoner at Andersonville* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1981), 77; George Foxcroft Read, “Transcription of Diary,” p. 16, 14, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, 3rd series, *Civil War Times Illustrated* Collection, Box 1, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, United States Army Military History Institute. See also Donald F. Danker, ed., “Imprisoned at Andersonville: The Diary of Albert Harry Shatzel, May 5, 1864—September 12, 1864,” *Nebraska History* 38 (June 1957): 81-125; Ovid M. Futch, ed., “The Andersonville Journal of Sergeant J. M. Burdick,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 45 (September 1961): 287-294; Edward D. Jervey, ed., *Prison Life among the Rebels: Recollections of a Union Chaplain* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press); Jefferson J. Hammer, ed., *Frederic Augustus James’s Civil War Diary* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973); John Ransom, *John Ransom’s Andersonville Diary* (1883; repr., New York: Berkley Books, 1994); William B. Style, ed., *Death Before Dishonor: The Andersonville Diary of Eugene Forbes* (Kearny, N.J.: Belle Grove Publishing Company, 1995); Samuel S. Gibson, “Transcription of Diary,” Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Box 5, Pennsylvania, United States Army Military History Institute.

expressed a desire for retribution against whoever was finally determined responsible for the prison tragedy.

When the North and South realized the implications of the prisoner accounts and testimony trickling out of the camps, the mutual animosity over prisoners of war exploded into outrage. The diaries and letters of the Union and Confederate public, particularly women, reflected the growing public anger surrounding the issue. And in addition to the anger, the writings from the home front showed that the families of captives suffered as well. Maria Daly, a New York woman, included an 1864 extract from the diary of Mrs. Van Lew, a Richmond lady, depicting the terrible suffering at Belle Isle. “It may be brave to meet death on the battlefield,” wrote Van Lew, “but months and weeks and days of dying, a forgotten, uncared for unit of a mighty nation! Surely this is the test of bravery and patriotism!” By the fall of 1864, other writers described the fearful results of that test. Iowa soldier J. B. Ritner, in a letter to his wife, told her, “the most pitiful sight I have seen during the war is that of our soldiers coming back from the southern prisons....so wasted away with hunger that they looked like mere skeletons. In November 1864, Jane Stuart Woolsey, a Union nurse, wrote a letter in which she quoted a Surgeon Smith on the condition of the returning Union prison survivors: “They are too low, too utterly wrecked to have hope....These living skeletons and puling idiots are worse than any sight to see on the battlefield.” Woolsey continued, outraged that the prisoners “have been subjected to every cruelty, every infamy of cruelty, we can conceive of.” Although a nurse who witnessed the plight of Confederate prisoners at Point Lookout, Woolsey insisted that she “knew what the contrast is” between the Union and Confederate prison systems. Woolsey believed, like the prisoners

themselves, that not only was Confederate brutality intentional, but that the Union prison system operated far more humanely. Yet southern women such as Lizzie Hardin refuted Woolsey's belief in Union exceptionalism. Of the Yankee treatment of prisoners, Hardin stated in her diary that "when men who have been confined in separate prisons, many of them hundreds of miles apart, come home at different times and by different routes, and all agree that they were so badly supplied with food as to be forced to eat rats and dogs, I believe it must be the truth." Sarah Morgan described the pain of hoping for the return of a captured soldier, only to learn of his death in prison. "We have deceived ourselves," Morgan wrote, "we readily listened to the assertions of our friends that Johnson's Island was the healthiest place in the world." More fortunate news awaited Floride Clemson, a descendant of John C. Calhoun. At the end of the war, she recounted the return of her brother, Calhoun Clemson, from Johnson's Island. He seemed "graver," Floride Clemson wrote, and she attributed his somber nature to Calhoun's experiences as a prisoner. In her diary Clemson claimed that Calhoun said "they retaliated upon him in prison," and "the loss of hope was the most terrible thing." Although both sides remained convinced of the purposeful nature of the suffering, the diaries and letters from the home front most clearly demonstrated the emotional toll that the prisons took not only on the captives and their families, but on the general public as well.²³

²³ Harold Earl Hammond, ed., *Diary of a Union Lady, 1861-1865* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, Inc., 1962), 364; Charles F. Larimer, ed., *Love and Valor: The Intimate Love Letters Between Jacob and Emeline Ritner* (Western Springs, Ill.: Sigourney Press, 2000), 364; Georgeanna Woolsey Bacon and Eliza Woolsey Howland, *My Heart Towards Home: Letters of a Family During the Civil War*, ed. Daniel John Hoisington (Roseville, Minn.: Edinborough Press, 2001), 373-74; G. Glenn Clift, ed., *The Private War of Lizzie Hardin* (Frankfort, Ky.: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1963), 224; Charles East, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 598; Ernest M. Lander, Jr. and Charles M. McGee,

By 1864, in recognition of the emotional attachment to the prisoner controversy, both the Union and Confederate press devoted extensive coverage to the prison camps. The steady publication of articles, pictures, cartoons, prisoner testimony, and even government reports on the problem further inflamed Union and Confederate citizens. In an August 1864 letter to a Fayetteville, North Carolina, editor, Thomas J. Green, a Confederate officer held at Johnson's Island, Ohio, an officer's prison, called on the newsman to "agitate, agitate, agitate the subject" of the poor conditions of the prison camps and especially the failure to exchange the thousands of suffering captives. Green need not have worried that the issues of prisoner treatment and exchange needed more exposure. If he had had access to southern newspapers, he would have been pleased to see that agitation over the treatment of prisoners continued to grow. That February, a *Charleston Mercury* editorial denounced the "Northern bastiles where our gallant Confederate soldiers pine in wretchedness, to which death is a relief, and where they are plied with cruelty." A letter to the *Macon Daily Telegraph* editor, published June 11, 1864, and signed simply, "Rebel," revealed a complete lack of sympathy for the suffering that Yankee prisoners encountered in nearby Andersonville. "Rebel" claimed that he and his fellow Confederate prisoners, who in 1863 experienced the hardships of Camp Douglas, located in Chicago, endured a mortality rate that "was some 3 1/3 times greater than...in the Yankee prison (Andersonville)," and "yet the Yankees said that the 'prison was too healthy for damned rebels.'" The callous brutality of the fighting on the battlefield seemed reflected in the hardened attitude on both sides—that perhaps

Jr., eds., *A Rebel Came Home: The Diary and Letters of Floride Clemson, 1863-1866* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1961), 89. See also Phoebe Yates Pember, *A Southern Woman's Story: Life in Confederate Richmond*, ed. Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, Inc., 1959).

imprisoned soldiers deserved their fate. Louis Manigault, the secretary to Major Joseph Jones, a Confederate surgeon sent to inspect Andersonville prison in the fall of 1864, displayed the cold reality of the situation when he wrote his wife that “I examined about 30 dead Yankees, a fearful sight. They have however caused us such suffering...that I feel no pity for them, and behold a dead Yankee in a far different light from a dead Confederate killed in fighting for all that is dear to him.” Given the destruction the war brought to the Confederacy, especially by late 1864, the plight of Yankee prisoners aroused little sympathy in Dixie.²⁴

During the same period, and on into 1865, the Union refused to yield the moral high ground in the prisoner debate. A flood of materials appeared throughout the last years of the war that blamed the Confederacy for the dying captives. In January 1864, *Harper's Weekly* expressed outrage at the way the South continued to mistreat Union prisoners. “They do not massacre their prisoners outright,” the editor admitted, but instead “drag them away to starve in loathsome dungeons.” Refusing to accept the deteriorating conditions encountered in Confederate prisons as an excuse, the author contended, “if the rebels can not treat prisoners honorably they have no right to take them.” The writer also mentioned the possibility of retaliation against Confederate captives held in Northern prisons as a means of encouraging the Confederacy to make caring for its prisoners a higher priority. The anger the prisoner issue provoked deepened

²⁴ Thomas J. Green to Hon. W. J. Greene, Fayetteville, NC, 15 or 20 (date unclear) August 1864, Thomas J. Green Papers, Folder 41, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; *Charleston Mercury*, February 19, 1864, Accessible Archives internet database (accessed February 2003); *Macon Daily Telegraph*, June 11, 1864 Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives; the Manigault letter appears in an article edited by Spencer B. King, Jr., “Letter from an Eyewitness at Andersonville Prison, 1864,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 38 (March 1954): 85.

as, in the absence of exchange, more and more prisoners died over the course of 1864. The press continued to inflame public sentiment. In November, 1864, a *New York Herald* article, entitled, “Our Suffering Prisoners,” summarized northern antipathy towards the South. How, it asked, could “a community boasting of Christianity and enlightenment...be guilty of so many barbarities as have been perpetuated by the rebels towards their Union prisoners.” To supplement the angry editorials photographs and other illustrations appeared as well.²⁵

Most photographs or cartoons published during the war years depicted the toll that prison life took on the health and strength of young soldiers. In the North, the circulation of the shocking images of emaciated troops, who had been hale and hearty when they left home, often conveyed the harsh reality of prison life better than any article could. Beginning in 1863, a series of illustrations appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*, confirming the rumors of prison evils taking place in the Confederacy. That December, one of the early drawings showed a ragged group of Union prisoners at Belle Isle, in Richmond. Most of them sat or lay prone on the ground, half naked, without the strength or desire to move. Two other prisoners stood, weakly, clutching each other for support. The gloomy scene revealed a world of brutality and deliberate cruelty as the northern soldiers helplessly awaited their fate. On the front page of the March 5, 1864 edition, a picture of tottering prison escapees, held upright only with the help of Union soldiers, suggested that even these brave, determined individuals—the strongest—barely survived the hell of prison in Dixie. More images in December of 1864 and January of 1865 followed, focusing

²⁵ *Harper’s Weekly*, January 9, 1864, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003); *New York Herald*, November 22, 1864, Accessible Archives internet database (accessed February 2003).

northern attention on the pitiful health of the recently exchanged survivors of southern prisons.²⁶

When illustrations of Union prisons occasionally appeared, as in the April 15, 1865, issue of *Harper's Weekly*, they depicted a much more benign existence. A panoramic drawing of Elmira prison, in New York, complete with American flag waving in the breeze, presented a stark contrast to the claustrophobic, graphic images that northern artists offered of the suffering individuals in the South. When a picture focused on Confederate prisoners, as in one rendering of Fort Lafayette, in New York, they sat peacefully inside a comfortable barracks room reading and playing games. The much cozier image fit the popular perception in the North, fed by the press, that Confederate prisoners lived in luxury while their counterparts starved and died. These images supported Hesseltine's assertion that "as the vindictive spirit of the Confederates came to be more emphasized, the corollary proposition was developed that prisoners in the northern prisons were accorded excellent treatment." Another scholar suggests such pictures "played a major role in deflecting attention away from the equally miserable Union prison camps." The anger over the treatment of northern soldiers in southern prisons, fed by the constant publication of charges and images of atrocity, increased the bitterness and sense of moral outrage that fueled the destruction of the Confederacy during the latter stages of the war.²⁷

²⁶ *Harper's Weekly*, December 5, 1863, March 5, 1864, December 10, 1864, January 14, 1865, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

²⁷ *Harper's Weekly*, April 15, 1865, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003); Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 175-6; Kathleen Collins, "Living Skeletons; Carte-de-visite Propaganda in the American Civil War," *History of Photography* 12 (April-June 1988): 103.

The intensity of the prison controversy increased during the summer of 1864 in part because of the actions of the federal government. That May, the House of Representatives released a report, complete with photographs, detailing the brutal treatment Union prisoners experienced in the Confederacy. “The evidence proves,” asserted the House, “a determination on the part of the rebel authorities, deliberately and persistently practiced,” to “subject” soldiers to “a system of treatment” so horrible that the survivors “present literally the appearance of living skeletons...maimed for life.” Similar conclusions appeared in a subsequent publication by the United States Sanitary Commission, which not only attacked the Confederate prison system but glowingly described the humane Union prison facilities. Such “official endorsement of prison propaganda,” argues William Hesseltine, “made the recounting of atrocity stories an act of high patriotism.” By fanning the flames of public indignation, the widely circulated government reports accomplished the goal, according to Hesseltine, of convincing “the North that exchange was impossible—that it had been stopped by the South—and that the southerners were actuated by a determination to destroy the lives of the prisoners in their hands.” Northern propaganda placed the blame for the suffering of prisoners completely on the side of the Confederacy, which once again distracted from the reality that, regardless of section, harsh prison conditions remained the rule. The active agitation of the prison issue by the federal government in 1864 contributed to the northern belief that the Civil War represented an opportunity to vindicate the superior morality of the North.²⁸

²⁸ House Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Returned Prisoners*, 38th Cong., 1st sess., 1864, H. Rep. 67, 1. See also United States Sanitary Commission, *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of United States Officers and Soldiers while*

Such sweeping denunciation of the Confederacy by the Union, however, rang hollow with the men unfortunate enough to find themselves in the prisons so often discussed in the newspapers back home. Like the Confederate captive Thomas Green, Union prisoners wondered why the northern public and government, despite their haste to blame the Confederacy for the problems, seemed slow to take action on behalf of the federals suffering in rebel prisons. In August of 1864, a small group of Andersonville prisoners, temporarily released by the Confederate authorities, arrived in Washington, D. C., to inform the government of the terrible conditions and casualties that the soldiers experienced in the Georgia prison camp. “One of the sad effects...of this terrible war,” the preamble to the prisoners’ presentation stated, “has been to deaden our sympathies....Does the misfortune of being taken prisoner make us less the object of interest and value to our Government?” Even given the horrible conditions at Andersonville, the Union captives there often harbored resentment as much at their own government for abandoning them as towards the Confederacy, which at least in their eyes openly acknowledged the difficulty of the prison situation. While the inflammatory rhetoric and images of the newspapers and government reports kept public indignation high in the North (and also the South), it did nothing to help ameliorate the suffering of the thousands of prisoners who waited hopefully for their release.²⁹

During the final months of the war, as exchange resumed and the prison camps slowly emptied, a sense remained that the brutal conditions experienced in these prisons

Prisoners of War in the Hands of the Rebel Authorities, Being the Report of a Commission of Inquiry (Philadelphia, King and Baird Press 1864); William Hesseltine, “The Propaganda Literature of Confederate Prisons,” *Journal of Southern History* 1 (February-November 1935): 60-1.

²⁹ O.R., VII: 618-19.

demanded further public attention. With victory at hand, northerners assumed that superiority on the battlefield meant moral superiority as well. On January 29, 1865, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, long accustomed to attacking the moral failings of southern society, gave a speech criticizing the congressionally proposed policy of retaliating against rebel prisoners in response to the brutal treatment accorded to Union prisoners. “We should do nothing by which our country shall forfeit that great place which belongs to it in the vanguard of nations,” Sumner pleaded, even as he admitted that “when we read the stories of their atrocities...when the whole scene in all its horror is before us...our souls are filled with unutterable anguish.” Although Sumner rejected the idea of retaliation, his speech, reprinted and circulated, nevertheless confirmed the guilt of the Confederacy and the innocence of the Union in the debate over responsibility for the prison atrocities. And despite Sumner’s magnanimous stance, refusing to trade an eye for an eye despite what the North saw as clear provocation, the Union government’s actions towards captive Confederates demonstrated that, claims of innocence aside, a policy of retaliation already existed. Inspired in part by the earlier information published in the 1864 House of Representatives report concerning the brutal treatment of northern prisoners, that spring Union Secretary of War Edwin Stanton approved a series of reductions in the rations given to Confederate prisoners held in the North. Although the connections between this decision and the deaths of thousands of southern prisoners remain tenuous and controversial, the most telling aspect of the policy concerns the lack of interest it inspired in the North. Despite all the attention devoted to the inhumanity of the Confederacy, or perhaps because of it, in the last stages of the war northerners

displayed the hardened apathy towards the suffering endured by imprisoned Confederates every bit as much as southerners like Louis Manigault.³⁰

Refusing to accept the Union portrayal of atrocity and the northern anger surrounding the prisoner of war issue, the Confederacy responded to the accusations. On March 3, 1865, the Confederacy released its own report describing the prison situation. What made the report “important,” the Confederate Congressional Committee stated, were the “persistent efforts lately made by the Government of the United States...to asperse the honor of the Confederate authorities and to charge them with deliberate and willful cruelty to prisoners of war.” These “efforts,” according to the report, “are designed to inflame the evil passions of the North; to keep up the war spirit among their own people.” Not content with that insight, the committee continued by asserting that “in nearly all the prison stations of the North...our men have suffered from insufficient food, and have been subjected to ignominious, cruel, and barbarous practices, of which there is no parallel in anything that has occurred in the South.” As for the collapse of the exchange cartel, the Confederate report acknowledged that “the policy of “seducing negro slaves” and “arming” them against the South “gave rise to a few cases in which

³⁰ Charles Sumner, *Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, in the Senate of the United States, January 29th, 1865, on the Resolution of the Committee on Military Affairs, Advising Retaliation in Kind for Rebel Cruelties to Prisoners*, (New York: Young Men’s Republican Union, 1865), 8; Bruce Tap makes an interesting argument for another source of inspiration for Union retaliation against Confederate prisoners. In a 1996 article, he argues that the atrocities at Fort Pillow, where black Union prisoners were slaughtered by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, fed Union anger and sparked the congressional debate over the need to retaliate against Southern prisoners. See Tap, “‘These Devils are not Fit to Live on God’s Earth:’ War Crimes and the Committee on the Conduct of the War, 1864-1865,” *Civil War History* 38 (June 1996): 125-131. Historians such as Sanders and Horgan focus on the Union reduction of rations as evidence that the high prison mortality rates resulted from conscious policy choices. For additional information on the Union prison bureaucracy and its decisions, see Leslie Hunter’s “Warden for the Union.”

questions of crime under the internal laws of the Southern States appeared.” Despite the disagreement over the status of African-American troops, however, the Congressional Committee declared that that issue “ought never to have interrupted the general exchange.” Unfortunately for the Confederacy, “the fortunes of war threw the larger number (of prisoners)” to the Union, which, in keeping with its strategy of attrition against the South, “refused further exchanges.” Therefore, “the responsibility of refusing to exchange prisoners of war rests with the Government of the United States,” and so too did the blame for every resulting “sigh of captivity” and “groan of suffering.”³¹

The final paragraphs of the committee’s report offered a defense of the Confederate prison system. Admitting that “privation, suffering, and mortality, to an extent much to be regretted, did prevail” in places like Andersonville, Salisbury, and the Richmond prisons, the committee insisted that it was “not the result of neglect” or “design, on the part of the Confederate government.” Instead, the report cited “haste in preparation; crowded quarters, prepared only for a smaller number; want of transportation, and scarcity of food,” as the causes of the suffering, all of which “resulted from the pressure of the war and the barbarous manner in which it has been conducted by our enemies.” J. B. Jones, a Confederate War Department Clerk, confirmed these sentiments in his diary. Upon hearing that 12,000 Union prisoners died at Andersonville, Jones summed up the Confederate quandary, writing “that climate is fatal to them; but the government cannot feed them here, and the enemy won’t exchange.” According to Jones and the Confederate committee, the “savage warfare” of the Union, including such practices as the blockade, the confiscation and destruction of food and medicines, and the

³¹ O.R., VIII: 337-8, 347, 349.

incineration of homes, crops, and tools prevented the proper treatment of Union prisoners by the Confederacy. Summing up their case, the Confederate leaders declared that the Union was “desolating our country, in violation of the usages of civilized warfare,” while simultaneously refusing “to exchange prisoners” and had “forced us to keep 50,000 of their men in captivity.” The hypocritical Union then dared “to attribute to us the sufferings and privations caused by their own acts. We cannot doubt that in the view of civilization we shall stand acquitted, while they must be condemned.” Any chance for condemnation of the Union over the treatment of prisoners, however, evaporated within weeks, thanks to the surrender at Appomattox, although the arguments outlined in the report provided ammunition for future defenders of the Confederacy’s handling of prisoners.³²

Although the prisoners themselves started the process of expressing horror, wondering about responsibility, and demanding retribution, the controversy over Civil War prisons grew rapidly in the last years of the war as the Union and Confederacy responded to the allegations of brutality. Families, the press, and the governments themselves engaged in a rhetorical war over the treatment of prisoners within the larger war. The intensity of that verbal conflict reflected in part the general bitterness of the Civil War, but also the more specific frustration with the inherent confusion about who exactly was to blame for Civil War prison casualties. Vindicating how the Union or Confederacy treated its prisoners became an opportunity to prove the justice of each side’s cause and a means to assert moral superiority over a depraved, uncivilized enemy. The manipulation of the prison controversy by the press and both governments also

³² O.R., VIII, 350; J. B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary*, ed. Howard Swiggett (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 340; O.R., VIII, 350.

provided an additional benefit to the war effort in that it lessened criticism of the refusal to exchange and focused the building anger over the treatment of prisoners on the actions of the enemies. Patriotic northerners and southerners ignored their own failings and decried their opponents' instead. As the victors, northerners, who remained unsurprisingly skeptical of southern claims that their side caused the suffering of imprisoned soldiers, placed the blame on the defeated Confederacy and overlooked any wrongdoing of their own.

There was one final reason that the debate over the prisons continued to grow. Despite all the propaganda and heated rhetoric that both sides appeared to relish, a sense of failure and helplessness plagued northerners and southerners alike over the terrible suffering that young men, regardless of section, experienced in enemy prisons. Throughout the last years of the Civil War, after its end, and in the years to come, it seemed that the volume of the debate over which side could claim moral superiority in the treatment of its prisoners served another purpose. It distracted Americans from their feelings of guilt about the 56,000 dead prisoners.

CHAPTER 3: “REMEMBER ANDERSONVILLE”

Amid the excitement that surrounded the transition from war to peace, in early May of 1865, Union troops quietly arrested a Confederate officer, Captain Henry Wirz, the camp commandant of Andersonville prison, and transported him to Washington. There the wrath of the enraged northern citizenry awaited him. During the operation of Andersonville, from the spring of 1864 through the end of the war, approximately 13,000 Union soldiers out of the 45,000 unfortunate souls housed there died. Those deadly statistics meant that Andersonville, both in the percentage of fatalities and sheer numbers, represented the worst of the Civil War prisons. The scale of the casualties, the vast majority of which took place during a six month period from late spring of 1864 through that fall, represented only one of the reasons for the interest in Wirz. Contributing to the northern ire, in early 1865, on the heels of the 1864 government reports, another government publication appeared which included over twenty pages of statements about the suffering occurring in Confederate prisons. Additional accounts of the terrible prison conditions in the northern press combined with the lingering grief and resentment over Lincoln's assassination made Wirz, an emblem of Confederate brutality, a natural target in the emotionally charged postwar environment. Over the next few months, the question of Wirz's fate made headlines all over America. His trial and subsequent execution helped assure that sectional bitterness and controversy over the wartime treatment of

prisoners of war remained as strong throughout Reconstruction as during the Civil War itself.¹

From Wirz's arrest in May to his execution in November, the American public seemed riveted to the events of the trial, which commenced in August and ended in October. The northern press avidly covered the story and railed against the crimes Wirz, supposedly at the behest of the Confederate government, conspired to commit against the Union prisoners. According to Northern popular opinion, the callous brutality demonstrated at Andersonville by Wirz and his co-conspirators typified the barbaric nature of the rebellious South. The animosity directed towards Wirz, as the representative of the Confederacy, grew so vociferous that many declared Wirz not just guilty, but an inhuman monster. Historian Ella Lonn points out an additional factor in the

¹ House Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War*, 38th Congress, 2nd sess., 1865, H. Ex. Doc. 32, 54-77. On the Wirz trial, besides the works of Hesseltine and Speer, see also Ovid L. Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison* (Indiantown, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1968); William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Charles W. Sanders, Jr., "'This Sad Business': The Union and Confederate Prison Systems of the American Civil War" (Ph. D. diss., Kansas State University, 2001). Many other scholars address the proceedings, including Bruce Catton, "Prison Camps of the Civil War," *American Heritage* 10 (August 1959): 96-97; Darrett B. Rutman, "The War Crimes and Trial of Henry Wirz," *Civil War History* 6 (June 1960): 117-133; Lewis L. Laska and James M. Smith, "'Hell and the Devil': Andersonville and the Trial of Captain Henry Wirz, C. S. A., 1865," *Military Law Review* 68 (1975): 77-132; Gayla Koerting, "The Trial of Henry Wirz and Nineteenth Century Military Law" (Ph. D. diss., Kent State University, 1995); Robert E. and Katharine M. Morseberger, "After Andersonville: The First War Crimes Trial," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 13 (July 1974): 30-40; Morgan Peoples, "'The Scapegoat of Andersonville': Union Execution of Confederate Captain Henry Wirz," *North Louisiana Historical Association Journal* 11 (Fall 1980): 3-18; James C. Bonner, "War Crimes Trials, 1865-1867," *Social Science* 22 (April 1947): 128-134; Elizabeth Leonard Parker, "The Civil War Career of Henry Wirz and its Aftermath" (M. A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1948); Stephen B. Oates, *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 339-353; Benjamin Cloyd, "Prisoners of a New Bureaucracy," 58-62.

northern anger directed at Wirz—his status as a Swiss immigrant in a nativist political culture. By the time Wirz went on trial, writes another historian, William Marvel, “the Northern public had been primed for the case for months.” Marvel understates the situation, as years, not months, of antipathy and frustration showed in the denunciations of Wirz. A July 1865 *New York Times* editorial demanded that “some expiation must be exacted for the most infernal crime of the century.” In October, another *Times* article compared the “diabolical and fiendish” Wirz to a “tiger sporting with its helpless prey.” Similar sentiments appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* when an editor judged, “of his guilt there can be no doubt,” even though the trial did not end until late October. A series of illustrations depicting the Andersonville atrocities, including one of Wirz stamping a prisoner, appeared in *Harper’s* in September. These engravings hardened northern sentiment against the yet to be convicted Wirz. Such biased press coverage indicated the climate of hatred that Wirz, the symbol of Confederate brutality and southern immorality, aroused in the North during 1865. One indication of that anger exists in the diary of Abram Parmenter, a member of the Veterans Reserve Corps stationed in Washington D. C. during the Wirz trial. On August 25, Parmenter learned of “some astounding facts brought to light—in regard to the brutal and inhuman treatment of prisoners.” The next day, Parmenter described the trial as “a sickening tale of suffering.” When the Wirz defense commenced on September 27, Parmenter dismissed it as “rather feble.” The anti-Wirz hysteria, demonstrated both in the press and public opinion, meant that long before the trial concluded, northerners were convinced of Wirz’s undoubted guilt.²

² Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 273-275; Marvel, *Andersonville*, 243; *New York Times*, July 26, 1865, October 15, 1865; *Harper’s Weekly*, August 19, 1865, September 16, 1865,

The vitriol Wirz received in the northern press and public opinion, however, at times seemed to pale in comparison to what the prosecutors said about him during his trial. On August 21, the trial before a military tribunal opened. The federal government, represented by its lead prosecutor, Colonel Norton Parker Chipman, initially hoped to prove conclusively the existence of a massive conspiracy among Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Brigadier General John Winder and Wirz, along with other leading Confederate officials, to brutally murder Union prisoners by the thousands. Robert Kean, the former Head of the Confederate Bureau of War, took offence to the trial, insisting in his diary that “the real object of the proceeding is to make a case against Davis and Seddon, or at least blacken them.” Along with the charge of conspiracy, Wirz stood accused of over a dozen murders of Andersonville prisoners. Although Secretary of War Edwin Stanton halted the proceedings and forced the overzealous Chipman to remove the names of the Confederate leaders specifically charged in the conspiracy with Wirz, the firm northern belief in the reality of the plot never wavered. Since the fate of Davis still remained undecided, Stanton and the federal government balked at implicating Davis so strongly in the Wirz matter. When the trial resumed on August 23, Wirz faced two revised charges. The first charge stated that Wirz conspired with unknown others “to impair and injure the health and destroy the lives of large numbers of federal prisoners.” The second accused Wirz of thirteen separate murders of unknown Union prisoners at Andersonville. As Lewis Laska and James Smith point out, throughout the ten pages of charges, repeated references to Wirz as “malicious,” “evil,” “cruel,” and “wicked” set the tone for how the

HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003); Diary of Abram Varrick Parmenter, August 25, 26, and September 27, 1865, Abram Varrick Parmenter Papers, MMC 696, Library of Congress Manuscript Room.

prosecution would portray Wirz throughout the trial. By demonizing Wirz, Chipman and the government desired not only to pin responsibility for the prison atrocities on the shoulders of guilty individuals like Wirz, but also remind posterity of the inherent brutality and evil nature of the Confederate South.³

Between late August and late October, when the trial concluded, the prosecution continued to rail against the inhuman cruelty of Wirz. “Mortal man,” Chipman declared, “has never been called to answer before a legal tribunal to a catalogue of crime like this.” But despite his insistence that Wirz bore responsibility for the “long black catalogue of crimes, these tortures unparalleled,” Chipman saved much of his venom for the Confederacy itself. “With what detestation,” stated Chipman, “must civilized nations regard that government whose conduct has been such as characterized this pretended confederacy.” The “treasonable conspiracy” of the South against the Union prisoners of war resulted not from “retaliation, punishment, nor ignorance of the law,” Chipman explained, “it was the intrinsic wickedness of a few desperate leaders, seconded by mercenary and heartless monsters, of whom the prisoner before you is a fair type.” In the trial Chipman and the federal government argued that individuals such as Wirz, Winder, and implicitly Davis and others, deliberately worsened the already difficult conditions for the Union prisoners. The reason such cruelty was tolerated in the Confederacy stemmed from the inherently corrupt and barbaric nature of the treasonous South. The consistent juxtaposition of Wirz’s individual crimes with the larger accusations of endemic

³ Laska and Smith, ““Hell and the Devil,”” 100-102; Koerting, “The Trial of Henry Wirz,” 69; Edward Younger, *Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean* (1957; repr., Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 223; William Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), 240-242; Laska and Smith, ““Hell and the Devil,”” 101.

Confederate brutality sufficed to explain the prison casualties in the minds of many in the North.⁴

In looking for someone to blame for the horrors of Civil War prisons, the North found a perfect target in Wirz, who proved to be not only a convenient scapegoat, but a malleable symbol of what responsibility meant at a time when confusion abounded about what actually happened at Andersonville and other prison camps. Wirz met northern needs for several reasons. Focusing primarily on Wirz made political sense because it offered the angry northern public a demonic figure on which to focus their outrage. Wirz' background as an immigrant also facilitated the campaign against him because he lacked the credentials and connections of other Confederate leaders, such as Jefferson Davis. It was far more politically expedient to blame a lone, expendable immigrant than to put Davis on trial for Andersonville. Trying and executing Wirz allowed the North to pin the responsibility for the prison debacle on the Confederacy without further stirring up the emotions of southerners. And even though Wirz received the blame, Chipman and Judge Joseph Holt, the Judge Advocate General in charge of the proceedings, never missed an opportunity to remind the public that Wirz represented the "spirit" of "murderous cruelty and baseness," that characterized "the inner and real life of the rebellion, and the hellish criminality and brutality of the traitors who maintained it." Although the prosecution tried him as an individual, Wirz became, for many northerners, the emblem of southern brutality, evidence of the sad but natural consequence of how traitors find themselves debased and dehumanized. Even though Wirz alone was convicted, the trial process demonstrated that northerners simultaneously attributed

⁴ House, *The Trial of Henry Wirz*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess., 1868, H. Ex. Doc. 23, 802, 777, 764, 756.

personal responsibility to Wirz for the suffering at Andersonville, supported the belief that the maltreatment of Union prisoners resulted from a conspiracy of Confederate officials, and used the proceedings to remind the world of the moral failings of the traitorous South.⁵

The heated rhetoric surrounding the trial obscured significant flaws in the government's prosecution of the case. Out of the one hundred and sixty witnesses who testified, one hundred and forty-five stated that they never saw Wirz kill a prisoner, and even those who insisted that Wirz committed murder failed to name any of the victims. As for the charge of conspiracy, Confederate doctor Randolph Stevenson made a simple yet compelling argument: "Captain Wirz could not conspire alone." No other Confederate official ever went to trial for the Andersonville crimes, a circumstance that weakens the charge of conspiracy against Wirz. The Confederate Commissary General of Prisons, General Winder, would probably have faced charges, but he died shortly before the end of the war. Wirz himself recognized that in his case, justice reflected popular opinion: "I know how hard it is for one, helpless and unfriended as I am, to control against the prejudices produced by popular culture and long continued misrepresentation."⁶

Other prejudices worked against Wirz as well. Though a legitimate legal proceeding, military law, as Gayla Koerting notes, not only differed from the more exacting standards of civil law, it also encouraged a predisposition against Wirz among

⁵ House, *Trial of Henry Wirz*, 814.

⁶ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 244; Dr. Randolph Stevenson, *The Southern Side; or Andersonville Prison* (Baltimore, Md.: Turnbull Brothers, 1876), 133. On Winder, see Arch Blakey, *General John Winder, CSA* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1990); House, *Trial of Henry Wirz*, 704.

his judges. Koerting explains that “military law allowed the introduction of circumstantial evidence,” an acceptable practice because the officers prosecuting Wirz were “men of honor.” The pride of the high-ranking officers, according to Koerting, led them to “convict any soldier or individual who tarnished the reputation of the armed services regardless of evidence and testimony favorable to the accused.” In their 1975 article, Laska and Smith suggest that regardless of the honor at stake, the “intimate ‘old boy’ relationship which existed between the prosecution and the members of the military commission,” cast serious doubt on the “intellectual integrity” of the military tribunal. These inherent flaws in the nature of military justice, especially given the emotional intensity created by the constant commotion over the prisoner of war issue, doomed Wirz even before the trial. The trial culminated in the inevitable verdict of guilty, and Wirz received a death sentence. On November 10, 1865, spectators assembled around the gallows hurled cries of “remember Andersonville” at Wirz. The chant from the crowd grew louder as he ascended the steps. The trap door opened, and with cheers ringing in his ears, Wirz joined many of his former wards in death. Wirz became the only ex-Confederate officer executed for war crimes committed during the Civil War.⁷

In the midst of the northern celebration over Wirz’ death, a few lonely southerners such as Robert Kean, a former Confederate official, insisted that the trial of Wirz represented a mockery of justice. Kean denounced the proceedings as a smokescreen designed to divert northern attention from the real culprit behind the prison suffering, Edwin Stanton. “That official,” Kean argued, “preferred for thousands to perish

⁷ Koerting, “The Trial of Henry Wirz,” 122; Laska and Smith, “‘Hell and the Devil,’” 106, 129. For other inconsistencies in the charges and the handling of the case, see Rutman, “The War Crimes and Trial of Henry Wirz,” 127-128; Morseberger, “After Andersonville,” 37-40.

miserably, in the effort to [have federal prisoners] eat Confederate corn from the Confederate armies.” “The perfidy by which the cartel was abrogated was a settled policy to starve the Confederacy,” Kean continued, “though thousands of their own men starved and rotted with scurvy.” Northerners ignored these arguments, however, and continued rejoicing.⁸

On the day of the execution, Abram Parmenter recorded his disappointment at arriving too late to see Wirz hang, but the demise of the “Andersonville wholesale murderer” comforted him. The execution of Wirz, Parmenter commented later that day, seemed an appropriate fate “to satisfy the just—claims of the law, and an outraged people.” A few days after Wirz’s burial, a *Harper’s Weekly* editor wrote, “there are crimes against God and man which ought not to be forgotten, and these for which Wirz suffered...are of them.”⁹

By 1865, northerners viewed Andersonville and Henry Wirz as the primary symbols of Confederate atrocity. After Appomattox, northerners vented their moral outrage at what they declared to be crimes committed against their soldiers imprisoned in the South. As postwar enmity persisted in the North, it took the form of reprisals against the supposedly singularly brutal Confederate treatment of prisoners. Victory gave the North a sense of moral reassurance, out of which its citizens could easily condemn the sufferings at Andersonville and other southern prisons rather than admit the failures of Union prison camps. Blaming Wirz and his fellow unnamed Confederates as individually responsible for the tragedy at Andersonville excused any acknowledgement

⁸ Younger, *Inside the Confederate Government*, 230.

⁹ November 10, 1865, Parmenter Diary; *Harper’s Weekly*, November 25, 1865, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

of the bureaucratic dysfunction, inadequate resources, or retaliatory behavior present in the Union prison system and signified an attempt to bestow meaning upon 56,000 deaths. Those deaths seemed more understandable if attributed to the individual cruelty of the “diabolical” men, representatives of a “murderous” rebellion, in charge of the prison system, which explained why the prosecution during the Wirz trial presented Andersonville as a moral outrage, a terrible exception, perpetuated by one fiendish individual in the service of a fiendish cause. Judge Holt, who reviewed the findings of the Wirz tribunal, spoke for many in his closing statement: “this work of death seems to have been a saturnalia of enjoyment for the prisoner (Wirz), who amid these savage orgies evidenced such exultation and mingled with them such nameless blasphemy and ribald jest, as at times to exhibit him rather as a demon than a man.” The combined effect of the press coverage and trial inflamed the demand for retribution, and the bitterness of the Wirz trial ensured that the mutual antipathy over the prison controversy would continue. The question of how Henry Wirz, no matter how demonic, could alone bear the responsibility for Andersonville, was left for future generations to ponder. But as Ovid Futch argues, “the molders of public opinion so effectively impressed on the northern people the image of Andersonville as the acme of inhumanity that to this day the word itself remains to some a symbol of southern savagery.”¹⁰

¹⁰ House, *Trial of Henry Wirz*, 813-4. The post-trial publication of *The Demon of Andersonville; or, The Trial of Wirz, for the Cruel Treatment and Brutal Murder of Helpless Union Prisoners in his Hands. The Most Highly Exciting and Interesting Trial of the Present Century, his Life and Execution Containing also a History of Andersonville, with Illustrations, Truthfully Representing the Horrible Scenes of Cruelty Perpetuated by Him* (Philadelphia: Barclay & Co., 1865) indicated how much Wirz was reviled during 1865; Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison*, 118.

In the period following Wirz's execution, as Reconstruction slowly integrated the Confederacy back into the United States, the ongoing controversy surrounding the prison legacy demonstrated that while political reunification could rebuild America, it could not heal the bitter attitudes and sectional differences that lingered long after the Civil War. Throughout the 1860s and 70s, often in the context of national politics, debates over the responsibility for the treatment of prisoners and the concomitant accusations of atrocity ensured that the anger over Civil War prisons continued. "Prison horror," states David Blight, "and the hatreds it fostered in both sections, infested social memories of the war during Reconstruction years as nothing else did." From the very beginning of Reconstruction, the prison controversy helped shape the contemporary political environment. According to Hans Trefousse, Thaddeus Stevens, a leader of the anti-Johnson wing of the Republican party and a driving force behind Congressional Reconstruction, justified his desire for the confiscation and redistribution of Confederate property on the grounds that ex-Confederates merited punishment for the barbarities at Andersonville and other places. In the 1866 *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, Stevens and his Congressional allies denounced President Johnson's lenient policy of Reconstruction, arguing that with the exception of Tennessee, "the prospects are far from encouraging." Reminding Johnson and his supporters that the ex-Confederate states waged war "with the most determined and malignant spirit, killing in battle, and otherwise, large numbers of loyal people," the Committee declared Presidential Reconstruction an insufficient penance for the South. In case the oblique reference to the deaths of thousands of Union soldiers in Confederate prisons went unnoticed, the Committee included several pages of testimony from Dorence Atwater, a

former inmate of Andersonville who compiled a roster of the dead and detailed the brutal conditions at Andersonville and other southern camps. Although the prison controversy never became the central focus in the debate over Reconstruction, the Radical Republicans' use of the prison issue justified a stronger policy and convinced the public to support Congress as it successfully wrested control of the process away from Andrew Johnson. By late 1867, in response to southern irritation with the passage of the Reconstruction Acts, *Harper's Weekly* ridiculed the South for protesting against northern "tyranny," pointing out that not only had the Southern cause failed, but that "there was no fame garnered at Salisbury: nor is Andersonville very bright and shining with classic glory." For the first time, but not the last, invocation of the prison controversy successfully served political ends. Throughout Reconstruction, discussion of the prison issue would consistently justify and symbolize the cemented relationship between northern morality and the Republican political agenda.¹¹

During the late 1860s, inflammatory rhetoric about and images of Civil War prisons appeared in the northern press, sparked initially by the question of what the North should do with ex-Confederate president Jefferson Davis, who still awaited trial or release from prison. On June 30, 1866, cartoonist Thomas Nast, in *Harper's Weekly*, contrasted the brutality and suffering of Andersonville with the relative luxury that Davis enjoyed at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. The public, an accompanying editorial maintained,

¹¹ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 152; Hans L. Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2001), 168; House Joint Committee on Reconstruction, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction*, 39th Congress, 1st sess., 1866, H. Rep. 30, xv, x-xi, 278-287; *Harper's Weekly*, March 23, 1867, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

should remember that Davis “is the same man who could see from his house in Richmond the island upon which Union prisoners were slowly starved and frozen, and who knew that thousands of his fellow-men imprisoned at Andersonville were pitilessly tortured into idiocy and death.” The ongoing animosity directed at Davis over his responsibility for the Confederate prison system may have delayed his release from prison, although in the end he, unlike Wirz, escaped formal charges.¹²

Even outside the context of controversial issues such as Reconstruction or Davis’ fate, the prison legacy demonstrated its power to fascinate the northern public. Another *Harper’s Weekly* article, on July 21, 1866, reviewed a popular exhibit of “Andersonville Relics,” on display at the National Fair in Washington, and confidently predicted that “whatever relates to the Andersonville dead is not likely soon to become void of interest, at least not to the loyal North.” The bitterness of the “loyal North” also found its way into the early histories of the war. Captain and Assistant Quartermaster James M. Moore, charged in 1865 with marking the graves of Union soldiers at Andersonville, reported that “nothing has been destroyed; as our exhausted, emaciated, and enfeebled soldiers left it, so it stands to-day, as a monument to an inhumanity unparalleled in the annals of war.” In the 1866 *History of the United States Sanitary Commission*, author Charles Stille described the heartrending task the Commission faced of caring for returning prisoners, “unable to walk, most of them were barefooted, and without underclothing, and their thin, wasted forms were covered with dirt and vermin.” In 1866, the first full year of peace, northern anger seemed as fresh as ever.¹³

¹² *Harper’s Weekly*, June 30, 1866, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

Much of the attention paid to the prison controversy in the aftermath of the war resulted from the publication of numerous, almost unanimously northern, prisoner accounts, a practice that remained common well into the early twentieth century. The consistent rehashing of the trauma combined with the animosity with which most former prisoners wrote ensured that sectional hostility over the issue remained alive. In many ways the postwar accounts, which took the form of memoirs rather than diaries, unsurprisingly resembled the wartime prisoner testimony. As before, the postwar accounts recreated the brutal daily experience of the prisoners, assigned blame for the tragedy, and confirmed the perception that the suffering was deliberate. They also perpetuated the beliefs that their own government's prison system represented a model of kindness and that any wrongdoing resulted from the actions of misguided individuals. What separated the postwar accounts from their predecessors, especially after the Wirz trial, was the strident, amplified rhetoric of the newer texts. The reason for the polemical nature of the accounts was the competition and popularity of the memoirs. Between 1865 and 1867, several dozen prison memoirs appeared, and because of the market pressures of timeliness and the desire to sell as many copies as possible, the need to distinguish one's product through sensationalism and vitriol became irresistible. This impulse led to titles such as *Martyria* and *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* along with declarations like those of Joseph Ferguson, whose exaggerated account stated, "it is past question that the

¹³Harper's Weekly, July 21, 1866, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003); Quartermaster General's Office, *The Martyrs Who, for Our Country, Gave up their Lives in the Prison Pens in Andersonville, GA.* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1866), 8; Charles J. Stille, *History of the United States Sanitary Commission: Being the General Report of its Work during the War of the Rebellion* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 305; see also Mrs. Holstein, *Three Years in Field Hospitals of the Army of the Potomac* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1867), 91-131.

Confederate authorities did deliberately, and with thoughts of murder in their hearts, perpetuate the awful enormity of torturing to death sixty or seventy thousand helpless but brave men; slain by a refined process of cruelty.” Statements like these served the needs of the individual prison survivors in that it allowed them a creative outlet to share their experiences and turn a profit, and simultaneously, these declarations catered to the appetite of the northern public for such reminders of the moral justice of the Union cause. Authors like Ferguson knew that the northern public expected an attitude of outrage and denunciation towards the brutal, treasonous South, and they willingly gave their audience reassurance of Yankee superiority over Confederate baseness.¹⁴

Another important distinction evident in the early postwar northern prison narratives involved the cessation of blame directed at the U. S. government for refusing to exchange prisoners for much of 1863 and 1864. Men like William Burson instead argued that “the rebels knew just how to demoralize the Union prisoners and make them useless to the Federal Government, and adopted this means to accomplish their hellish purpose.” Alfred Richardson, imprisoned at Salisbury, North Carolina, praised the “credulity and trustfulness of our Government towards the enemy” in sending private shipments of supplies to Union prisoners, which the Rebels “openly confiscated.” Richardson lodged his only criticism of Union policy against Edwin Stanton’s “cold-blooded theory” that “returned prisoners were infinitely more valuable to the Rebels than to us.” Although this policy contributed to his hardship, Richardson seemed accepting of

¹⁴ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 247-48; Augustus C. Hamlin, *Martyria; or, Andersonville Prison* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1866); Robert H. Kellogg, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* (1865; repr., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); Joseph Ferguson, *Life Struggles in Rebel Prisons: A Record of the Sufferings, Escapes, Adventures and Starvation of the Union Prisoners* (Philadelphia: James A Ferguson, Publisher, 1865), 72-73.

the logic, especially in the aftermath of victory. Along with the vindication of Union policy came Richardson's attack against the camp commandant at Salisbury, Confederate Major John H. Gee. Gee, claimed Richardson, insisted on giving the prisoners quarter rations even though the commissary warehouse, as well as the surrounding regions, enjoyed ample supplies of corn and pork. Like Richardson, other survivors also singled out the men they held personally responsible for their suffering. Warren Goss, an Andersonville prisoner, blamed the harsh conditions on "the inflexible Winder." Josiah Brownell expressed his disdain for Wirz, saying of him, "a more brutal coward I never saw." In 1867, J. F. Brock swore that defenders of the Southern prison system, and in particular "Jeff Davis and Benj. Hill are both liars." Readers of these memoirs, most of whom were already familiar with the old conspiracy arguments, saw no reason to doubt the words of their heroes, and so the belief that deliberate brutality took place towards prisoners at the will of leading Confederate officials became even more ingrained in the North. And while the number of accounts dropped after 1867, the consistent appearance of similarly styled prison memoirs in the late 1860s and 70s continued to perpetuate the hostility.¹⁵

¹⁵ William Burson, *A Race For Liberty, or My Capture, Imprisonment, and Escape* (Wellsville, Ohio: W. G. Foster, Printer, 1867), 41; Albert D. Richardson, *The Secret Service, the Field, the Dungeon, and the Escape* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1865), 417, 412; Warren Lee Goss, *The Soldier's Story of His Captivity at Andersonville, Belle Isle, and other Rebel Prisons* (1866; repr., Scituate, Mass.: Digital Scanning, Inc., 2001), 257; Josiah C. Brownell, *At Andersonville. A Narrative of Personal Adventure at Andersonville, Florence and Charleston Rebel Prisons* (1867; repr., Glen Cove, N.Y.: Glen Cove Public Library, 1981), 7; J. F. Brock, "The Personal Experience of J. F. Brock in the Rebel Prison Pens," p. 2, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, 3rd series, Kansas City Civil War Round Table Collection, United States Army Military History Institute. See also Bernhard Domschke, *Twenty Months in Captivity*, edited and translated by Frederic Trautmann (1865; repr., London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1987); George W. Murray, *A History of George W.*

Although outnumbered, in their own memoirs, a few Confederates not only refuted the northern arguments but also made their own accusations. Decimus Barziza, held at Johnson's Island, ridiculed the "alleged" brutality supposedly taking place in southern prisons and insisted that the "horrible treatment" at prisons like Fort Delaware and Point Lookout occurred with the purpose of forcing Confederate prisoners to swear an oath of allegiance to the Union, or else face "starvation, cold, and ill-treatment." A. M. Keiley felt impelled to write his own prison account as a response to the North, which "is not only writing the story of the late war, but the character of its late enemies." In doing so, Keiley compared his experience at Point Lookout and Elmira with those of the Andersonville prisoners. Keiley believed that Union Major E. L. Sanger, the head of the Medical Department at Elmira, acting on the instructions of Edwin Stanton, refused to supply the prison with the medicine prisoners needed. An indignant Keiley wondered how the North could "studiously ignore" the evidence of their own brutality while condemning Wirz, "who was not the monster whom that scandalous tribunal declared him." As bitter as he felt about the treatment he received in the North, what seemed to anger Keiley the most involved the one-sidedness with which northerners attacked the southern prison record. Other southerners perceived the northern hypocrisy as well. L. M. Lewis, in the preface to W. A. Wash's prison account, hoped that "if we would have a

Murray (Northampton, Mass.: Trumbull & Gere, Steam Printers, 1865). For examples of prison memoirs between 1868-1877, see Thad Waters, *The Terrors of Rebel Prisons* (N.p.: privately printed, 1868); Samuel J. M. Andrews, *Sufferings Endured by Union Soldiers* (Effingham, Ill.: Register Print, 1870); Henry Hernbaker, Jr. and John Lynch, *True History. Jefferson Davis Answered. The Horrors of the Andersonville Prison Pen*, (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Son, Printers, 1876). Even former Union soldiers who never experienced capture denounced the Confederate prison system. See D. G. Crotty, *Four years Campaigning in the Army of the Potomac* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Dygert Bros. & Co. Printers and Binders, 1874), 189.

just verdict from the grand juries of coming generations,” northern prisons such as Johnson’s Island, “Alton Penitentiary, Camp Douglas, Camp Chase, Rock Island and Elmira,” should “be placed by the side of the exaggerations about Libby, Belle Isle, Tyler and Andersonville.” Although Barziza, Keiley, Lewis and Wash reminded southerners of the inconsistencies in the Yankee interpretation, they had little impact on the North, which remained outraged at the Confederate treatment of prisoners.¹⁶

The persistent bitterness of the prison narratives on both sides indicated that the emotions stirred up by Civil War prisons remained relevant after the war, and the prison controversy quickly became an important symbolic issue in Reconstruction politics. With the first presidential election looming in 1868, the Republican party focused attention on the prisons, a tactic one scholar called “the most powerful political weapon that could be used by the North in securing Republican victories at the polls.” Although the Republican party dominated the North, the sizeable number of Democratic sympathizers there worried the Republican establishment. Since the white South remained staunchly Democrat, the possibility existed that a rejuvenated Democratic party might challenge the Republican majority, which could threaten to reverse the policies enacted during the war. In the fall elections of 1867, *Harper’s Weekly*, as usual, took the lead in reminding its readers of the stakes. Those “who love freedom, will vote for the Republican,” the editor wrote, “while all who secretly wish...the Andersonville pen had

¹⁶ Decimus Et Ultimus Barziza, *The Adventures of a Prisoner of War* (1865; repr., Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1964), 103, 91; A. M. Keiley, *In Vinculis; or, The Prisoner of War* (New York: Blelock & Co., 1866), 5, 138-147, 141, 52; L. M. Lewis, “Introduction,” viii-ix, in W. A. Wash, *Camp, Field and Prison Life* (St. Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Co., 1870); see also Joe Barbieri, *Scraps from the Prison Table at Camp Chase and Johnson’s Island* (Doylestown, Pa.: W. W. H. Davis, Printer, 1868); D. R. Hundley, *Prison Echoes of the Great Rebellion* (New York: S. W. Green, Printer, 1874).

succeeded, will vote for his Democratic opponent.” Throughout 1868, Republican publications such as *Harper’s Weekly* delighted in hammering the Democrats by repeatedly charging them with behavior only slightly less traitorous than that of the Confederacy. On July 4, 1868, another *Harper’s* article lamented that had the Democrat George McClellan defeated Lincoln in 1864, “the rebel army and the Andersonville jailers would have sung Te Deum.”¹⁷

Over the last few months of the election, a torrent of similar sentiments flooded the northern press. On October 3, an anonymous letter to *Harper’s Weekly* finally stated the obvious point of the agitation over Andersonville and the other southern prisons: “I should like to see a picture of that stockade (Andersonville), and on the left the United States Cemetery (located at Andersonville), with the Stars and Stripes flying over those poor boys’ graves. I do believe,” the author concluded, “it would clench the nail in the political coffin of Seymour and Blair (the Democratic ticket).” Three weeks later, with the election only days away, an illustration titled “The Political Andersonville” appeared in *Harper’s*. The cartoon depicted the unfortunate Republican voters of the South as trapped in a giant stockade—symbolic of the white Democratic South’s tactics of violence and fraud to ensure victory at the polls. A grim specter, the ghost of a dead Andersonville inmate, loomed over the scene. The caption quoted Wade Hampton, the ex-Confederate general and South Carolina gubernatorial candidate, as the main advocate of these abuses of democracy. “Agree among yourselves...that you will not employ any

¹⁷ Rutman, “The War Crimes and Trial of Henry Wirz,” 133; *Harper’s Weekly*, November 9, 1867, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003). On July 11, 1868, a *Harper’s Weekly* editor referred to Andersonville as “the Palladium of Southern Democratic liberties.” *Harper’s Weekly*, July 11, 1868, July 4, 1868, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

one who votes the Radical ticket,” Hampton threatened, and “use all the means that are placed in your hands to control this element.” The denial of democratic liberties in the South and even the alliance between northern and southern Democrats, the engraving suggested, insulted the memory of the sacrifice that thousands of imprisoned soldiers made during the war. Over the course of the campaign, the Republican press succeeded in portraying the Democrats not only as corrupt, undemocratic, and unpatriotic, but as disrespectful of the dead Union prisoners. In November, the war hero Ulysses S. Grant secured the presidency for the Republican party. Given Grant’s lack of political experience, the constant emphasis on playing to the patriotism of Republicans proved a sound strategy. That patriotism, of course, rested in part on attacks against anyone with even the slightest connection to the prison atrocities. Along with blaming Henry Wirz and Jefferson Davis, in 1868, Republicans also held Democrats, North and South, responsible for the suffering at Andersonville and other Southern prisons.¹⁸

Even after Grant’s election, Republicans continued to harp on the subject of Civil War prisons. In 1869, the House of Representatives published the results of one final investigation into the treatment of Union soldiers in Confederate prisons. “In a national and historical sense, the subject of rebel imprisonment,” stated the committee, required “an enduring record, truthful and authentic, and stamped with the national authority.” The report proceeded to endorse all the accusations of the Civil War and its aftermath, so that “these facts should live in history as the inevitable results of slavery, treason, and rebellion, and as an example to which the eyes of future generations may revert with shame and detestation.” Nearly two hundred and seventy pages of similar rhetoric

¹⁸ *Harper’s Weekly*, October 3, 1868, October 24, 1868, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

seemed designed as much to justify the need for ongoing Republican control of the federal government as to warn posterity about the “unholy ambition” and the barbaric society of the rebel South. Besides officially endorsing the campaign propaganda of the late 1860s, the report served another purpose as well. Acknowledging the “heroism of the thousands of long suffering and martyred soldiers of the republic,” the committee cited the sacrifice of these men “as an enduring example of that chivalric courage which elevates man above the common level of his race.” The House also exonerated the Lincoln Administration, as well as the Union military, “from any responsibility for these great sufferings and crimes.” With the Union absolved of any potential guilt and respect paid to the dead prisoners, the report accomplished its task of codifying the official Republican stance on the prison controversy. Rejecting even the possibility that the Republican government and military could have done more for the prisoners of both sides, the committee instead denounced the Confederacy as the product of barbaric southern society and lauded the martyred figures of Lincoln and the Union prisoners. In part because of the constant repetition, few, at least in the North, disagreed. A similar example of Union self-congratulation appeared in the war histories of 1869. “Kindness and humanity” prevailed at the northern prison of Camp Morton, Indiana, according to one author, and “in contrast with the horrors of Libby, Belle Isle, Andersonville and other Southern prison pens, where thousands of brave Union men were starved and murdered, the history of Camp Morton is as Heaven is to Hell.” In 1869, memories of the Civil War remained too vivid to allow a more objective presentation of the events surrounding the

prison legacy. Having won the war, the Republicans continued to press their rhetorical advantage in order to win the peace as well.¹⁹

One of the reasons for the ongoing emphasis placed on the prison controversy by the Republican party in the first years after the war involved the fact that Union veterans, and their main postwar organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, represented a sizeable portion of the Republican constituency. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, as Stuart McConnell argues, “the war’s place in the popular estimation as a successful crusade allowed Union veterans to assume the role of savior, and they did not hesitate to do so.” Between holding political offices at the national, state, and city levels and “marshaling the massive ‘soldier vote’ for Lincoln in 1864 and Grant in 1868,” veterans affiliated with the GAR also acted as political saviors for the Republican party. The pre-eminence of Union veterans in the Republican party, as evidenced by the subsequent elections of Grant, Hayes, and Garfield to the presidency, meant a natural focus on what best qualified them for public office—meritorious service to the Union cause.²⁰

Rehashing the war every political campaign not only involved celebrating the Union victory but also reminding the public of the prison atrocities committed by the Confederacy against the Union martyrs. The 1870 speech of General J. P. C. Shanks to the GAR post at Washington, D. C., indicated the continued centrality of the prison issue

¹⁹ House, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by the Rebel Authorities*, 40th Cong., 3rd sess., 1869, H. Rep. 45, 6, 7; Indiana Historical Collections, *Indiana in the War of the Rebellion: Report of the Adjutant General: A Reprint of Volume 1 of the Eight Volume Report Prepared by W. H. H. Terrill and Published in 1869* (N.p.: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1960), 547, 552-3; see also Otis F. R. Waite, *Vermont in the Great Rebellion* (Claremont, N.H.: Tracy, Chase and Company, 1869), 280.

²⁰ Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 21, 28.

for the Union veterans and the Republican party. “It is at the door of the confederate government I lay the charge of wanton and savage cruelty to helpless prisoners of war,” Shanks thundered, before invoking the sympathies of the audience: “I would, if I could, call before your imaginations the gaunt, spectral forms of those thousands of robbed, frozen, starved, beaten, wounded, manacled, dogged, emaciated, neglected, crazed, and murdered men.” Shanks’ oration testified to both the enduring power of the vitriol over the treatment of prisoners and the attractiveness of the easy political capital gained from recycling old allegations. The speech was also part of a constant discussion of southern brutality in the press throughout the late 1860s and 70s. During this period, repetitious mention of the accusations of Confederate atrocity, the celebration of the sacrifice of the Union prisoners’ bravery, and the innocence of the Union government all added up to a political phenomenon known as waving the bloody shirt. Waving the bloody shirt, according to Mary Dearing, served to “recall war enthusiasm to the minds of both veterans and civilians.”²¹

The 1872 reelection of Grant once again demonstrated the remarkable influence of the bloody shirt. On September 21, 1872, a Thomas Nast cartoon in *Harper’s Weekly* conjured up the old animosity over the conditions at Andersonville. Presidential candidate Horace Greeley, a Democrat, stood, with hand outstretched to the South, while

²¹ General J. P. C. Shanks, *Speech of Gen. J. P. C. Shanks, of Indiana, on Treatment of Prisoners of War*, (Washington D.C.: Judd & Detweiler, 1870), 3, 12; see also C. E. Reynolds, “Thirteen Months at Andersonville Prison and What I Saw There: A Paper Delivered before the N. L. Association, Napoleon, Ohio, April 24, 1869,” *Northwest Ohio Quarterly* 27 (1955): 94-113; Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G. A. R.* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 203. For a good overview of the bloody shirt phenomenon, see Reinhard H. Luthin, “Waving the Bloody Shirt: Northern Political Tactics in Post-Civil War Times,” *The Georgia Review* 14 (Spring 1960): 64-71.

below him lay the vast stockade of Andersonville, filled with graves. Nast juxtaposed Greeley's quote, "let us clasp hands over the bloodiest chasm," with a sign featuring a skull and crossbones, that stated, "Andersonville Prison. Who Ever Entered Here Left Hope Behind." Nast's setting proved telling. Instead of a battlefield such as Gettysburg or Antietam, two of the bloodiest battles of the war, Nast chose Andersonville to represent "the bloodiest chasm" of the Civil War. That choice mirrored the popular northern perception of Andersonville as a terrible anomaly, the result of demonic, deliberate cruelty. In a political culture dominated by the idea of the bloody shirt, Nast expertly conveyed the message that a full reconciliation with the South was impossible and ultimately undesirable, given the horrors experienced at Andersonville. To prevent that reconciliation, northerners needed to continue to vote Republican. Undeniably effective as a practical political tactic, the persistent use of the bloody shirt, with its emphasis on the evils of the Confederacy and the purity of the Union, benefited northerners in another less tangible, but still important way. The bloody shirt enabled northerners to forget the similar experiences Confederate prisoners endured in the North.²²

Throughout the late 1860s and early 70s, southerners remembered quite clearly, if more quietly, the sacrifices made by their sons in Union prison camps. The humiliation of defeat, augmented by the constant use of the bloody shirt, at first drowned out the southern voices who protested that the North's memory of Civil War prisons seemed selective. A few undaunted Southerners, however, began assembling a defense against the northern accusations. Writing from a jail cell in 1865, former Confederate Vice

²² *Harper's Weekly*, September 21, 1872, HarpWeek internet database (accessed March 2003).

President Alexander Stephens echoed the arguments of the Confederate Congressional report on the problem of prisoner treatment, declaring that the harsh conditions in the Confederate camps resulted from “unavoidable necessity,” rather than “inhumanity of treatment.” Since everyone in the Confederacy suffered from the lack of resources, Stephens opined, from the Confederate army to civilians, Yankee prisoners naturally endured the same hardships. Stephens suggested that in light of the quickly deteriorating state of affairs in the Confederacy by 1864, northerners prone to conspiracy theories about deliberate atrocities overlooked the obvious supply problems that plagued the entire Confederacy, not just Union prisoners. Despite the Confederacy’s shortcomings, if anything, Stephens continued, “Confederates escaping from Camp Chase and other Northern prisons” found “their treatment in these places to be as bad as any now described in exaggerated statements going the rounds about barbarities at Andersonville, Salisbury, Belle Isle, and Libby.” Stephens concluded that “there were barbarities...and atrocities on both sides,” and that therefore, neither section should boast too much about their prison record. Ex-Confederate president Jefferson Davis, according to the account published by the physician, Dr. John Craven, who treated him during his imprisonment after the war, expressed similar sentiments to those of Stephens. Craven summarized Davis’ belief that Confederate officers cared for their prisoners “the best they could,” but because “non-exchange” was “the policy adopted by the Federal Government,” the Union abandoned its prisoners to their fate in the resource-starved South.²³

²³ Alexander H. Stephens, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens*, edited by Myrta Avery (1910; repr., Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 233-236; John J. Craven, *Prison Life of Jefferson Davis* (New York: Carleton, Publisher, 1866), 107-8.

In 1867, Louis Schade, Wirz's defense attorney, stated that the question of responsibility for the dead prisoners "has not fully been settled." Like Stephens, Schade pointed out that given the collapsing Confederate infrastructure due to the Union naval blockade and the destruction of southern railroads and property, providing food and medicine for prisoners proved difficult, if not impossible. Schade insisted that "the Confederate authorities, aware of their inability to maintain their prisoners...urgently requested that prisoners should be exchanged," but to no avail. Not content to merely refute northern accusations, Schade asked, "has the North treated her Southern prisoners so that she should lift up her hands and cry 'anathema' over the South?" Denouncing the North's "fearful record," which, according to the 1866 report of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, consisted of an estimated 26,436 Southern deaths in Union prisons, Schade pointed out how curious it seemed that "over 26,000 prisoners" perished "in the midst of plenty!" Using Stanton's figures, which claimed that 22,576 Union prisoners died in Confederate prison camps, approximately 4,000 fewer casualties than in the North, Schade wondered why northerners continued to adamantly attack southerners over the treatment of prisoners, especially when one considered the supplies available to prisoners in the Union, but not in the Confederacy. After not so subtly suggesting that if either section deserved to be accused of atrocities committed against prisoners of war, perhaps it was the North, rather than the South, Schade reminded readers that "puritanical hypocrisy, self-adulation and self-glorification will not save those enemies of liberty from their just punishment." In the emotionally charged climate of the late 1860s, however, the arguments of Stephens and Schade accomplished little, except perhaps to help

reassure southerners of their brave and honorable conduct during the war. No one in the North took them seriously.²⁴

Despite the negligible impact of their ideas on northern public opinion, these southern defenders succeeded in creating what evolved into the standard southern response to northern accusations of intentional Confederate cruelty committed against Union prisoners. This defense consisted of several components and not only excused the Confederacy's prison record but placed the burden of responsibility for the dead prisoners back on the Union. According to Stephens, Davis, Craven, and Schade, the Confederacy strove, even in the midst of total collapse, to conscientiously fulfill its obligations to its prisoners. If the North had fought a more civilized war, refraining from destroying much of the Confederate heartland and preventing the import of medicine and other supplies, then tending to the needs of Union captives would have been far easier. At any point in time, had the Union acquiesced to the resumption of the exchange cartel (and abandoned the rights of African-American soldiers) the misery of those supposedly intentionally deprived soldiers would have ended. Finally, even with the concession that Confederate prisons took an incredible toll on Union prisoners, the fact remained that Union prisons killed Confederate captives at similar rates. While northerners scoffed at these arguments and dismissed them as either selective, false, or conjecture, southerners clung to these rhetorical positions and began to repeat them, at first weakly, but eventually with growing confidence.

²⁴ The Louis Schade quotes come from an unknown newspaper dated April 4, 1867, Joseph Frederick Waring Papers, Folder 1, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Besides these few strident voices, however, in the immediate aftermath of the war many southerners suffered the accusations of the North in silence. One reason that the southern defenders of the Confederate prison legacy remained relatively quiet reflected the need for the South, at least in the short term, to move on. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, southerners faced the daunting task of putting their society back together. As historian Dan Carter points out, southerners “came home defeated but unrepentant,” but the early political turmoil surrounding the process of Presidential Reconstruction and then Congressional Reconstruction prevented debate with the North. “Reestablishing a normal life,” states Gaines Foster, “left little time for dwelling excessively on the past and its pains,” and “discouraged public lamentations.” Despite Dixie’s silence during Reconstruction, Foster argues, the South’s “need to repeat their assertions of righteousness, honor, and manhood,” and the “defensiveness toward northerners” foreshadowed an outpouring of southern frustration over the northern definition of the prison legacy.²⁵

Part of the southern resentment came from the reality that even after a decade of Reconstruction northerners demonstrated little desire to stop agitating the prison controversy for political ends. On January 10, 1876, Congressman James Blaine, of Maine, rose to criticize a pending bill that proposed amnesty to the last of the unforgiven Confederates, on the grounds that it included Jefferson Davis. Davis, argued Blaine, deserved no amnesty, because “he was the author, knowingly, deliberately, guiltily, and willfully, of the gigantic murders and crimes at Andersonville.” Reaching back into

²⁵ Dan T. Carter, *When the War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865-1867* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 2; Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 22, 33.

history for other brutalities, Blaine declared, to the crowd's applause, that not even "the thumb-screws and engines of torture of the Spanish Inquisition begin to compare in atrocity with the hideous crime of Andersonville." The debate over the amnesty bill offered yet another opportunity for northern manipulation of the prison legacy in the name of politics. With Wirz and Winder dead, Davis provided the best remaining target for northern politicians like Blaine to attack the Democratic party as the party of the Confederate south and its horrible prisons. With support for Reconstruction fading, and growing Democratic representation in the federal government, Blaine hoped, in the words of one scholar, "that waving the bloody shirt again...would cause the country, in this presidential year, to forget the corruption of the Republican administration." Despite the applause, Blaine soon found himself in a storm of controversy. The first responses came from Representatives Samuel Cox, of New York, and William Kelley, of Pennsylvania, and both regretted that, in the centennial anniversary of the United States, Blaine insisted on reviving the old bitterness of the past. Just before adjourning, Benjamin Hill, of Georgia, obtained the floor.²⁶

The next day, Hill, speaking with the emotion of over ten years of pent-up frustration, delivered a rebuke not just to Blaine, but the entire North. Hill's speech ended the Reconstruction years of southern silence over the prison controversy and indicated a renewed willingness to protect southern honor. Expressing sorrow that Blaine focused attention on the prison feud, Hill declared it his "imperative duty to vindicate the

²⁶ Hill-Blaine Debate on Amnesty Bill, 44th Cong., 1st sess. *Congressional Record* 4 (10-14 January 1876): H. 324; E. Merton Coulter, "Amnesty for all Except Jefferson Davis: The Hill-Blaine Debate of 1876," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56 (Winter 1972): 457. Also see Nancy Roberts, "The Afterlife of Civil War Prisons and their Dead" (Ph. D. diss., University of Oregon, 1996), 41-49.

truth of history.” “Whatever horrors existed at Andersonville,” Hill continued, “grew out of the necessities of the occasion, which necessities were cast upon the confederacy by the war policy of the other side.” Hill proceeded to ridicule Blaine’s claim “that no confederate prisoner was ever maltreated in the North” and insisted that “the time has passed when the country can accept the impudence of assertion for the force of argument or recklessness of statement for the truth of history.” After rejecting Blaine’s accusations, Hill questioned the constant use of the bloody shirt to attack southern honor. “Is the bosom of the country always to be torn with this miserable sectional debate whenever a presidential election is pending?” Hill asked, especially when “the victory of the North was absolute, and God knows the submission of the South was complete.” But the reality of the political situation in 1876, Hill argued, showed a South “recovered from the humiliation of defeat,” offering “no concession” to those in the North “who seek still to continue strife.” Hill’s speech reflected a growing, if still delicate, confidence in the South that resulted from the preservation of much of the antebellum social order. By 1876, white southern males managed to regain political control in all but a few southern states, and northern interest in the South’s affairs faded. Despite Reconstruction, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and a tumultuous period of economic and class turmoil within white society, continued southern white dominance over African-Americans seemed probable, if not quite assured. From this position of relative strength, later confirmed with the election of 1876 and the subsequent end of Reconstruction, and the fear of northern reprisal all but gone, southerners like Hill finally felt able to resist the bloody shirt rhetoric of the North. Although the amnesty bill went down to defeat, and Jefferson Davis, remained unforgiven, the Hill-Blaine debate marked

a victory for the South in terms of reaffirming their right to argue against the northern perception of the prison legacy.²⁷

Two months after the controversy over the amnesty bill, a new periodical, the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, responded to Blaine's comments and devoted an entire issue, over 200 pages, to the "*Prison Question*." Admitting that Union prisoners experienced some suffering in southern prisons, the editor nevertheless declared the conditions even worse for Confederates held in the North. In a manner reminiscent of the Confederate Congressional report of 1865, the testimony of the southern defenders rehashed the old arguments—that the Union alone stopped the exchange of prisoners, prevented materials from reaching prisoners via the blockade and destruction of railroads, and consciously retaliated against Confederate prisoners by reducing their rations. Although the inaccurate claims of higher mortality rates in Union prisons strained credibility, the strident, one-sided portrayal of the issue, intended to protect southern honor, managed to cement a sense of solidarity in Dixie over the prison legacy. Despite a period of dejection, southerners, the *Southern Historical Society Papers* made clear, intended to fight the bloody shirt rhetoric and restore their reputation.²⁸

Between 1861 and 1877, then, a pattern of constant northern vitriol over what seemed deliberately brutal treatment of Union prisoners in Confederate pens emerged along with a northern willingness to ignore its own troublesome prison problems. The

²⁷ Hill-Blaine Debate on Amnesty Bill, *Congressional Record*: H. 345, 347, 351; Coulter, "Amnesty for all Except Jefferson Davis," 481.

²⁸ *Southern Historical Society Papers* 1 (January to June, 1876): 113. The full March 1876 issue on Civil War prisons runs from page 113 to 327. Another southern defender, Dr. Randolph Stevenson, published his exoneration of Andersonville and Henry Wirz in 1876; see Stevenson, *The Southern Side*.

Union victory cemented an assumed northern sense of moral superiority, demonstrated in the postwar execution of Henry Wirz and the Republican reliance on bloody shirt politics during the Reconstruction era. Not content merely to defend itself, the South, with a similar intensity, at least during the war and again in the late 1870s, blamed the Union government and war policies for the suffering and claimed that Confederate soldiers experienced far worse in northern camps. A number of factors contributed to the endurance of the prison controversy throughout Reconstruction. Even in a war as consistently destructive as the Civil War, the sheer scale of the 56,000 prison casualties stunned Union and Confederate alike. A second reason centered on the reality that the Union and Confederate arguments, each placing responsibility for the tragedy on the other, both contained more than a grain of truth. Neither side planned adequately, devoted enough resources, or displayed the flexibility needed to hammer out a concrete exchange policy. To be fair, given the entanglement of the prison issue with the larger themes of the war, such as slavery, compromise on exchange became increasingly difficult once African-American soldiers entered the picture. But the constant blame directed at the enemy revealed that both the Union and the Confederacy showed a better talent for pointing out their opponent's flaws than for organizing their own prison system. The third component of the controversy built on the wartime proclivity for finger pointing. Throughout Reconstruction, the ongoing anger over the prisons served as a verbal battlefield, a rhetorical framework, as both the North and South fought to define their postwar goals and sectional identity. The North justified the long, costly process of Reconstruction and the support of the tenuous Republican party in the South in part by constantly reminding themselves of the South's barbarity towards prisoners during the

war. The bitter rhetoric fostered a sense of obligation, based on appeals to the moral superiority of the North, which augmented support for the idea that northerners owed it to the dead Union prisoners to complete the task of Reconstruction and to support the patriotic party of Lincoln. Although consistently politicized during elections, the connection of the prison legacy and the bloody shirt also served as commemoration—northerners appreciated and wanted to remember the sacrifices their imprisoned soldiers made. Southerners, initially quiet on the subject, over time rejoined the debate, albeit for slightly different reasons. With home rule all but established, and in a period of growing national support for the Democratic party, southerners like Benjamin Hill enjoyed a renewed sense of confidence as they began to vigorously refute the Northern accusations. But for southerners the prison legacy raised even deeper emotions. The war, and the crushing nature of the defeat, shook southern faith in their society at the same time that the North attacked southern honor over prisons like Andersonville. While the North, in the revelry of victory, could overlook its flawed treatment of prisoners, the South, during the late 1860s and early 1870s, remained exceedingly conscious of the bloody shirt aspersions cast on their honor. The rejuvenation of the southern perspective on the prison issue in 1876, as a component of the emerging Lost Cause phenomenon, reflected the southern need to justify not only the honorable nature of the Confederate war effort and commemorate their own soldiers' sacrifice, but also demonstrated a sense of renewed optimism that the days of southern penance might soon end.

By 1877, then, the hostility over the prison controversy remained as strong as ever. The reason for the persistence of the issue directly correlated to the shocking human cost that both sides' prison camps claimed. From the wartime rumors of the

problem, prisoner memoirs, the Wirz trial and continuing on through the sectional political battles of Reconstruction, the prisons received so much attention because Americans, North and South, never understood just how such a tragedy could have happened. Even the war itself, as regrettable as it appeared to many, possessed identifiable, if controversial, origins. The 56,000 prison deaths, however, represented a new dimension of warfare, and therefore, during this period, could only be explained as the brutality of a savagery without precedent. In the North, the demonizing of Wirz, Winder and Davis presented the prison casualties as the logical result of how the horrid southern social system twisted individual morality. That position also necessitated the exoneration of the Union prison system, a task to which northern writers devoted much of their energy. As so often before, southerners took the opposite tack, denouncing Stanton and Lincoln and similarly defending their own prison record. The possibility that the truth lay somewhere in between would have to wait for future generations even more bitterly schooled in the realities of modern war.

CHAPTER 4: “SO LONG WILL THERE RISE UP DEFENDERS OF THE TRUTH OF HISTORY”

During the Civil War and Reconstruction, the intensity of the debate over the treatment of prisoners emerged from the sectional hatred engendered by the conflict. In the period between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the onset of the Spanish American War in 1898, despite the passage of time, the prison legacy remained highly controversial. The ongoing debate over treatment of Civil War prisoners reflected the larger national concern with the future direction of the United States, both as a country and as a society. Robert Wiebe, Nell Painter and T. J. Jackson Lears, and other scholars argue that from 1877 through the early twentieth century America entered a crucial, often painful era of transition during which a modern, interconnected, organizational society replaced the older, isolated communities of the pre-Civil War era. Although historian Olivier Zunz persuasively shows that some Americans embraced the changing times, others clearly feared the outcome and resisted the transition. As labor unrest and the Populist movement of the late nineteenth century attested, a contentious period of national debate and strife cemented this shift in American society. In the uncertain environment of the last decades of the nineteenth century, the legacy of the Civil War reassured Americans that the country had survived far worse. Americans took comfort and inspiration from the character and fortitude displayed by their forebears in the Civil War, including the sacrifice of those who suffered in enemy prisons. Honoring that sacrifice became paramount in these turbulent decades as Americans sought to make sense of their present, and testimonials to the dead Civil War prisoners reflected efforts,

North and South, to use their deaths to justify and garner support for the creation of an America worthy of these heroes.¹

Throughout the late nineteenth century, northerners enjoyed the upper hand in the prison controversy and continued, as they had since 1865, to dominate the ongoing debate over what really happened in the prisons of the Civil War. In politics, memoirs, speeches, and general histories, northerners consistently defended the Union prison record and attacked the Confederate prison system. Sensing that the uneasiness over the prison controversy still could mobilize northern voters, Republican politicians throughout the late 1870s and 1880s continued to emphasize the brutality of the southern prison system. In 1879, James Garfield, future president of the United States, addressed a reunion of Andersonville survivors. “From Jeff Davis down,” he declared, “it was a part of their policy to make you idiots and skeletons.” That policy, thundered Garfield, “has never had its parallel for atrocity in the civilized world.” As so often before, Garfield connected the brutality of the Confederate prisons to the actions of depraved southern leaders. Garfield also suggested that the individuals responsible for the prison suffering deserved the continued scorn of the North. “We can forgive and forget all other things,” he stated, “before we can forgive and forget this.” Republicans recognized that emphasizing their role as the successful prosecutors of the Union war effort attracted the continued favor of voters. In order to maintain the public mandate supporting Republican office holders, it helped Republican candidates like Garfield to remind their northern

¹ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Nell Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987); T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Olivier Zunz, *Making America Corporate 1870-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

constituents of the unspeakable horrors of the southern prison system. This tactic made political sense given the dominance of the Democratic party in the South. The choice, as Garfield framed it, lay between the Republican party of the civilized North and the Democratic party of the amoral South.²

In the 1880s, according to scholar Reinhard Luthin, national politics, and particularly presidential elections, often centered on the old Republican bloody shirt charge that the Democratic party consisted of treasonous ex-Confederates. As late as 1887, Luthin describes how General William T. Sherman, a Republican political symbol if not an actual politician, “divided the American people into Republicans and Confederates, and termed the Democratic Party the left flank of the Confederacy.” That same year James G. Blaine, the 1884 Republican candidate for president defeated by Democrat Grover Cleveland, published his *Political Discussions*, a compendium containing what he felt were his most important speeches. Among them Blaine included his 1876 address attacking the idea of extending amnesty to ex-Confederates, particularly Jefferson Davis. Once again northerners read Blaine’s assessment that while “Wirz deserved his death,” it was “weak policy on the part of our government to allow Jefferson Davis to go at large and to hang Wirz.” Despite his failed campaign, Blaine remained steadfast in his belief that the prison controversy offered incontrovertible proof of the need for Republican control of the American government. Only Republican

² James Garfield, “Speech of Gen. Garfield at the Andersonville Reunion at Toledo, Ohio, October 3, 1879,” in *Prison Life in Dixie*, Sergeant Oats (1880; repr., Scituate, Mass.: Digital Scanning, Inc., 1999), 204.

administrations could act as a safeguard against the Democratic party allowing the return of ex-Confederates to power.³

Although Cleveland's election to the White House in 1884 and again in 1892 demonstrated the diminishing effectiveness of bloody shirt politics, northern Republicans, in an attempt to tarnish their Democratic opposition, held fast to their accusations that the Confederacy brutalized its prisoners. The calculated animosity with which Republicans denounced barbaric southerners such as Jefferson Davis and Henry Wirz continued to yield a tangible political dividend. It went over well with the northern public and army veterans, reminding them that the causes for which the war was fought were best served by keeping Republicans in office. And by reinforcing the image of the Democratic party as a sympathetic home to ex-Confederates, the ongoing utilization of the prison issue stirred up the fading emotions of the northern voting public against the South.

Throughout the late nineteenth century the proliferation of published prisoner narratives by Union soldiers contributed to the ongoing bloody shirt politics. Capitalizing on the national appetite for reminiscences of the Civil War, between 1877 and 1898, numerous prison memoirs appeared in the North in which the animosity over the treatment of prisoners continued unabated. Many historians of Civil War prisons note that the motivation for publishing prison memoirs often derived from the desire to make a profit or to establish a right to a veterans' pension. These scholars offer persuasive evidence that authors of prison narratives, especially by the 1880s and 1890s, often

³ Reinhard H. Luthin, "Waving the Bloody Shirt: Northern Political Tactics in Post-Civil War Times," *The Georgia Review* 14 (Spring 1960): 70; James G. Blaine, *Political Discussions: Legislative, Diplomatic, and Popular* (Norwich, Conn.: The Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1887), 160-61.

exaggerated, fabricated, and plagiarized their accounts. But whatever the questionable motives or veracity of the ex-prisoners, the historical importance of the prison memoirs lies in the widespread acceptance of their stories by the northern public. Hundreds of thousands of readers bought these books because of the dominant narrative of these books—the portrayal of the Civil War prison experience as an individual tale of courage appealed to a people still incredulous at the unimaginable scale of impersonal mortality in the wartime prison camps. The prison stories not only reminded northerners of the Confederate prison atrocities, which helped the Republican party, but they also personalized the suffering of Union soldiers in a highly sympathetic manner. Despite their flaws, prison memoirs represented a legitimate search for meaning in the wartime suffering.⁴

As with the Reconstruction-era prison accounts, the authors focused their attention on the horrible treatment and their struggle to survive, and charged individual Confederate leaders such as Wirz, Winder, and Davis, among others, with committing deliberate atrocities against prisoners. In 1880, Sergeant Oats recalled the misery he and his fellow “ragged, scurvied, filthy, vermin-eaten wretches” experienced at Andersonville. And these pitiful specimens represented the lucky ones, as Oats made clear, because the “the strongest struggled for life, and the weak died without pity.” Willard Glazier, self-styled “soldier-author,” described the commandant of Libby prison, Dick Turner, as “possessed of a vindictive, depraved, and fiendish nature...there is

⁴ The best discussions of the various motivations behind the prisoner narratives can be found in William Marvel, “Johnny Ransom’s Imagination,” *Civil War History* 41 (September 1995): 181-89; James M. Gillespie, “Postwar Mythmaking: The Case of the POWs,” *North & South* 6 (April 2003): 40-49; and William Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 233-258.

nothing more terrible than a human soul grown powerful in sin, and left to the horrible machinations of the evil one.” Such brutal treatment, Glazier argued, could only have supernatural origins. Like Wirz, in the eyes of the Union captives, Turner seemed demonic in his cruelty. J. Madison Drake, another former prisoner at Libby, referred to Turner as a “deep-dyed villain” and a “leech.” Andersonville survivor John Urban, however, blamed “Jefferson Davis, his cabinet advisors,” and the “demons whom they sent to these prisons to carry out their devilish plans.” In 1892, William Woolverton declared that nothing he witnessed on the battlefield could compare to “that accursed place,” Andersonville. According to Woolverton, the “fiends” in charge of the prison, particularly Wirz, delighted in their “barbarous and inhuman” cruelty. The animosity towards individual Confederate leaders reached an apex in the account of John McElroy, another Andersonville captive. McElroy detested Wirz, but he saved most of his antipathy for Winder, whom he held most responsible for the atrocities at Andersonville. Although “neither Winder nor his direct superiors,” and here McElroy singled out Jefferson Davis, “conceived in all its proportions the gigantic engine of torture and death they were organizing...they were willing to do much wrong to gain their end.” As their “appetite for slaughter grew with feeding,” McElroy declared, “they ventured upon ever widening ranges of destructiveness.” “Killing ten men a day” in places like Belle Isle, argued McElroy, “led very easily to killing one hundred men a day in Andersonville.” According to a later edition of McElroy’s memoir, over 600,000 Americans purchased copies of McElroy’s account after its publication in 1879, and its popularity helped reinforce the sectional division over the treatment of prisoners as well as the belief that

the Confederacy deliberately brutalized Union captives according to the whim of evil individuals like Davis, Turner, and Winder.⁵

Well into the 1880s and 90s, northerners blamed the unprecedented prison casualties on the depraved leaders of the Confederacy, the representatives of the old southern social order. The perception that “inhuman” “fiends,” “demons,” and “villains” reveled in the committing of these atrocities appealed to the former prisoners for several reasons. Focusing their anger on men like Wirz, Winder, Davis, and Turner provided an outlet for the prisoners’ bitterness and the denunciation of the individual Confederate leaders offered a small measure of revenge for their suffering. With their infamous national reputations long established, Wirz and Davis served Union prisoners especially

⁵ Sergeant Oats, *Prison Life in Dixie*, 61, 60; Willard Glazier, *Sword and Pen; or, Ventures and Adventures of Willard Glazier* (Philadelphia: P. W. Zeigler & Company, Publishers, 1881), i, 167, v; J. Madison Drake, *Fast and Loose in Dixie: An Unprejudiced Narrative of Personal Experience as a Prisoner of War at Libby, Macon, Savannah, and Charleston* (New York: The Authors’ Publishing Company, 1880), 29; John W. Urban, *Battle Field and Prison Pen, or Through the War, and Thrice a Prisoner in Rebel Dungeons* (N.p.: Edgewood Publishing Company, 1882), viii; William B. Woolverton, “A Sketch of Prison Life at Andersonville,” *The Firelands Pioneer* 8 (January 1894): 65, 67-68; John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1962), 318, ix. For additional prison narratives, see, among others, Alonzo Cooper, *In and out of Rebel Prisons* (Oswego, N.Y.: R. J. Oliphant, Job Printer, Bookbinder and Stationer, 1888); William H. Jeffery, *Richmond Prisons 1861-1862* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: The Republican Press, 1893); William W. Day, *Fifteen Months in Dixie, or, My Personal Experience in Rebel Prisons* (Owatonna, Minn.: The People’s Press Print, 1889); Herbert P. Kakuske, *A Civil War Drama: The Adventures of a Union Soldier in Southern Imprisonment* (New York: Carlton Press, Inc., 1970); S. S. Boggs, *Eighteen Months under the Rebel Flag* (Lovington, Ill.: privately printed, 1887); Thomas H. Mann, “A Yankee in Andersonville,” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 40 (May-October 1890): 447-461, 606-622; Robert Cooper, *The Prison Pens of the South* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Press of J. W. Chalmers, 1896); Sylvester O. Lord, “1861-1865 At the Front: Reminiscences in the Life of a Soldier,” Andersonville Subject Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Lessel Long, *Twelve Months in Andersonville* (Huntington, Ind.: Thad and Mark Butler, Publishers, 1886); Washington Davis, *Camp-Fire Chats of the Civil War* (Chicago: W. H. Ives & Co., 1889); and Joseph Morton, Jr., *Sparks from the Camp Fire* (Philadelphia: Keystone Publishing Co., 1891).

well in that northern audiences already perceived these men as villains, although the prisoners' attacks on other Confederate officials accomplished the same result. The explanation of the prison tragedy as the result of evil Confederate individuals also appealed to northerners because it deflected attention away from the shortcomings of the Union prison system. Finally, the willing spirit of sacrifice displayed by so many loyal Union soldiers, even though confronted by unspeakable human cruelty, proved just how honorable and righteous their cause had been.

Thanks to its versatile appeal, the argument blaming individual Confederate leaders from Wirz through Davis as deliberately responsible for the prison atrocities remained dominant during the late nineteenth century. In the minds of a few prisoners, however, the explanation of so many deaths as the result of individual actions seemed insufficient. McElroy himself, although convinced of Winder's evilness, used language denouncing the prisons that referred to "organization" and an "engine of torture and death." McElroy also found the escalating scale and efficiency of the brutality stunning, as "killing ten men a day" then "led very easily to killing one hundred men a day." Ex-Andersonville prisoner Herman Braun went even further than McElroy in searching for an alternative understanding of what went wrong in Civil War prisons. After describing Wirz as an individual of "efficiency and consideration," Braun assessed the organizational structure of Andersonville in a chapter titled, "General Management of the Prison." "The management of the prison," according to Braun, showed "a persistent effort to prevent overcrowding," but the mortality from "the change in climate alone" doomed many prisoners despite the Confederate efforts. Focusing on Wirz or even Confederate organization, Braun felt, distracted from the most important lesson of the

prison tragedy. The real responsibility for Civil War prisons, Braun stated, lay with the conduct of the Republican party. Braun believed that the party of Lincoln deliberately discriminated “between the favored class and the rest of the people” by exempting wealthier citizens from military service and drafting the poor instead. “The seed beds of that policy were Andersonville and other Confederate prisons,” as the Union government “assumed the right to expose citizens enlisted in its service to unparalleled suffering and sacrificed their lives for the sake of other citizens who were unwilling to aid in the country’s defense.” For Braun, the evil of Civil War prisons resulted from government policy, not individual actions.⁶

The alternative explanations of the prison controversy offered by McElroy and Braun revealed the growing importance of two interrelated concepts in American society. One involved what later historians referred to as the organizational synthesis, the idea that during the late nineteenth century organizational structure and behavior challenged the autonomy of individuals during the painful creation of modern America. McElroy’s disdain for “organizations” and “engines,” and his amazement at the efficient killing they were capable of in the case of Civil War prisons, directly reflected the suspicion and uncertainty many Americans felt with the role that organizations played in changing America. Braun shared McElroy’s concerns with “efficiency” and “management,” but Braun made the even more ominous argument that the United States government itself represented a potential source of great evil. By arguing that the Republican bureaucracy consciously sacrificed the poor in the prisons of the Civil War to benefit the rich, Braun

⁶ John McElroy, *Andersonville*, 318, ix; Herman Braun, *Andersonville: An Object Lesson on Protection* (Milwaukee, Wisc.: C. D. Fahsel Publishing Co., 1892), vi, 70, 98, 160-161.

implied that, in the America created by the Civil War, the growth of sinister government power made it impossible to accept that Wirz, Davis, or any individual could reasonably be credited with sole responsibility for the prison tragedy. Although the minority opinions of McElroy and especially Braun made little impact on public opinion at the time, in their efforts to dig below the standard argument that depraved Confederate leaders intentionally slaughtered Union prisoners they not only set a precedent for later chroniclers of Civil War prisons but asked thoughtful questions about the nature of an American society in transition.

As important as the search to find meaning in the prison deaths remained, throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century the continued appearance of prisoner memoirs indicated that prison survivors still had other concerns as well. Wartime and early postwar accounts explained the horrible conditions and assessed responsibility for the prison suffering. The Wirz trial and the bloody shirt politics of Reconstruction cemented the northern belief that the Confederacy intentionally committed atrocities against its prisoners while the Union, in contrast, provided benign treatment in its camps. But survivors of Confederate prisons continued to publish their stories in the 1880s and 90s in part to remind the public of their bravery despite the horrors they faced. Along with writing their memoirs, prison survivors often recalled their experiences in public speeches. These orations, whether delivered before Grand Army of the Republic reunions or the general public, gave the audience a chance to hear once again about the terrors of the Confederate prisons and the dedicated service of the loyal Union captives. In addition to the verbal and printed memoirs, during the 1880s and 90s, military histories appeared celebrating the service of individual northern states

and their Union regiments in the Civil War. These recollections also added to the persistent agitation of the prison controversy in the North because they generally included a brief but bitter discussion of the Confederate prison system. Although these post-Reconstruction era prison accounts resembled their predecessors in many ways, three additional themes figured prominently in most of the newer northern memoirs. While continuing to vent hostility and attribute blame, the ex-prisoners also focused on the ideas of sacrifice, heroism, and escape. These themes, particularly sacrifice, were not new in the accounts of the late 1870s and early 1880s, but the emphasis given them was.⁷

One of the primary motivations for prison survivors in publishing their memoirs involved expanding the definition of what wartime heroism meant. Before the Civil War, according to public perception, heroism in combat almost exclusively manifested itself in battlefield charges, last stands, brilliant tactics, or personal fighting prowess. Young men entered the Civil War expecting a test of their manhood and character along these traditional lines. Instead, over 400,000 soldiers on both sides experienced an entirely new test of individual fortitude in prisons. The patient courage they demonstrated, although less glorious, demanded no less of them than did fighting on the front lines. But as many prison memoirs indicated, the stigma of being captured combined with the unglamorous prison existence of waiting for exchange undermined the public acknowledgment of their heroism. Heroism required action in the nineteenth century,

⁷ For additional examples of public speeches on Civil War prisons, see Samuel M. Quincy, *History of the Second Massachusetts Regiment of Infantry. A Prisoner's Diary. A Paper Read at the Officers' Reunion in Boston, May 11, 1877*, (Boston: George H. Ellis, Printer, 1882); James Hutson, untitled 1894 speech, James Hutson Papers, United States Army Military History Institute; F. W. Swift, "My Experiences as a Prisoner of War," in *War Papers Read before the Commandery of the State of Michigan: Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (Detroit: Wm. S. Ostler, Printer, 1888).

and so prison survivors set out to recast passive imprisonment as a harrowing tale of Yankee toughness overcoming southern brutality.⁸

Minnesota's official history, published by the state in the early 1890s, declared that Union prisoners "were penned in like so many cattle." So "brutally treated" were the prisoners, the commission insisted, that "when all other bitter memories of the great Civil War are blotted out, the recollection of Andersonville and Libby will still remain—the blackest page of American history." S. H. M. Byers, author of *Iowa in War Times*, stated that "human beings had never in the history of the civilized world been treated so before." Jefferson Davis and his fellow Confederate leaders, felt Byers, deserved condemnation for the suffering. "The finger of time," he declared, "will point to these men as monsters." "The awful reality of the torments," wrote Asa Isham, Henry Davidson, and Henry Furness in 1890, "inflicted upon the unfortunate victims of this war in rebel hands can never be known, except by those who survived it." Isham and his co-authors described in detail the horrible conditions they endured at Andersonville, including the lack of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, but warned their readers that mere words could not adequately convey their suffering. Isham, his co-authors, and numerous other prison survivors hoped for public recognition that despite the carnage on the battlefield at places like Gettysburg or Antietam, being imprisoned by the enemy represented an equally challenging experience. In his account of Salisbury prison, Benjamin Booth asked "that the example of this noble heroism and loyalty to their country and their flag shall not be forgotten or treated as a mere trifle." Booth believed that the northern public needed these reminders of what happened in places like Salisbury

⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, "The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying," *The Journal of Southern History* 67 (February 2001): 37.

because “this Nation cannot afford to forget.” The intensity of their trials, according to Alonzo Cooper, revealed the Union captives as “true-hearted patriots,” who, in the words of Jesse Hawes, “never for a moment faltered in their devotion to their country.” Instead of the more ambiguous diaries and memoirs of the war and early-postwar period, in which Union soldiers often denounced the role of their government in the failure to exchange prisoners, by the 1880s and 1890s few northern accounts even mentioned that the Lincoln administration played any part at all in the controversy. Proving their loyalty despite the hardships of Confederate prisons occupied the minds of most ex-prisoners, who seemed anxious to legitimize and explain their suffering as heroism on a par with any demonstrated on the battlefield. To that end James Compton dedicated his prison memoir “to the memory of that brave band of heroes,” men “who were true to the flag and the cause of freedom when the monster death was looking them in the face.” The heroism displayed in the southern prisons, these accounts suggested, deserved even more recognition and respect.⁹

Despite their resonant tales of patient courage, the authors of the prison accounts also demonstrated their bravery by describing the heroic pursuit of trying to escape their Confederate captors. Almost every prison memoir published in the late nineteenth century contained a detailed report of an escape plot or exploit. Although escape stories

⁹ The Board of Commissioners, *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars 1861-1865* (St. Paul, Minn.: The Pioneer Press Company, 1891), 424; S. H. M. Byers, *Iowa in War Times* (Des Moines, Iowa: W. D. Condit & Co., 1888) 476-77; Henry M. Davidson, Henry B. Furness, and Asa B. Isham, *Prisoners of War and Military Prisons* (Cincinnati: Lyman & Cushing, 1890), 388; Benjamin F. Booth and Steve Meyer, *Dark Days of the Rebellion: Life in Southern Military Prisons* (1897; repr., Garrison, Iowa: Meyer Publishing, 1996), xiii, xii; Alonzo Cooper, *In and Out of Rebel Prisons*, 46; Jesse Hawes, *Cahaba: A Story of Captive Boys in Blue* (New York: Burr Printing House, 1888), v; James R. Compton, *Andersonville. The Story of Man's Inhumanity to Man*. (Des Moines, Iowa: Iowa Printing Company, 1887), 2.

figured prominently in the earlier prison texts, escape took on even more significance in the post-Reconstruction era. According to H. Clay Trumbull, escape “was our duty,” a sentiment shared by Madison Drake, who declared in 1880 that escape dominated his thoughts, and he “knew that a brave heart and unceasing vigilance would, sooner or later, offer me an opportunity of striking for liberty.” The idea of escape and its important role in the prison narratives restored the initiative to the captured soldier. Ex-prisoner John V. Hadley suggested that escape was a simple matter of “strength and will,” a perception that empowered the prisoner. Escape offered an active response to the inherently passive existence of imprisonment, and that desire for action resonated with the prisoner and his readers. Readers rooted for the underdog prisoner to not only escape but reach freedom despite the obstacles of guards, Confederate patrols, and hostile citizens. As Lessel Long, an Andersonville prisoner, pointed out, the odds against successful escape seemed almost insurmountable when “every white man and woman in the South stood ready to assist in your re-capture.” The authors of the prison narratives stressed that despite recapture, which happened frequently, they remained determined to try again whenever possible. Andersonville survivors like McElroy wrote that as soon as they established their shelter, escape became “the burden of our thoughts, day and night.” William B. McCreery spoke about the hardships of Libby prison and his attempt at freedom, emphasizing that he was no braver than the rest of his fellow inmates, of whom “nearly everyone was projecting some plan for escape.” Elaborate plans of scaling the walls or tunneling to freedom, instead of waiting for exchange, occupied the time and energy of the prisoners, according to the late nineteenth century accounts. And the public responded to the idea of escape, as the publishing of several editions of *Famous*

Adventures and Prison Escapes of the Civil War, a popular collection of escape narratives, clearly indicated. By emphasizing their escape attempts, the ex-prisoners focused public attention on their bravery and active determination to resist the Confederate villains holding them. Escape accounts, especially when successful, also appealed to the late nineteenth century audience because they highlighted the ability of the individual to defy the power of the Confederate prison system. Although their audience appreciated the heroic sacrifices of the captives who died in the prison stockades and warehouses, they also appreciated a good story about the initiative of those resourceful individuals who actively fought to liberate themselves.¹⁰

Whether they escaped or not, former prisoners made their claims as Civil War heroes, according to historian Douglas Gardner, by basing their stories “on the metaphor of captivity leading to suffering and sacrifice and perhaps martyrdom, followed by some sort of redemption sanctifying and justifying the original suffering.” The dominance of Christianity in nineteenth century America provided not only the archetype for the cultural understanding of sacrifice but the recognition that one of the most important proofs of faith involved the ability to sacrifice self for the greater glory of God and country. Like Gardner, Drew Gilpin Faust recognizes the important role that the

¹⁰ H. Clay Trumbull, *War Memories of a Union Chaplain* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898), 278-79; Drake, *Fast and Loose in Dixie*, vi; John V. Hadley, *Seven Months a Prisoner* (1898; repr., Hanover, Ind.: The Nugget Publishers, 1998), 20; Long, *Twelve Months in Andersonville*, 178; McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons*, 30; William B. McCreery, “My Experience as a Prisoner of War and Escape From Libby Prison,” in *War Papers Read before the Commandery of the State of Michigan: Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States* (Detroit: Winn & Hammond, Printers, 1893), 17; *Famous Adventures and Prison Escapes of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Co., 1893). *Famous Adventures* enjoyed seven different printings between 1885 and 1915, an indication of its popularity. See also Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence*; and Charles M. Smith, *From Andersonville to Freedom* (Providence, R.I.: Rhode Island Soldiers and Sailors Historical Society, 1894).

Christian character of the North and South played in creating an “image of a Christian soldier” that “encompassed patriotic duty within the realm of religious obligations.” In a nation dedicated to belief in the martyrdom of Jesus Christ, the notion of wartime sacrifice particularly dominated the post-Reconstruction era prison texts because it gave both the author and the reader a sense of meaning in the face of the unprecedented brutality that took place in southern prisons. The idea of sacrifice also explained, in retrospect, why so many Union soldiers died behind Confederate lines. The prisoners’ suffering and death, for all its unpleasantness, benefited the Union and reflected the moral certitude that God favored the northern cause. The prisoners’ hardships shortened the war by depriving the Confederacy of potential soldiers and resources. The sacrifice of men like John Urban, who concluded his account by stating, “a broken constitution and wrecked physical frame will ever be to me a horrible reminder of prison-life in the South,” thus appealed to the author and audience because it lent a sense of purpose and inspired appreciation for their prison experience. Booth, who remained concerned that the public demonstrated too little appreciation, asked “that the great sacrifices of my dead comrades shall not be suffered to pass into oblivion.” Sergeant Oats dedicated his memoir to “my comrades in suffering,” an acknowledgment that the fraternal nature of their hardships made the prison experience distinct in the Civil War. The official Civil War history of Michigan also reflected the ongoing anger on the subject of Civil War prisons, accusing the Confederacy of “the most inhuman barbarities ever committed.” But Michigan also acknowledged the “sacrifice” of “six hundred and twenty three braves,” who “became victims of the horrid ordeal.” W. T. Zeigler, former Andersonville prisoner, recalled the suffering, but spoke to his audience about the emotions he felt upon

leaving Andersonville near the end of the war. “My heart grew sad,” Zeigler stated, at the thought of those “who, in the defense of the cause they loved, had given their all, their life, and they lie there now in unknown graves.” The sacrifice of “the martyred dead,” he continued, would always remain in his thoughts. Public acknowledgment of the Union troops’ sacrifices soon followed. In an 1889 speech to a Grand Army of the Republic post, William Chandler thanked the Union dead for their sacrifice, calling them the “saviors of our country.” Their sacrifice produced victory.¹¹

The constant repetition of the themes of heroism, escape, and sacrifice by Union veterans during the 1880s and 1890s was not accidental—northern prison survivors wrote and spoke about their terrible experiences in order to better define their legacy. By emphasizing their heroism, the former prisoners hoped to bolster the national sense of respect for their suffering. The spellbinding accounts of escape offered testimony to the individual courage and indomitable spirit that the prisoners displayed in the face of adversity and boosted the entertainment value of their stories. Stressing their selfless sacrifices, meanwhile, allowed the prisoners to make their most important appeal to the

¹¹ Douglas Gardner, “Andersonville and Historical Memory: Civil War Prisoners and Narratives of Suffering and Redemption” (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1998), 70; Faust, “The Civil War Soldier and the Art of Dying,” 26; Urban, *Battle Field and Prison Pen*, 484; Booth, *Dark Days of the Rebellion*, xiii; Oats, *Prison Life in Dixie*, 5; Jno. Robertson, *Michigan in the War* (Lansing, Mich.: W. S. George & Co., State Printers and Binders, 1882), 140-1; W. T. Zeigler, *Half Hour with an Andersonville Prisoner. Delivered at the Reunion of Post 9, G. A. R., at Gettysburg, Pa, Jan. 8th, 1879.*, (N.p.: John M. Tate, 1879), 11; William E. Chandler, *Decoration Day. Address of William E. Chandler, on Thursday, May 30, 1889, at Nashua, N. H., before John G. Foster Post No. 7, G. A. R.*, (Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1889), 7. See also William Henry Lightcap, “History of My Experiences during the War of the Rebellion,” p. 52-3, Andersonville Subject Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; John Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence. The Capture, Imprisonment, Escape and Rescue of John Harrold* (Atlantic City, N.J.: Daily Union Book and Job Printing Office, 1892), 111; and Charles Fosdick, *Five Hundred Days in Rebel Prisons* (N.p.: privately printed, 1887), 117.

American public—to remember the incredible human cost of the Civil War and the need for loyal service to the nation. In a time when Republican political dominance seemed increasingly fragile, these men felt both a responsibility to revive flagging patriotism and a fear that, should their deeds fade into obscurity, the purpose of the war might as well. Although their themes were traditional and dated back to the war itself, the feverish intensity with which northern prison survivors sought to insure their interpretation of Civil War prisons directly reflected the uncertain direction of the United States in the late nineteenth century. Prison survivors, through their discussion of deliberately chosen concepts, wanted to insure that a proper understanding of the Civil War remained central in the future.

The desire for a proper understanding of the Civil War and its prisons existed in the former Confederate states as well. During the late nineteenth century white southerners constructed the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War as an honorably contested battle over principles. Embracing the Lost Cause, as Gaines Foster explains, not only restored a sense of purpose and glory to the South's defeat but offered "social stability" to a region deeply affected by sweeping changes in race, labor, and industrialization. But northern accusations of Confederate atrocities against prisoners challenged the southern understanding of the war and represented a threat to the celebration of the Confederate legacy. Southerners refused to accept the Yankee claims and resented what they felt was a northern attempt to further dishonor an already defeated

opponent. In response, Southerners not only angrily refuted the Yankee accusations but insisted that if prison atrocities occurred, they took place in Union prisons instead.¹²

As in the aftermath of the Hill-Blaine debate in 1876, the *Southern Historical Society Papers* took the lead in both defending the Confederate prison record and attacking the hypocritical North. The intensity of the false northern charges, the editors sought to show, represented an effort to obscure the true facts about Civil War prisons. In 1878, the periodical declared in italics that “*the sufferings on both sides were due to the failure to carry out the terms of the cartel for the exchange of prisoners, and that for this the Federal authorities (especially Stanton and Grant) were responsible.*”

Emphasizing the failure of the exchange cartel remained a popular argument for southern apologists because it exposed a weakness in the northern explanation of the prison controversy. During the war, the Union justified refusal to exchange as an unfortunate but necessary measure to protect the rights of its African-American soldiers. By 1876, with Reconstruction waning, and certainly in the following decades, northerners no longer demonstrated much concern about African-Americans. The northern silence on the cartel issue perhaps reflected the uncomfortable recognition that one of the important causes of the war had been betrayed. While southerners may not have recognized the reason for the effectiveness of the cartel argument, the realization that northerners could or would not respond strongly on the point further encouraged its exploitation. Although cognizant that dispelling the northern charges might take time, the *SHSP* publishers felt

¹² Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 126.

“assured” that “if the present generation is not prepared to do us justice their children will.”¹³

Throughout the late nineteenth century, the *SHSP* stridently maintained that the suffering of Union prisoners in the Confederacy occurred because of the Union’s own war policies. According to the *SHSP*, the prison casualties resulted from the combination of the blockade, which denied the Confederacy valuable materials and medicines, Sherman’s campaign, which simultaneously destroyed resources and all but severed Andersonville’s supply lines, and the failure to exchange, a policy that the *SHSP* claimed proved both the hypocrisy and brutality of the Union cause. But it was not enough to prove that the “*United States Government alone was responsible*,” as the *SHSP* stated in 1880. Since northern “authorities were responsible for the suffering of prisoners,” the *SHSP* declared that “Elmira, Rock Island, Point Lookout, &c., are really more in need of ‘defence’ than Andersonville, with all of its admitted horrors.” By vindicating the Confederacy and attacking the Union prison system, the *SHSP* offered an explanation of the prison atrocities that inverted the northern logic. Stanton and Grant replaced Davis and Wirz in the deliberate mistreatment of Confederate prisoners, while the suffering of prisoners in the South seemed the regrettable but inevitable consequence of the cruel Union policies. The *SHSP*’s perspective both reflected and contributed to the Lost Cause interpretation of the conflict—that the South had nothing to be ashamed of, prison record included, no matter what the Yankees might say.¹⁴

¹³ William Jones, “The Historical Register on our Papers,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 6 (July-December 1878): 238.

¹⁴ Rufus B. Richardson, “The Prison Question Again,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 8 (January-December 1880): 569-70.

The zealous defense of the South undertaken by the *SHSP* during the late 1870s and 80s included publishing the experiences of ex-Confederate prisoners. In 1879 James T. Wells described the “gloom, privation, and starvation” of prison life at Point Lookout, Maryland. But Wells saved special contempt for Major Patterson, the provost-marshal of the prison, whose conscience, Wells stated, “must burn him.” Patterson, claimed Wells, “was the impersonation of cruel malignity, hatred and revenge.” Like his Yankee counterparts, however, Wells also detailed his efforts at escape. A scheme to tunnel out of the prison, a “bold” plan Wells and his fellow prisoners attempted, “required men of courage and determination and courage to undertake it.” Unfortunately for Wells the escape plot failed, but he remained steadfast and loyal despite “the cruelty of the United States officials towards us.” As in northern prison accounts, Wells and other southern prisoners emphasized the excitement of escape and testified that only heroic courage and a willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause enabled men to survive the daily suffering of the prison experience. In 1890, Charles Loehr addressed a meeting of the George E. Pickett Camp Confederate Veterans about his experiences at Point Lookout Prison. Loehr recounted the Union attempts to starve the prisoners and the cruel practices of being “bound and dipped head foremost in a urine barrel” for “trifling” offenses.” “Expediency,” claimed Loehr, motivated the Union, in sharp contrast to the South, which “did what it could for the prisoners that fell into our hands.” In an 1898 memoir, George Booth, who served briefly as a prison guard at Salisbury prison, in North Carolina, testified that the Confederacy endeavored “to better the condition of the miserable men whom the fortunes of war had thrown on our hands.” According to Booth, both the “poor confederates” and the “wretched federals” suffered tremendously

because of the Union's "cruel, very cruel" refusal to exchange. In the end, Booth believed that "no phase of the war" seemed "more dishonoring to the federal arms than the policy they sanctioned...regarding prisoners."¹⁵

By the late 1880s and early 90s, then, the *SHSP* defense of the Confederacy's prison record helped reassure southerners that despite the suffering at Andersonville and other prisons, the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War remained viable and southern honor intact. Although northerners still viewed the arguments espoused by the *SHSP* as nothing short of lunacy, by the 1880s and 90s southerners felt increasingly comfortable in not only refuting the northern accusations but suggesting that the Yankees reexamine their own conduct. Another major contributor to the southern defense of the Confederate prison system was the familiar figure of the ex-president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. In 1890 his article, "Andersonville and other War Prisons," appeared, written expressly to "vindicate the conduct of the Confederacy" while enlightening those "who have generally seen but one side of the discussion." Davis again declared that the breakdown of the exchange cartel combined with the lack of southern resources reflected the "cold-blooded insensibility" of the Union war policies. Northern "inhumanity," not the actions of Confederate officers like Henry Wirz, whom Davis vigorously defended,

¹⁵ James T. Wells, "Prison Experience," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 7 (January-December 1879): 327-28, 489-90. Other southern prison accounts in the *SHSP* include M. McNamara, "Lieutenant Charlie Pierce's Daring Attempts to Escape from Johnson's Island," *SHSP* 8 (January-December 1880): 61-67; T. D. Witherspoon, "Prison Life at Fort McHenry," *SHSP* 8 (January-December 1880): 111-119, 163-168; William G. Keady, "Incidents of Prison Life at Camp Douglas—Experience of Corporal J. G. Blanchard," *SHSP* 12 (January-December 1884): 269-273; Henry G. Damon, "A Florida Boy's Experience in Prison and Escaping," *SHSP* 12 (January-December 1884): 395-402; and Charles T. Loehr, "Point Lookout," *SHSP* 18 (January-December 1890): 119-20. George Wilson Booth, *A Maryland Boy in Lee's Army* (1898; repr., Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 164-166.

caused the suffering that occurred in Confederate prisons. Finally, Davis wondered why, in the end, if the Confederacy was so brutal in its treatment of prisoners, the Union prison record so closely mirrored that of its beaten opponent. Davis suggested that the Northern “authorities dared not confess to the people of the North the cruelties, privations, and deaths they were mercilessly inflicting on helpless prisoners.” Although Davis expressed his desire to see the prison controversy fade away, he and his fellow southerners did not want the issue to disappear. Until the North recognized and admitted its role in the failure of the Civil War prison systems, or at least refrained from further attacks on southern honor, southerners remained eager and ready to argue the subject.¹⁶

And the debate continued. Appalled by Davis’ argument, in 1891, General N. P. Chipman, the former Judge Advocate of the 1865 Wirz military commission, published his response, *The Horrors of Andersonville Rebel Prison*, in which he promised to “fully” refute Jefferson Davis’s “defiant challenge.” Dismissing the cartel issue as “irrelevant,” Chipman insisted that the end of exchange “furnishes no justification for unusual cruelty and starvation.” After a lengthy recapitulation of the evidence presented at Wirz’s trial, evidence that Chipman claimed conclusively proved both the brutality of Andersonville and the Confederate government’s knowledge of the events, Chipman summarized why he found Davis’ arguments so offensive. Davis hoped that the bitterness over the prison controversy should fade, but Chipman asserted that “so long as Southern leaders continue to distort history, so long will there rise up defenders of the truth of history.” Instead of doing “a great service had he disproved the alleged complicity of his administration,” Davis “chose to deny the horrors of rebel prisons rather than confess.” Chipman spoke

¹⁶ Jefferson Davis, *Andersonville and other War-Prisons* (New York: Belford Company Publishers, 1890), 161-62, 345-48.

for many in the North who could not understand why southerners persisted in their perceived distortions and who resented the fact that the southern arguments called into question the veracity of the Union government, Union veterans, and the Union cause. Although perhaps less revered than the Lost Cause, northerners like Chipman remained committed to their own idealized understanding of the Civil War and its legacy. An important component of that vision depended on portraying Andersonville and other southern prisons, in the words of Chipman, as “unparalleled in the annals of crime.”¹⁷

Undeterred by Chapman’s vociferous reaction and the ongoing northern accusations, throughout the 1890s, led by the *SHSP*, the South continued to maintain both its innocence and honor in the prison matter. In response to the Davis-Chipman exchange, the *SHSP* devoted many pages to further discussion of the prison controversy with articles such as “Horrors of Camp Morton,” “Prison-Pens North,” “Escape of Prisoners from Johnson’s Island,” and “Prison Life at Point Lookout.” These articles rehashed the cruelty that Confederate prisoners experienced in the North and extolled the bravery and sacrifices made by the loyal Confederate heroes. But more than anything else they sought, as Dr. Thomas Spotswood, author of the Camp Morton piece openly avowed, to refute the Northern arguments. “Since our friends on the other side have done so much to show how cruel the South was, and still continue to publish these sad and horrible facts,” Spotswood declared, “it is but fair that we of the South should let the world know that the prison-pens of the North were no whit better than the worst in the

¹⁷ General N. P. Chipman, *The Horrors of Andersonville Prison* (San Francisco: The Bancroft Company, Publishers, 1891), 1, 3, 7, 79-80. The Confederate v. Union debate in the press between Davis and Chipman was not uncommon during the late nineteenth century. See also *The Philadelphia Weekly Times, The Annals of the War* (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), which included articles from Confederate representative Judge Robert Ould and Union General Robert S. Northcott.

South.” Although Spotswood and his fellow writers paid lip service to the idea of sectional healing and reconciliation, the persistent enmity provoked by the prison controversy indicated that the South would forget the past only when the North acknowledged the legitimacy of their claims. Since both sides understood history as a definite record of past facts, the argument continued to rage, motivated by the certainty that the correct version of history would exonerate either the North or the South.¹⁸

As the sectional hostility persisted, a new dimension to the prison issue emerged in the late 1880s and 90s as Americans, North and South, demonstrated their interest in preserving and visiting old Civil War prison sites. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, two Confederate prison camp sites in particular, Libby and Andersonville, evolved into national tourist attractions. In 1888, a group of Chicagoans, led by industrialist Charles Gunther, proposed the purchase and transfer of Libby prison from Richmond to Chicago, where he planned to turn the former warehouse and prison into a for profit museum of Civil War memorabilia. Gunther’s project inspired sharp criticism from many Americans, particularly in the North. Northerners, in the words of Philadelphian James Workman, who wrote a letter to the *Loudoun Times Mirror* in

¹⁸ John W. Daniel, “Life, Services and Character of Jefferson Davis,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 17 (January-December 1889): 113-121; Isaiah H. White, “Andersonville Prison,” *SHSP* 17 (January-December 1889): 383-388; J. Scheibert, “Jefferson Davis,” *SHSP* 20 (January-December 1892): 406-416; Thomas E. Spotswood, “Horrors of Camp Morton,” *SHSP* 19 (January-December 1891): 327-333, 332; A. M. Keiley, “Prison-Pens North,” *SHSP* 19 (January-December 1891): 333-340; T. E. Fell, “Escape of Prisoners from Johnson’s Island,” *SHSP* 19 (January-December 1891): 428-431; J. B. Traywick, “Prison Life at Point Lookout,” *SHSP* 19 (January-December 1891): 431-435. Throughout the 1890s, the SHSP published numerous articles about Civil War prisons. For examples, see Abram Fulkerson, “The Prison Experience of a Confederate Soldier,” *SHSP* 22 (January-December 1894): 127-146; Albert Caison, “Southern Soldiers in Northern Prisons,” *SHSP* 23 (January-December 1895): 158-165; F. C. Barnes and R. E. Frayser, “Imprisoned Under Fire,” *SHSP* 25 (January-December 1897): 365-377.

Virginia, declared that the idea “horrificed me.” Having lost his father and two brothers in the war, Workman wanted to let the past fade into “oblivion, which is impossible while a republican politician lives to wave the bloody shirt.” The blatant commercialization of Libby prison “would perpetuate in the North all the animosity of the war,” he insisted, “and what can the people of Richmond be thinking about to permit it.” Instead of permitting this travesty, Workman believed it would be better to “burn the building to ashes than for a few paltry dollars allow it to stand in a Northern city a standing shame on the fair fame of the South.” But if some northerners, and veterans like Workman in particular, felt uncomfortable selling the memory of their sacrifices, southerners seemed content to let Libby go. Although the editor of the *Times Mirror* admitted that Workman’s points met “with hearty approval,” the lack of any real organized attempt to preserve the Libby prison site in Richmond not only indicated a southern willingness to distance themselves from one of the primary symbols of the prison controversy but also an acceptance of the prison issue as a viable commodity for commercial manipulation.¹⁹

Gunther’s Libby Prison War Museum opened in 1889 and remained open for a decade. Ten years, scholar Katharine Hannaford attests, represented a successful run for a museum at that time, especially one that charged fifty cents per visit, far more than most workers in Chicago could afford. Tied to the larger fortunes of Chicago, the museum’s success rose and fell with the 1893 World’s Fair and the economic troubles that followed it. Once established, however, the museum remarkably generated more profit than controversy. Inside the reconstructed prison, most of the collection contained

¹⁹ *Loudoun Times Mirror*, February 16, 1888, clipping in Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, 3rd series, Confederate States Army Miscellaneous, United States Army Military History Institute. See also William B. Meyer, “The Selling of Libby Prison,” *American Heritage* 45 (November 1994): 114-18.

non-prison memorabilia such as Civil War manuscripts, letters, and weapons, while other items, including shrunken Incan heads, were not related to the subject of Civil War prisons at all. Instead of waving the bloody shirt or bringing further infamy to the South, the museum represented a new approach to the prison controversy. Americans recognized the museum for what it was—a creatively presented commercial venture complete with its own gift shop, where one could purchase pieces of the old Libby prison floor or small chunks of the Andersonville stockade. By the 1890s, any misgivings about profiteering off the sacrifice of the dead prisoners seemed prudish in light of the decades of hawking of prison narratives. History apparently possessed value beyond the intangibles of inspiring pride or teaching lessons learned in the past. Americans saw little harm in embracing the Civil War prison legacy as a source of entertainment, even as they continued to commemorate the sacrifices of the heroic prisoners in a more solemn manner.²⁰

In contrast to the transformation of Libby prison into a museum, for many years the Andersonville site in Georgia remained quiet, with the exception of yearly memorial gatherings in May. Throughout the 1870s, 80s, and 90s, African Americans generally outnumbered whites at these gatherings that celebrated the sacrifices of the dead Union soldiers. The open participation of blacks unnerved the town of Andersonville and sparked a “lively discussion” of the “prospect of a riot.” But by the 1890s, the annual event attained such stature that the townspeople of Thomasville, Georgia, desired to take

²⁰ Katherine W. Hannaford, “Culture Versus Commerce: The Libby Prison Museum and the Image of Chicago, 1889-1899,” *Ecumene* 8 (July 2001): 284-316; *Libby Prison War Museum Catalogue and Program* (Chicago: Libby Prison War Museum Association, 1890); Bruce Klee, “They Paid to Enter Libby Prison,” *Civil War Times Illustrated* 37 (February 1999): 37.

advantage of their relative proximity to the festivities. In 1893, the *Thomasville Review* dedicated its front page to advertising “must see Andersonville!” As the “Mecca for thousands of tourists each year,” the paper asked, “can you afford to miss it?” After all, the prison not only inspired “patriotic pride” but also the “most wonderful forensic combat that ever occurred in our national legislative hall—that between the late lamented Senators Blaine and Hill.” Special trains shuttled interested parties between Thomasville and Andersonville. Like their northern brethren, southerners embraced the opportunity to both commemorate and profit off the attention that Civil War prisons like Andersonville inspired.²¹

The same year that Thomasville embarked upon its tourism campaign, the Women’s Relief Corps, an organization affiliated with the Grand Army of the Republic, in response to the surging curiosity about Andersonville, agreed to purchase the prison site and care for the grounds. Although the government owned Andersonville National Cemetery, the prison site itself had been dormant under the ownership of the Georgia department of the Grand Army of the Republic, which could not afford the expense of maintaining the location. In 1896, the WRC started improving the site by building a cottage that also served as an informal visitor center and installing fences, bridges, roads, paths, and walkways. By 1898, according to one newspaper headline, “The Old Prison Pen is Now a Pleasant Park.” Since the WRC was a non-profit organization, its efforts to preserve and beautify Andersonville represented an altruistic attempt at memorialization, in contrast to Gunther’s brazenly commercial Libby Prison War Museum. In practical

²¹ *Americus Times Recorder*, May 26, 1895, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; *Thomasville Review*, March 7, 1893, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

terms, however, with nearby communities like Thomasville hoping to cash in on the proximity to a place of national interest, little difference separated the conversion of the old prisons into tourist attractions. The decades of animosity, and the ongoing bitterness of the debate even in the 1890s over the horrors and responsibility for the treatment of prisoners during the Civil War, created a natural interest among all Americans, regardless of section, in these sites. The overt commercialization of Libby and the combination of memorialization and tourism at Andersonville offered Americans an enjoyable opportunity to see for themselves firsthand the magnitude of what it meant to be a prisoner during the Civil War and simultaneously gain appreciation for the sacrifice of so many dead. As northerners and southerners embraced the idea of using the prisons as a source of financial profit, the intermingling of patriotism with capitalism helped unify not only the tourists, but the sections themselves. For all the tension industrialization created in the late nineteenth century about the role of the individual in an organizational society, widespread commercialization also began to offer Americans a comforting interpretation of their country's exciting past.²²

Even though the commercialism and commemoration surrounding the prisons increased, the sectional condemnation persisted as strongly in the South as the North. By the 1890s, southern confidence continued to rise as southerners actively sought ways to celebrate the memory of their prison dead while decrying the perceived northern hypocrisy over the prison controversy. If the *SHSP* led the fight to clear the Confederate prison record, the *Confederate Veteran* spearheaded southern efforts to remember the

²² William Burnett, "The Woman's Relief Corps at Andersonville," Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site. The newspaper headline comes from an unidentified, late 1890s newspaper clipping in the Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Joseph Schubert Collection, United States Army Military History Institute.

dead Confederate prisoners while asserting that in regards to the prison controversy, “history must affix on the United State government its lasting condemnation.” As the voice of Confederate veterans, the publication frequently included prisoner accounts and defenses of the Southern prison system voiced in the same aggrieved manner as the *SHSP*. But the reverent approach of the *Veteran* and its desire to praise the heroism of the southern soldier led naturally to a preoccupation with preserving the tangible evidence of that sacrifice, the graves of the dead prisoners in the North. In 1894, the *Veteran* announced plans to identify and order the graves of the Confederate dead in Indianapolis, which “lie leveled and unmarked.” The following year, in Chicago, “our monument” was unveiled in commemoration of the Confederate dead buried in Chicago, many of them casualties of the prison at Camp Douglas. Although not specifically a monument to Confederate prisoners, it was dedicated in part “to the brave men who died in our city, while prisoners of war,” and celebrated those “men who were as true to their convictions, and as loyal to their leaders, as any class of men that ever put on the uniform, listened to the bugle-call, or marched to battle.” Part of the reason the event seemed so moving, according to the *Veteran*, involved the participation of Union veterans, who demonstrated a “soldier respect for soldier that you can not put into words.”²³

²³ John Shirley Ward, “Responsibility for the Death of Prisoners,” *Confederate Veteran* 4 (January 1896): 13; Charles W. Frazier, “Prison Life on Johnson’s Island,” *CV* 2 (April 1894): 113-14; W. Gart Johnson, “Prison Life at Harper’s Ferry and on Johnson’s Island,” *CV* 2 (August 1894): 242-43; “Treatment of Prisoners,” *CV* 3 (October 1895): 297; “Confederate Dead at Indianapolis,” *CV* 1 (January 1894): 18; “Services at our Chicago Monument,” *CV* 3 (July 1895): 209; “Our Monument in Chicago,” *CV* 3 (June 1895): 176.

In 1896 and 1897, the *Veteran* publicized and requested support for the efforts, often supported by northerners, to care for “the graves of our known and unknown dead buried” at, among other places in the North, Camp Morton, Camp Douglas, Camp Chase, Point Lookout, and Johnson’s Island. “It is our sacred duty,” required by “the dictates of honor,” the *Veteran* declared, to “keep fresh the memory and green the graves of those of our heroes whose arms are nerveless, many of whose families are helpless, and they sleeping so far away from homes and kindred.” Although the *Veteran* expressed the South’s appreciation for northerners who assisted the process of decorating and memorializing the prison graves, the overall tone of the periodical in dealing with the prison controversy remained strident. According to Henry Howe Cook, in an article published in March 1898, “the Federal Government was criminally negligent in her treatment of Confederate soldiers, and in many respects” committed “willful, intentional cruelty.” Commemoration, even when both North and South participated together, still did not translate into reconciliation. Nor did it end feelings of southern defensiveness, evident in Cook’s declarations that “we were a more civilized and Christianized people than were our Northern brethren.” The bitterness of the 1860s remained evident in the angry rhetoric of the 1890s.²⁴

Although rancor still dominated the public perception of the prison controversy, the fate of Libby and Andersonville and the southern interest in memorializing the prison

²⁴ “Camp Chase Confederate Dead,” *Confederate Veteran* 4 (August 1896): 246-248; “Camp Chase Confederate Graves,” *CV* 5 (May 1897): 197; Henry Howe Cook, “Story of the Six Hundred,” *CV* 6 (March 1898): 120. For additional *Confederate Veteran* articles about northern brutality and prison escapes, see B. L. Farinholt, “Escape from Johnson’s Island,” *CV* 5 (October 1897): 514-517 and B. L. Farinholt, “Perils in Escaping from Prison,” *CV* 5 (November 1897): 547-550; D. C. Thomas, “Dark Chapter in Prison Life,” *CV* 6 (February 1898): 71-73; and J. K. Womack, “Treatment of Prisoners at Camp Morton,” *CV* 6 (December 1898): 571.

graves in the North indicated the beginning of a shift in the way Americans approached the subject. Along with the increasing interest in memorializing and commercializing the prisons came the first opinions that, perhaps, it was time to let go of the old animosity over the prisons. In 1891, John Wyeth of New York wrote a letter to the editor of the *Springfield Republican*, a letter later published by the *SHSP*, in which he declared that any “reasonable and fair-minded being” knows that there was “as much culpability on one side as the other.” The reason that passions remained heated after more than twenty five years, Wyeth believed, was that “the Southern side of the prison question has never been made known to the Northern people. Though a good deal has been written, it appeared in Southern magazines,” and as a result, never found “its way to the masses of the North.” In contrast, Wyeth argued, “the narratives of Union prisoners have been widely diffused through the daily papers, made the texts of passionate oratory by the statesmen of a day, elaborated by the illustrated journals, and emphasized by the immense circulation and influence of the Northern magazines.” All this one-sided publicity, Wyeth asserted, prolonged the northern anger over the treatment of prisoners and prevented a true understanding of the “cold and unanswerable” facts. Sir Henry Morton Stanley, imprisoned at Camp Douglas, instead of blaming either side, thought that “it was the age that was brutally senseless and heedlessly cruel.” With this argument Stanley became one of the first observers of the prison controversy to find the real fault in the nature of modern war itself. Whether both the Union and Confederacy shared responsibility or deserved to be excused because of what Stanley called the “moral epidemic” surrounding the entire Civil War, both men demonstrated a willingness to assess objectively the prison controversy. Their opinions, although certainly in the

minority, offered evidence that at some point the sectional hostility over the prison issue might cease.²⁵

The work of one author, Herbert Collingwood, also showed a deep commitment to sectional reconciliation. In 1889 Collingwood published *Andersonville Violets: A Story of Northern and Southern Life*. Born in New England, in the 1880s, Collingwood moved to the South and spent a few years farming in Mississippi before returning North and writing his novel, which he hoped would remind readers that it was “the duty of all patriotic citizens to lend their best efforts to the task of looking at the causes of the war, and its results, fairly and intelligently.” The plot of the novel centered on the mutual respect between a Union prisoner who daringly escapes from Andersonville and a Confederate guard discharged for refusing to shoot a prisoner who crossed the dead-line. When, years later, the two men find themselves living in the same Mississippi town, they recognize each other and become fast friends. Throughout the novel, in which Collingwood reveals his concerns about a South torn by racial questions and commercial exploitation, the horrors experienced at Andersonville represent the burden of the southern past. Despite the obstacles, however, Collingwood’s characters find peace and strength in the bonds they formed at the prison, and “so much happiness” replaces “so much misery.” Collingwood’s optimism showed in his sincere belief that even the

²⁵ John A. Wyeth, “Prisoners North and South,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 20 (January-December 1892): 48, 51, 48. In keeping with the pattern of the Davis-Chipman exchange, Wyeth’s statements unsurprisingly provoked a northern rebuttal. See James R. Carnahan, *Camp Morton* (N.p.: Baker-Randolph L. & E. Co., 1892). Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., *Sir Henry Morton Stanley, Confederate* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 146.

brutality of Civil War prisons should not discourage a spirit of forgiveness between the North and South. In reconciliation America would discover new strength.²⁶

Although the open-mindedness of Collingwood, Wyeth, and Stanley revealed the first signs of a desire to end the long hostility over the treatment of Civil War prisoners, those signs remained overshadowed by the ongoing animosity that most Americans still held regarding the prison controversy. Bitter rhetoric continued to dominate the subject as it had since the 1860s. The intensity with which Americans contested the meaning of the prisons in the late nineteenth century reflected the uncertainty of a country in transition. The myriad, often conflicting interpretations of the prison legacy by different groups existed as part of the larger process of shaping how an emerging modern America understood its past. Republican politicians and Union prisoners rehashed the traditional argument for the prison tragedy, that evil Confederate individuals perpetuated the horrors, in an attempt to bolster support for the Republican party and a sense of reverence for the heroism and sacrifice displayed by Union prisoners. Southerners refused to accept their assigned role as depraved villains and mounted a spirited rhetorical campaign to exonerate themselves, if not in the eyes of the North, at least in the verdict of history. Along with the sectional arguments, however, new trends emerged adding further complexity to the legacy of Civil War prisons. The commercialization of Libby and Andersonville offered Americans an increasingly popular chance to experience the history of Civil War prisons for themselves, while the efforts to commemorate dead prisoners testified to the potent influence the Civil War still had on American public

²⁶ Herbert W. Collingwood, *Andersonville Violets: A Story of Northern and Southern Life* (1889; repr., Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 2000), xxxiii, 270.

memory. For a few, the prison controversy reminded Americans of the powerlessness of the individual, no matter how heroic, against the increasing capability of governments and organizations for evil. The turbulence of the period between 1877 and 1898, an era of social, economic, and political uncertainty, manifested itself in the appearance of these varied perspectives on the history of Civil War prisons. Regardless of whether Americans restated old arguments or investigated new explanations, the urgency with which they disputed the legacy of Civil War prisons resulted from the shared sense that, in a rapidly changing world, the ability to define the meaning of the past offered one potential source of stability.

CHAPTER 5: “TRUE HISTORY”

In 1898, the outbreak of the Spanish-American War confirmed the restoration of the bonds between the North and South. The sweeping success of the United States military in Cuba and the Philippines contributed to the growing feeling that perhaps at long last the terrible divisions of the Civil War could be considered healed. As the war swiftly ended and the United States joined the ranks of imperial powers, the bright American destiny, once imperiled by the devastation of the Civil War, now appeared but slightly delayed. On December 14, 1898, President McKinley, basking in the afterglow of the convincing victory over Spain, remarked to an Atlanta crowd that “sectional feeling no longer holds back the love we bear each other.” The proof, he argued, “is found in the gallant loyalty to the Union and the flag so conspicuously shown in the year just passed.” The popularity of the Spanish-American War, especially in the South, testified to the true patriotism of the maligned ex-Confederate states and heightened the spirit of reconciliation across America. The resulting sense of optimism created by the Spanish-American War and the demonstration of American military prowess also fueled an increased national appreciation for the fading Civil War generation, the rapidly disappearing war heroes of the 1860s. With America secure in the knowledge that her fortunes were once again on the rise, the deaths of most of the remaining Civil War veterans between 1898 and 1913 provided Americans with a final chance to acknowledge the shared sacrifices of the soldiers of the Union and Confederacy.¹

¹ Committee on Confederate Dead, Charles Broadway Rouss Camp No. 1191 United Confederate Veterans, *Report on the Re-Burial of the Confederate Dead in Arlington Cemetery*, (Washington, D.C., Judd & Detweiler, Printers, 1901), 10-11;

Between 1865 and 1898, celebrations held by and for Civil War veterans focused primarily on parades, monument unveilings and battlefield gatherings, and were attended with increasing frequency by both Union and Confederate soldiers. These types of reunions remained popular for many reasons. As historian Stuart McConnell points out, the United States, “long since saved,” faced no threat from the ex-rebels, as “few of those who remained looked likely to lead a second insurrection.” And so year after year, battlefields such as Gettysburg hosted reunions where the dwindling numbers of blue and gray mingled, swapped stories, and relived the excitement of the war. Naturally the battlefields attracted the largest crowds, because, as scholars Gary Laderman and Edward Linenthal attest, the grounds, consecrated by the tragic end of the hundreds, at times thousands, sacrificed there, had become “sacred” sites for all Americans. And finally, as historian Cecilia O’Leary argues, “the new unity” of the white veterans on both sides “came at the cost of abandoning Reconstruction and severing the link between the memory of the Civil War and the struggle for racial equality.” Northern acceptance of the Lost Cause and Jim Crow contributed to the shared spirit of self-congratulation surrounding the Civil War. At these memorial events, speakers acknowledged the equal bravery and martial spirit of both sides, and with the important outcome achieved, the preservation of the Union, the question of race faded from the American mind. With the smashing success of the Spanish-American War, the growing sentiment of mutual forgiveness and shared celebration even extended to the still painful and controversial

Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 163.

subject of Civil War prisons, as the rituals of reunions and monuments finally extended past the battlefield to old prison sites.²

During the period between 1898 and 1913, many northerners, inspired by the national sense of reconciliation, finally demonstrated forgiveness for the southern transgressions against Yankee prisoners during the Civil War. In the immediate aftermath of the Spanish-American War, numerous Union veterans made pilgrimages to the old Confederate prison sites of Andersonville, Georgia, and Salisbury, North Carolina. During the first two decades of the twentieth century almost all the northern states commissioned and unveiled monuments at one or both of these Confederate prisons in commemoration of the thousands of dead Union soldiers. The construction of memorials at Andersonville and Salisbury offered a way to acknowledge the sacrifice and heroism displayed by Union prisoners of war. Not only did these tributes recognize the dead, but they also testified to the example of courage displayed by those fortunate enough to have survived the ordeal. The process of dedicating these monuments also encouraged the spirit of reconciliation. Instead of continuing to harp on the old

² Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 200; see also Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G. A. R.* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1952). On the concept of sacred battlefields, see Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996); Edward T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Michael W. Panhorst, "Lest We Forget: Monuments and Memorial Sculpture in National Military Parks on Civil War Battlefields, 1861-1917" (Ph. D. diss., University of Delaware, 1988). Cecilia E. O'Leary, "Blood Brotherhood: The Racialization of Patriotism, 1865-1918," in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism*, ed. John Bodnar (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 54; see also David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

accusations of deliberate brutality, most participants in the ceremonies surrounding these monuments at last seemed willing to part with their anger.

In 1898, New Jersey commissioned the building of a monument at Andersonville in the cemetery, adjacent to the old stockade grounds, where the 13,000 dead prisoners lay. The two thousand dollar monument, constructed primarily of granite, honored the 235 New Jersey soldiers who died at the Georgia prison, “heroes” who, as the inscription on the monument stated, chose “death before dishonor.” Dishonor would have been to swear loyalty to the Confederacy and gain freedom from the suffering inside the Andersonville stockade, an option taken by relatively few Union captives. The New Jersey contingent that attended the unveiling of the monument on February 3, 1899, took pride in the “creditable distinction of having first erected a monument to the memory of its dead, buried in this cemetery.” The northern rancor normally directed at Wirz, Davis, Winder, and southerners in general, was markedly absent from the proceedings. “The prison,” the report of the dedication concluded, instead of being noted as a place of unprecedented brutality and inhumanity, “was a place where true character developed itself.” New Jersey’s attempt to recognize permanently the positive memories of Andersonville, of Union prisoners caring as best they could for one another while suffering loyally, in a spirit of sacrifice, for the Union cause, represented an important step forward in the process of sectional reconciliation. At last Union veterans seemed willing to extend an olive branch on the subject of Civil War prisons.³

³ New Jersey Monument Commissioners, *Report of the New Jersey Andersonville Monument Commissioners* (Somerville, N.J.: The Unionist-Gazette Association, State Printers, 1899), 3, 7-8, 11.

Following New Jersey's lead, more Union states over the next decade commissioned and dedicated monuments of their own, and as the years passed, both the monuments and the ceremonies grew increasingly elaborate. On December 7, 1905, Pennsylvania dedicated its ten thousand dollar monument, spending an additional sixteen thousand dollars on transportation alone so that the state's Andersonville survivors could attend en masse. Three hundred and eighty-one of the former prisoners, nearly eighty percent of the four hundred and eighty-two still living, made the trip south to Georgia, an indication of the deep interest in remembering the horrors of the war. From the opening prayer, given by the Reverend J. R. Greene, Grand Army of the Republic Chaplain, Department of North Carolina and Georgia, the spirit of reverence for the sacrifice of the dead and the new atmosphere of sectional reconciliation dominated the ceremonies. Although the dead prisoners "fell not in the front of battle," Greene stated, "they were heroes every one," demonstrating "patient bravery" and suffering "untold agonies" out of an unwavering sense of "loyalty and honor." Descriptions of the martyrdom and heroism displayed by the Andersonville prisoners had been heard before. But as Greene continued, the importance of the Spanish-American war in finally starting to heal the prison wounds became clear. "Out of the carnage of war has come these days of peace," Greene declared, and "the animosities of the past have been obliterated, that the blue and the gray now mingle in fraternal sympathy, and that our sons and theirs go forth together to fight the battles of our common country, following the old flag, the one flag, in its victories on the land and on the sea." Greene's prayer, reminiscent of President McKinley's belief that Americans had finally come to terms with the past, but delivered at the actual grounds of Andersonville, the center of the post-war prison controversy,

showed that perhaps, given time, the lingering animosity over Civil War prisons might fade completely.⁴

As officials and dignitaries from the various states came south to Andersonville to dedicate their monuments to the dead prisoners, the spirit of forgiveness they demonstrated corresponded to the warm welcome they received from their Georgia hosts. The guests from Pennsylvania, according to a December 8, 1905 article in the *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, received a “cordial welcome,” and “fraternal good feeling was in evidence upon every hand.” The event stirred such positive feelings of reconciliation that both hosts and guests would remember it “with much pleasure.” With more northern states continuing to add to the rapidly expanding collection of monuments at Andersonville, Americus, rather than display defensiveness and frustration with the attention, instead relished the opportunities to provide true southern hospitality. When Wisconsin scheduled its commemoration exercises for October 17, 1907, and Connecticut its monument unveiling for one week later, the *Times Recorder* announced on September 13 that it welcomed the “distinguished party” to at least “stop in Americus” and extended an invitation “to make Americus headquarters during their stay in the South.” After all, the editor continued, during the previous visit of the Pennsylvania

⁴ *Pennsylvania at Andersonville, Georgia, Ceremonies at the Dedication of the Memorial Erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the National Cemetery at Andersonville, Georgia* (C. E. Aughinbaugh, Printer to the State of Pennsylvania, 1909), 16-17, 25-6, 28; for other state reports of monument dedications see *Report of the Maine Andersonville Monument Commissioners* (Augusta, Maine: Kennebec Journal, 1904); Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Report of the Commission on Andersonville Monument* (Boston: Wright & Putter Printing Co., state printers, 1902); *Report of the Joint Special Committee on Erection of Monument at Andersonville, Georgia* (Providence, R.I.: E. L. Freeman & Sons, state printers, 1903); *Dedication Connecticut Andersonville Monument: Dedication of the Monument at Andersonville, Georgia, October 23, 1907* (Hartford: Published by the State, 1908).

delegation, the Governor of Pennsylvania and the “entire party were handsomely entertained” just ten miles from Andersonville, and “with ample hotel accommodations” available, Wisconsin and Connecticut deserved the same courtesy. Though the potential financial windfall of Yankee dollars no doubt contributed to the eager invitations, the consistently tasteful and cathartic ceremonies at the prison indicated a growing sense of mutual respect between North and South. In 1911, when New York and Illinois added their monuments, an editor at the *Times Recorder* declared the two new monuments “superb,” and stated that “each state monument that is erected at Andersonville seems to display better taste and a more gracious spirit than its predecessors.” That spirit was the product of years of interaction between the Union veterans and their once Confederate hosts as they met repeatedly at Andersonville to remember the horrors of the past. Although intended as a permanent tribute to the thousands of dead prisoners, the process of dedicating the northern monuments created a secondary effect—it helped defuse the animosity over the prison issue as northern visitors and southern hosts cooperated to make each celebration successful.⁵

By 1907, the attention paid to Andersonville extended past the periodic commemorations of the individual northern states. As each delegation returned, word spread of the gracious treatment encountered in Georgia and the beauty of the prison grounds, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Women’s Relief Corps in caring for the site. Visitors no longer waited for Memorial Day celebrations or monument dedications to plan excursions to see the old stockade and cemetery. That same year Sarah Winans,

⁵ *Americus Daily Times-Recorder*, December 8, 1905, September 13, 1907, September 28, 1911, clippings in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

acting chairman of the WRC, remarked that maintaining Andersonville had become “arduous,” primarily due to the constant job of “welcoming the increasing number of visitors, comrades especially” who traveled individually or in small groups to the prison to pay their own respects. With more state monuments planned for the future, the effort required of the WRC seemed likely to rise. Many members of the WRC realized that their organization had reached the limit of what it could accomplish at Andersonville. In 1908, the WRC decided to offer the eighty-eight acre site as a “free gift, unencumbered,” to the national government, “because of a belief that these grounds should be under the control and protection of the United States.” On March 2, 1910, President Taft accepted the gift, and later that year, at the official deed transfer ceremony, Lewis Call, one of the government’s representatives, promised the WRC “that the grounds will ever be held as a memorial of the heroism of the men who there proved themselves the highest type of patriots.” The possession of Andersonville prison by the Taft administration, the first and only former Confederate prison site under the care of the federal government, added even more to the growing sense of the importance of the prison, no longer solely as a place of unspeakable atrocity, but now also as a permanent symbol of the brave sacrifice made by thirteen thousand Union soldiers and the achievements of the increasingly powerful country they died to save.⁶

While Andersonville, appropriately, given its central role in the controversy, remained the focal point of attention for northern memorials and visitors, Salisbury,

⁶ Excerpts from the minutes of the 25th Women’s Relief Corps National Convention, 231, the 27th Women’s Relief Corps National Convention, 192, and the 28th Women’s Relief Corps National Convention, 61-62, come from Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site. See also James P. Averill, ed., *Andersonville Prison Park. Report of its Purchase and Improvement*, (Atlanta, Ga.: Byrd Printing Company, n.d.).

North Carolina, also served as host to northern delegations and monuments during the early twentieth century. On June 8, 1908, the Maine contingent arrived to celebrate its tribute to the victims of Salisbury prison. As at Andersonville, the people of Salisbury offered a warm reception. The mayor of Salisbury, A. H. Boyden, a Confederate veteran, offered an “earnest, hearty welcome” and declared his excitement that “the season of heated blood has passed,” and his wife, as the Star Spangled Banner played, helped unveil the monument. In response to such generosity of spirit, the governor of Maine’s representative, Adjutant General Augustus B. Farnham acknowledged that, happily, today “only the kindest feelings existed” between North Carolina and Maine. After another Maine speaker, Charles Newell, reminded the audience of the patriotic example of the ex-Confederate turned Spanish-American war heroes, Generals Fitzhugh Lee and Joe Wheeler, the crowd “repaired to the handsome home” of the Salisbury mayor, where the “visitors received their first real impressions of true Southern hospitality.” The report of the festivities omitted whether any of those who attended the harmonious ceremony noted that just a decade before, such an event would have been unthinkable.⁷

The tangible harmony of that 1908 North Carolina June reflected the building sincere and authentic sense of sectional reconciliation over Civil War prisons, made possible by the Spanish-American War and first demonstrated by the New Jersey visitors to Georgia in 1899. But while the themes of forgiveness and brotherhood dominated each memorial event, an unmistakable bitterness remained noticeable as well. At the

⁷ *Report of the Maine Commissioners on the Monument Erected at Salisbury, N. C., 1908* (Waterville, Maine: Sentinel Publishing Company, 1908), 10, 13, 15, 19-20, 25; see also *Pennsylvania at Salisbury, North Carolina: Ceremonies at the Dedication of the Memorial Erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the National Cemetery at Salisbury, North Carolina* (C. E. Aughinbaugh, Printer to the State of Pennsylvania, 1910).

Iowa unveiling, November 17, 1906, Iowa Governor Albert Cummins, even while remarking on the “harmony” of “emotions” of the moment, nevertheless implored the crowd to remember “the unparalleled inhumanity” and “cruelty” of Andersonville. Another Iowan, Ernest Sherman, who in 1907 published an account summarizing the experience of the Iowa delegation, included a sensationalized history of Andersonville reminiscent of the 1860s or 70s. During the war, the Confederate authorities, Sherman claimed, openly “boasted” about the brutality of the Georgia stockade. Even during the Pennsylvania unveiling, General Harry White, one of the official members of the monument commission, betrayed the lingering anger about the prisons that remained for many Union veterans. White blasted the South for what he termed the “perversion of the actual facts of history” regarding the Civil War and its prisons, regrettable “disturbances” that threatened the “harmonies of the sections.” Although Andersonville survivor Captain William Bricker followed White and declared himself “highly pleased” with the respect paid to the dead prisoners, the atmosphere of sectional reconciliation had been diminished.⁸

The same ambiguity did not appear in the prison memoirs of Union veterans during and after the turn of the twentieth century. Many northern prison survivors, such as Private William Allen of the 17th Iowa Volunteer Infantry, showed little desire to forgive the South. Allen repeatedly referred to Henry Wirz as a “demon” throughout his 1899 account of life in Andersonville prison. In 1904 John Worrell Northrop, veteran of the 76th New York Infantry, recalled the “horrors of prison life” and the “barbarity of the

⁸ Alonzo Abernethy, ed., *Dedication of Monuments Erected by the State of Iowa* (Des Moines, Iowa: Emory H. English, State Printer, 1908), 99-100; Ernest A. Sherman, *Dedicating in Dixie* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Press of the Record Printing Company, 1907), 45; *Pennsylvania at Andersonville*, 47, 49.

treatment” experienced in Confederate prisons, which he described as “dark and loathsome spots.” Others were more sensitive. At times northern prison survivors, expressed, as in a 1910 address by John Read, member of the Loyal Legion, a “hesitation” about discussing the prison subject, which he referred to as “that dark episode.” Despite his concerns, however, Read continued, hoping that the “desire in the hearts of all for reconciliation” would overcome any sectional bitterness or “harsh feeling of criticism.” As he concluded, Read declared that “the lack of shelter” in Confederate prisons “cannot be understood or explained,” a statement reminiscent of the old accusations of deliberate cruelty towards the Union prisoners in the South. These potentially inflammatory statements, he attested, were necessary to “preserve the memory of the brave men who died for the honor of their country.” By faithfully recounting the old tragedies, in this case to an audience of fellow veterans, Read and other prison survivors attempted to fulfill an obligation to celebrate the history of the Civil War and the successful quest for Union and also to recognize the memory of their fallen comrades whose sacrifices enabled victory. Although aware that this duty would jeopardize the process of reconciliation by freshly recounting the sins of the South, Read, along with many in the North, could not let the “memory be unspoken.”⁹

⁹ William H. Allen, “One Hundred and Ninety Days in Rebel Prisons,” *Annals of Iowa* 38 (Winter 1966): 232, 234, 236; John W. Northrop, *Chronicles from the Diary of a War Prisoner* (Wichita, Kans: privately printed, 1904), 195; John Read, “Texas Prisons and a Comparison of Northern and Southern Prison Camps,” in *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion*, ed. A. Noel Blakeman (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 249, 259. For additional hostile discussion of the prisons, see The Committee on Publications, *Civil War Papers, vol. I & II* (Boston: Printed for the Commandery, 1900); Ralph O. Bates, *Billy and Dick from Andersonville Prison to the White House* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Sentinel Pub. Co., 1910); William B. Clifton, *Libby and Andersonville Prisons: A True Sketch* (Indianapolis, Ind.: privately printed, 1910); James N. Miller, *The Story of Andersonville and Florence* (Des Moines, Iowa: Welch, The Printer, 1900);

By the twentieth century, then, in the minds of the remaining prison survivors in the North, there was a feeling that, before they died, they owed it to the memory of the thousands of dead Union prisoners to continue to pay homage to the heroism, bravery, and sacrifice of those who survived the ordeal as well as those who did not. Ezra Ripple, Andersonville survivor, in 1902 best summarized this sentiment as he began the tale of his prison experiences. He reminded his readers of the “suffering,” the “great mortality,” and the “horrors of the Southern prisons,” and apologized, because “the subject is not a pleasant or attractive one.” “We would all sooner listen,” he acknowledged, “to a description of a grand battle where all the bravery and dash of trained soldiers in assault and defense is portrayed in the most vivid and glowing colors than to a tale which has little in it but that which is revolting, sickening and sorrowful.” The reason Ripple subjected his audience to this depressing account, he claimed, was that it was “necessary to the preservation of the true history of those times.” Victory in the war itself, while satisfying, would not suffice. Before they disappeared completely, the Northern prison survivors intended to win not only the war but the battle for posterity and the historical record. They naturally and understandably feared that if the memory of their suffering and sacrifice faded, it threatened to diminish the value of their experiences, their service, and their lives. Too many soldiers lay in the cemeteries of Andersonville and other southern prisons to allow Americans to forget. And so, whether motivated by personal

Gustaf Alstrand, *The Story of a Private in the Civil War* (Fort Dodge, Iowa: *The Evening Messenger*, 1970); W. F. Lyon, *In and Out of Andersonville Prison* (Detroit: Geo. Harland Co., Publishers, 1905); C. M. Prutsman, *A Soldier's Experience in Southern Prisons* (New York: Andrew H. Kellogg, 1901). For a discussion of why the proper historical understanding of Civil War prisons was so important to prison survivors, see Ezra H. Ripple, *Dancing along the Deadline*, edited by Mark Snell (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1996).

desires to remind people of their individual courage or the surge of patriotism following the Spanish-American War, as the remaining northern prison survivors entered the twilight of their lives they realized that while the Civil War officially ended in 1865, by the 1900s discussion and interpretation of the conflict continued, prisons included, and would still continue long after they died.¹⁰

If the growing obsession with history and memory by Union survivors of southern prisons motivated men like Ripple to speak out about Civil War prisons, it also revealed an irony about the nature of “true history.” By 1902, when Ripple wrote, or 1912, when the account of George Putnam, another prison survivor, was published, forty or fifty years had passed since the actual events described took place. Putnam openly avowed that, since “forty-eight years have elapsed,” he could not “undertake to say that my memory can be trusted for all of the details or incidents.” Putnam did pledge that his account had been composed in “good faith.” Ripple, meanwhile, admitted that he wrote his account using only “a retentive memory on which the events had been indelibly impressed,” and also confessed to reading “many other accounts of prison life.” Although he insisted on the veracity of his memoir, in the end he argued that what was really important about his book was its message. “If you appreciate the sacrifice,” he implored, “teach your boys and girls their duty in preserving to posterity this Union for which their lives were so freely given.” In appealing to his readers’ patriotism, Ripple revealed the concerns of the aging prison survivors as to how Civil War prisons would continue to be remembered. Ripple and his comrades intended to remain heroes in the history of the Civil War, and that status demanded constant vigilance against southern

¹⁰ Ripple, *Dancing along the Deadline*, 5-6.

heresy. By the early 1900s, prison chronicles no longer focused solely on the bitter accusations of the past, although the authors rarely missed an opportunity to rehash the old belief that southerners deliberately imposed cruel treatment on Yankee prisoners. Instead writers of the accounts, like Ripple, cloaked their arguments in the guise of reconciliation and patriotism in the hope that the accumulation of subjective memories would eventually gain acceptance as objective history, and in the process permanently recognize the heroic sacrifice made by Union prisoners.¹¹

As the battle for history continued, on February 1, 1911, Lieutenant Thomas Sturgis, from Massachusetts, delivered a lecture on Civil War prisons to a New York branch of the Loyal Legion. Sturgis possessed a unique set of qualifications on the subject. During 1864, his regiment served as the guard at Camp Morton, a Union prison outside Indianapolis, and later that year, he was captured and imprisoned at Libby prison in Richmond during the final grueling winter of the war. In his speech, reprinted in augmented form the following year, Sturgis offered insight into the northern perspective, and a sense of how little had changed, even after nearly fifty years of controversy. Of the treatment of the Confederate prisoners at Camp Morton, he insisted that “everything was done to minimize any unsanitary conditions” and that there “was no desire on the part of our men anywhere or at any time wantonly to take a prisoner’s life.” Sturgis concluded that “certainly our Government dealt with its prisoners with conscientious regard for life.” Rebel prisons, such as Libby and Andersonville, however, existed as manifestations of a “spirit of malice or as a vindictive display of power.” A sense of justification and righteousness infused Sturgis’ words as he openly attacked the morality

¹¹ George H. Putnam, *A Prisoner of War in Virginia 1864-5* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 3; Ripple, *Dancing Along the Deadline*, 1-2.

of the South. “We are the living witnesses,” Sturgis declared, “rapidly passing away from this scene.” “Before we go,” he argued, “in the interest of history, in justice to the way our people conducted the war,” in contrast to “the actions of our antagonists,” we must “leave our testimony.” This need to testify confirmed the need of the aging survivors to preserve the legacy of the Civil War as they understood it. For northern veterans like Sturgis the war always remained the ultimate experience of their lives, the years that defined them and gave meaning to their post-war careers. As they participated in saving the Union, reconstructing the nation, and the decades of growth that saw the United States emerge as a world power, America’s success confirmed the worthiness of their sacrifices at Libby and Andersonville and reassured them that there was a purpose to the horror, a greater good to emerge from the suffering. That comforting understanding depended, however, on maintaining the traditional depiction of Civil War prisons. Union prisons represented good, while Confederate prisons represented evil. The half-century of American progress, in the eyes of Sturgis, Ripple, and other survivors, owed its origins to their heroism in overcoming that evil, and they intended to continue reminding America of their sacrifice.¹²

Another reason for the strident language of Sturgis and other Union veterans at this late date centered on the appearance of a new phenomenon after 1900, the first substantial histories of the various Civil War prison camps. The appearance of Clay W. Holmes’s *The Elmira Prison Camp* in 1912 raised few eyebrows in the North, as Holmes, an Elmira native, described one of the worst Union prisons as being a place of “Christian

¹² Thomas Sturgis, “Prisoners of War,” in *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion*, ed. A. Noel Blakeman (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 270-1, 275, 305, 267.

humanity.” Likewise, William H. Knauss’ 1906 *The Story of Camp Chase* focused not on describing the hardships experienced by Confederate prisoners at Camp Chase and Johnson’s Island, the two Ohio prisons during the war, but instead on the spirit of reconciliation. Knauss spent many years trying to restore and decorate the graves of the more than two thousand Confederates who died at the Columbus prison during the war. Despite some resistance, including threats of violence, Knauss persisted in his efforts “with no thought but that of pride and admiration for the great American people, regarding no North or no South, but a land rich in memories of its brave deed.” Both volumes were written by locals who defended the conditions of the Union prisons and rejoiced in the national climate of reconciliation after 1898.¹³

In 1911, however, the first ostensibly national history of Civil War prisons appeared as part of Francis Trevelyan Miller’s *The Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes*. The bulk of volume seven, covering prisons and hospitals in the war, came from the pen of Dr. Holland Thompson, who at the time held an assistant professorship in history at the College of the City of New York, but originally hailed from North Carolina. Over the course of several brief chapters, interspersed with dozens of photographs, Thompson discussed various aspects of the prison controversy, including the experiences of prisoners on both sides and the question of why the policy of exchange ended, necessitating the creation of prisons like Andersonville. For the first time, pictures of both Union and Confederate prisons and prisoners appeared side by side, and Thompson intentionally juxtaposed the images to support his argument. Thompson

¹³ Clay W. Holmes, *The Elmira Prison Camp* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), v; William H. Knauss, *The Story of Camp Chase* (1906; repr., Columbus, Ohio: The General’s Books, 1994), xx.

suggested that the mortality in “the prisons of the Civil War, North and South,” resulted from the use of “temporary makeshifts, hastily constructed, and seldom suitable for human beings in confinement.” “If judged by standards now generally accepted,” he continued, they “would have been condemned for the lack of the most elementary sanitary requirements.” Thompson’s position shocked veterans like Sturgis, because Thompson lumped the prisons on both sides together and labeled them as equal examples of inhumanity, so that Elmira and Camp Chase became kin to Andersonville and Salisbury. Sturgis felt betrayed because Thompson had relied on him, along with Read and Putnam, for “courtesies” during the preparation of the manuscript. Thompson even thanked Sturgis in the preface to volume seven. Outraged by the public connection of his name to this atrocity of history, Sturgis attacked Thompson in the 1912 printed edition of his 1911 New York speech. While crediting Thompson with an “earnest effort” at impartiality, Sturgis felt it his duty to remind readers of flaws in Thompson’s work. Not only had Thompson been born after the Civil War, and so relied entirely on “second-hand” information, but he was also “a native of North Carolina.” These “insurmountable difficulties,” according to Sturgis, proved that Thompson suffered from “unconscious bias.” Only a southerner, Sturgis insinuated, could possibly conclude that the prison systems of the Union and Confederacy shared more similarities than differences. With heretics like Thompson challenging the traditional interpretation and understanding of the prison controversy, Sturgis and his fellow veterans felt compelled to protest vociferously these perceived injustices and perversions of history. If their message sounded shrill and

strident, it was only because they knew that they were running out of time “before we go.”¹⁴

The defense of “true history” explains in large measure why the familiar tone of animosity persisted among Union veterans, even in the midst of monument dedications devoted to spreading the message of forgiveness about Civil War prisons, and after the healing impact of the Spanish-American War. The paradoxical feelings of the survivors of Confederate prisons testified to the still uncomfortable juxtaposition of the positive story of reconciliation with the ongoing sense of bitterness. Former Union prisoners shared the national excitement over the achievements of the United States since 1865 and felt justifiably proud at their role in winning the war that put America on that path to glory. In that sense men like Read and Ripple recognized that the rancor of the past seemed less important in a more optimistic and forward-looking present. Yet a fear remained that during that rapid march of progress, public remembrance of their part in the Civil War, or even the war itself, might fade into oblivion. As they revisited the hatred inspired by and encountered in the prisons, survivors apologized for disturbing the process of reconciliation. Compelled by the need to preserve their place in history, however, they refused to stop. Even for men accustomed to sacrifice, to allow the annihilation of their past proved more than they could bear.

The enduring bitterness of former Union prisoners of war also testified to the distinct conflict between the purpose of public and private memory. From a national perspective, as evidenced by the statements of President McKinley, the Spanish-

¹⁴ Holland Thompson, ed., *Prisons and Hospitals, Vol. 7, The Photographic History of the Civil War in Ten Volumes*, ed. Francis Trevelyan Miller (New York: The Review of Reviews Co., 1911), 18, 54, 136; Sturgis, “Prisoners of War,” 326-328.

American War represented confirmation that the United States had fully recovered from the trauma of the Civil War. The monuments built at Andersonville and Salisbury showed that many northerners agreed with McKinley. For many northerners, these monuments provided a final opportunity to acknowledge the sacrifice of the Civil War generation before permanently turning their attention forward to the American future. As individuals, however, former prisoners felt that no statue, ceremony, or statement could bring closure to their suffering. Only death would end many of the personal grudges of northern prison survivors. No matter how much time passed, for many northerners the old accusations and sense of outrage at the actions of the South, particularly regarding the treatment of prisoners, defined the meaning of the war and permeated any attempt at discussion or objective analysis of the issue. Much of the tenacity with which ex-prisoners clung to their antipathy reflected a natural frustration as the construction of public memory, with its positive interpretation of reconciliation, slowly but inevitably whitewashed over the private memories of those individuals who refused to forget the bitter past.

If some northerners resented the disappearance of sectional hostility, during the Spanish-American War and its immediate aftermath, southerners eagerly participated and welcomed the conflict as well as McKinley's declaration that reconciliation was complete. Perhaps naively, southerners assumed that that reconciliation extended to the subject of Civil War prisons and that northerners might finally acknowledge the suffering that occurred in Union prisons during the Civil War. At the 1898 United Confederate Veterans convention, as if to test the waters, Surgeon General C. H. Tebault delivered a defense of the Confederate prisons, stating that the "responsibility of all this sacrifice of

human life...rests entirely upon the authorities at Washington.” With southern confidence on the rise once again, many southerners focused their optimistic energy on the ongoing campaign to care for and mark the graves of Confederates in the North, particularly prisoners. By 1901, however, their efforts yielded only slow progress. The report that year of Samuel Lewis, Commander of the Charles Broadway Rouss Camp of the UCV, located in Washington, DC, discussed the painstaking process of disinterring and reburying the remains of two hundred and sixty-four Confederates in Arlington cemetery, as well as marking their new graves with marble headstones. Although the process met with McKinley’s approval in 1899, not until 1901 were the necessary funds allocated and the process completed. More sobering, from Lewis’ perspective, were the “28,000 Confederate dead remaining uncared for in the North.” “Attention to the care of these dead,” Lewis argued, “would be productive of much good,” and help “remove from discussion a still fruitful source of irritation.”¹⁵

Decorating and restoring the oft-overlooked graves became a priority for southern memorial organizations like the Confederate Southern Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, two groups that expressed the desire to honor properly these 28,000 southern heroes in a manner reminiscent of the northern monuments built at Andersonville and Salisbury. One small success came in 1899, when the Ladies Memorial Association dedicated a monument in Americus to the one hundred

¹⁵ *Minutes of the 8th Annual Meeting and Reunion of the United Confederate Veterans* (New Orleans: Hopkins’ Printing Office, 1899), 70, 65-77; for similar sentiments, see *Minutes of the Tenth Annual Meeting and Reunion of the United Confederate Veterans* (New Orleans: Hopkins’ Printing Office, 1902), 118-132 and George L. Christian, “The Confederate Cause and its Defenders,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 26 (January-December 1898): 323-347; Committee on Confederate Dead, *Report of Re-burial*, 3, 15-16.

and fifteen Confederates who died at Andersonville. Their graves had been “neglected” at Andersonville, and in 1880 their bodies had been re-interred in Americus, just a few miles away. The “suitable” monument and the new marble headstones offered a much more fitting tribute. But the refurbished Georgia graves offered little solace to southerners still concerned about the thousands of Confederate dead in the North. During the early 1900s, although memorial efforts persisted to decorate graves in Chicago, site of Camp Douglas, and New York, the location of Elmira, the UDC focused much of its attention on Camp Chase, Ohio, where Union veteran William Knauss continued to labor for the cause of sectional reconciliation. In the mid 1890s, Knauss undertook the cause of caring for the more than two thousand Confederate graves because of the “unutterable loneliness and shameful disorder of Camp Chase Cemetery.” Over time his efforts helped lead to the creation of a Columbus chapter of the UDC, and by 1902, the chapter members stood ready to take over the care of the cemetery grounds from Knauss. All that remained were the ceremonies of June 7, 1902, the day that the UDC helped unveil a memorial arch near the entrance of the cemetery. Financed by Knauss and his friends, the first monument dedicated entirely to Confederate victims of Union prisons bore the simple inscription, “Americans,” a sentiment that seemed appropriate in the new climate of sectional reconciliation. Unlike the unveiling of the Andersonville monuments, however, where the northern delegations enjoyed a warm reception, locals anonymously threatened vandalism and even to blow up the monument. Although the ceremonies proceeded without interference, and as Ohio Governor Nash declared in his comments,

the commemoration confirmed a joyous “epoch of fraternal love and peace,” the promised violence, even though never realized, tarnished the proceedings.¹⁶

The 1902 dedication of the Camp Chase monument, which on the surface represented the positive post-1898 culmination of reconciliation and provided an example of cooperation between North and South, also reinforced the growing suspicions of many southerners that perhaps the process of reconciliation, particularly in reference to the prison controversy, remained incomplete. Reconciliation promised forgiveness to the South, but as southerners examined the North’s superior attitude on the subject of prisons after 1898, they increasingly remembered that, concerning Civil War prisons, they had done nothing to be forgiven for, or at least nothing that the North had not also done to them. From the perspective of southern defenders, if either section owed an apology over Civil War prisons, it was the North to the South for the decades of unfair accusations. At the very least, to confirm the sincerity of northern claims of reconciliation, northerners needed to stop denigrating the Confederate prison record and protesting Union innocence in the treatment of Civil War prisoners. Southerners, after all, peacefully and openly welcomed Union veterans to Andersonville and Salisbury year after year and listened to magnanimous Yankees forgive them for their sins, but when one monument to Confederate prisoners was built, northerners threatened violence. As a result of this clear disparity over the memorialization of Civil War prisons, where the North erected

¹⁶ Confederated Southern Memorial Association, *History of the Confederated Memorial Associations of the South* (New Orleans: The Graham Press, 1904), 87-88. For an additional report on Confederate memorials at Camp Chase, see “Camp Chase Memorial Association,” *Confederate Veteran* 7 (July 1899): 305; *Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Meeting of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (Nashville, Tenn.: Press of Foster & Webb, Printers, 1905), 147-150; Knauss, *The Story of Camp Chase*, xvii-iii, 75, 73.

monument after monument emphasizing the singular brutality of the Confederate prison system, while only one monument and thousands of dilapidated graves testified to the South's inability to convince the Yankees of their part in the tragedy, southerners realized that the offer of sectional reconciliation came with a hidden cost. To further the process of reconciliation, the South needed to accept the northern interpretation of Civil War prisons. For many southerners, the northern acceptance of much of the Lost Cause mythology and Jim Crow segregation by the early 1900s made it easier to accept blame for the prison controversy, especially when, as in the case of Thomasville and Americus, Georgia, the community benefited financially from the attention. Other southerners, meanwhile, decided to renew the fight in the name of "true history."

Ever since the late 1860s and 70s, when Jefferson Davis, Alexander Stephens, and Benjamin Hill defended the Confederacy's prison system, some southerners steadfastly refused to accept the northern explanation that the Confederacy bore the responsibility for the failure of exchange and that its officials deliberately practiced brutality against Union captives. Even after 1900, the campaign to clear the record about supposed southern guilt and northern innocence continued as a central part of a larger effort to resist what southerners felt was no less than the re-writing of history by the North in an effort to permanently humiliate the South. The previous November, a *Confederate Veteran* article, "School Histories in the South," republished the report of Dr. Hunter McGuire of the Grand Camp Confederate Veterans." In his statement, McGuire avowed that the South faced an insidious threat from "false teachings" of history. Southerners were being "misled" or else "foolishly" ignoring "the principles and convictions of the past." "We are enlisted," McGuire implored his fellow southerners, "against an invasion organized

and vigorously prosecuted.” For McGuire, reconciliation, instead of yielding a balanced perception of history, threatened to obliterate the true meaning of the war. Winning the war alone would never satisfy the Yankees, who persisted in denigrating southerners and reminding them of their treachery. And so the reclamation of history, from the southern perspective, continued to drive memorial organizations. The 1904 *History of the Confederate Memorial Associations of the South* declared that the chief purpose of these Southern women centered on the “sacred duty,” the “determined effort to perpetuate in history the testimony of the broken hearted women and maimed heroes of ’61-’65.” And, like Sturgis, a sense of urgency infused the organization and the discharge of its duty “before the march of time decimates our rapidly thinning ranks.” By 1905, the solidarity of the UCV, UDC, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the Ladies’ Memorial Associations as “guardians” of “vital Confederate historical interests” was “gratefully” acknowledged at the annual report of the historical committee at the UCV convention. The “extreme vigilance in guarding our posterity against error,” stated committee chairman Clement Evans, protected southern “intelligence, patriotism, courage, and honor.” With so much at stake these southern organizations promised to hold firm against the Yankee invasion of their history.¹⁷

By 1905, the United Daughters of the Confederacy already possessed a reputation as one of the most “zealous” of the memorial organizations in the South and as vigorous defenders of the historical memory of the Confederacy. At the annual UDC convention

¹⁷ Hunter McGuire, “School Histories in the South,” *Confederate Veteran* 7 (November 1899): 500, 502; Confederate Southern Memorial Association, *History of the Confederate Memorial Associations of the South*, 31; *Minutes of the Fifteenth Annual Meeting and Reunion of the United Confederate Veterans* (N.p.: privately printed, 1905), 30, 33.

at San Francisco that year, the president of the Georgia Division of the UDC, Sarah Hull, unable to attend the “far-off” proceedings, instead sent a report updating the progress of their ninety-one Georgia chapters. After some discussion of fund-raising, scholarships, and memorial events, all part of “fulfilling” the “sacred duty we owe to our great dead,” Hull concluded her statement:

There is one memorial work to which we wish it were in our power to direct the attention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. This is the erection of a monument at Andersonville. We have nothing there to refute the lies and slanders proclaimed in marble on all sides, nothing to bear witness to the Truth, and to the brave testimony of Wirtz and the men who died with him. What greater work is there for us, when the monument to our President is completed, than to turn our attention to this, and so proclaim to the world in the simple, straightforward language of Truth, which needs no adornment, the facts of that prison at Andersonville. Awful they were, we know, but no more so than the prisons in which our own men were held; and we had this palliation: Our government did the best it could, and the prisoners fared as well as our soldiers in the field. Truly the work will never end, Daughters of the South, and the more we do the more we find to do, as is always the case in life.

Following Hull’s announcement, the convention listened to the report of Mary Young, historian of the Savannah chapter. Since the northern monuments at Andersonville “inscribed a false presentation of Wirtz,” Young declared, duty called the UDC to right the injustice committed against southern honor and proper history. She suggested that a national fund-raising campaign commence, with the goal “to erect a suitable memorial to his memory,” including “a lasting record of his murder under false charges.” So began the most heated battle over the historical record of Civil War prisons since the Hill-Blaine debate of the 1870s.¹⁸

¹⁸ McGuire, “School Histories in the South,” 500; *Minutes of the Twelfth Annual Meeting of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (Nashville, Tenn.: Foster, Webb & Parkes, Printers, 1906), 137-140.

During the fund-raising and planning stages of the Wirz monument after 1905, southern memorial organizations lined up in support of the UDC's proposal. The April 1906 *Confederate Veteran* publicized the initial campaign, announced the formation of three UDC-subcommittees, "Selection of Site," "Inscriptions," and "Design," and solicited "liberal" donations from those loyal southerners willing to support the project. That same year, R. A. Brock, editor of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* expressed his excitement about the monument, stating that "it is gratifying to be informed that the cruel stigma may be removed from the memory of Henry Wirz." By November 1907 the UDC commissioned C. J. Clark of the Americus-based Clark Monumental Works to build "the handsome marble shaft." No doubt the fine workmanship Clark exhibited in building several of the Andersonville and Salisbury monuments contributed to his obtaining the Wirz monument contract. The twenty-five to thirty foot tall shaft, when completed, seemed destined for either Americus, or, as originally conceived, the Andersonville prison grounds, as a "rebuttal to the State monuments" located at the prison and cemetery." As news of the Wirz monument reached the North, however, controversy flared.¹⁹

On January 28, 1908, the editor of the *Americus Times Recorder* announced that the UDC's proposed tribute to Wirz had "kicked up" a "storm of indignation" in the ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic, the "fanatical element of south haters." Instead

¹⁹ L. G. Young, "Georgia U. D. C. to Honor Henry Wirz," *Confederate Veteran* 14 (April 1906): 181-82; see also James H. M'Neilly, "Andersonville and Maj. Henry Wirz," *CV* 15 (January 1907): 14-16; "Maj. Henry Wirz," *CV* 16 (May 1908): 199-200; R. A. Brock, "Prisoners of War North and South," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 34 (January-December 1906): 69; J. R. Gibbons, "The Monument to Henry Wirz," *SHSP* 36 (January-December 1908): 226-236; William Burnett, "The Wirz Monument at Andersonville," p. 5, Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

of placing the monument in the town of Andersonville, a compromise location anyway, since the national government had no intention of allowing the Wirz monument anywhere on the Andersonville prison grounds or cemetery, the editor suggested that in order to calm the “tempest,” the town of Americus would accept the monument, further preventing any estrangement between “the two sections.” Many southerners recognized that perhaps the monument would cause less controversy if located away from Andersonville. A former member of the Georgia UDC, E. F. Andrews, wrote her friend, a Mr. Oglesby, in April of 1907, and acknowledged that even though she was no longer part of the organization, she hoped “that the kind-hearted women of Georgia will place their monument either on Wirz’s grave, or in some Georgia town where it will stand a chance of being treated with respect.” The debate over where to build the memorial grew throughout 1908, and members of the UDC, motivated by what the *Times Recorder* called “strenuous objection in all parts of the state towards putting the monument at Andersonville,” considered placing the monument at several locations, including Richmond, Virginia, as well as Macon, Americus, and Andersonville. By December 8, 1908, the monument appeared headed to Richmond to stand “in close proximity to the graves of the Davis family,” and the *Times Recorder* declared in exhaustion that the “vexed question has been settled at last.”²⁰

One week later, the *Times Recorder* reported, some “dissatisfied” Georgia members of the UDC requested a “reconsideration” of the “decision to remove the

²⁰ *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, January 28, 1908, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; E. F. Andrews to Mr. Oglesby, Montgomery, Ala., 29 April 1907, Thaddeus Kosciuszko Papers, Box 2, Mss., Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Burnett, “The Wirz Monument at Andersonville,” p. 9-11; *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, March 22, 1908, December 8, 1908, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

monument from Georgia soil” and announced a new convention, scheduled for March of 1909, to reach a final decision on the location of the Wirz monument. On March 18, 1909, after a vote of 125 for Andersonville, 65 for Macon, and 5 for Americus, the *Times Recorder* announced with resigned relief, “Andersonville was selected as the site for the famous Wirz monument.” The resolution of the controversy ended “the discussion that has been raging for four years.” Only the construction and unveiling of the monument remained.²¹

Throughout the process of turning the proposed Wirz monument into reality, progress, particularly in terms of the selection of the site and the final decision on the inscription, moved slowly largely because of the dogged resistance of Union veterans to the very idea of such an affront to “true history.” The Iowa delegation that visited Andersonville in November 1906 demonstrated a keen awareness of and indignation about the growing southern support for the Wirz monument. General E. A. Carman, representing the Secretary of War, in his speech at the Iowa dedication, praised the women of Georgia, who, during the Civil War, demonstrated a “womanly tenderness” towards the Union prisoners. The “sympathies” of those women, Carman announced, in a direct attack on the UDC, “will be remembered long after the names of those who seek to erect monuments to the memory of one whose cruelty was a shock to humanity shall have been forgotten.” In his summary of the Iowa proceedings, Ernest Sherman expressed his disgust at the actions of Wirz’s defenders. “God grant that the proposition of certain misguided women,” Sherman stated, “to erect a monument to the memory of Captain Wirz, may never be realized. There are some things in this world that are best

²¹ *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, December 15, 1908, March 18, 1909, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

forgotten. This arch fiend of Andersonville is one of them.” And by early February 1908, an encampment of the Grand Army of the Republic issued its official response to the Wirz monument. “This insult to the honored dead of the Union should be stopped,” the veterans declared, “if by no higher authority then by the conscience of the Southern women, who would as violently denounce any similar desecration of the memory of their own justly honored heroes.” Any “consummation of this contemplated slur upon the martyred dead,” the outraged northerners resolved, would “disregard” the “truth of history.”²²

Although the salvos of northern vitriol towards the Wirz monument divided the UDC members and delayed the selection of the final site for the shaft, the verbal attacks on southern women only further galvanized the support of the Southern Historical Society and both the UCV and SCV for the Wirz cause. In 1908, J. R. Gibbons, a member of J.E.B. Stuart’s Cavalry, wrote in the *SHSP* that “we will stand many things” in the South, but when northerners say “anything about our women,” it “gets all of the fuz turned the wrong way.” Gibbons declared that, furthermore, “it is a little peculiar that the people of the North can put up their fine monuments in the South, right under our noses, falsifying history, and think it is all right, but the Southern people must say nothing.” Even if the Union veterans abhorred the idea of the Wirz monument, Gibbons pointedly commented, “the ladies of the South are going to erect one, and it will be built just as tall as it will be possible for them to get the money to build it, and they will inscribe upon it the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Throughout 1908, the *Confederate Veteran* also staunchly supported the Wirz monument, although one editor confessed that

²² Abernethy, *Dedication of Monuments*, 103; Sherman, *Dedicating in Dixie*, 53; Burnett, “The Wirz Monument,” p. 8-9.

“the inscription is anticipated with anxiety.” What the final monument would say remained a secret. While awaiting its appearance, southerners, men and women alike, continued to defend their historical perspective against what they perceived to be the North’s intentional distortion of history and as a rejection of the hypocritical promises of reconciliation.²³

Southerners received an additional morale boost in 1908 from the publication of Union veteran James Madison Page’s *The True Story of Andersonville Prison*, portions of which appeared in the *Confederate Veteran* and southern newspapers. Page’s popularity in the South resulted from his conviction that “prejudice” and “warped” memory created the northern perception of Wirz as a demon. Page, a prisoner for seven months in Andersonville, explained his motivation for writing this account. “After forty years we can at least afford to tell the truth,” he argued, that “we of the North have been acting unfairly.” “We profess unstinted friendship towards the South,” Page continued, but “we charge the South with all the blame for all the horrors of the Civil War.” Page, like William Knauss, believed that the time for recrimination was past and that the North, with its hypocritical treatment of the South concerning the prison controversy, was only prolonging the bitterness. Southerners delighted in the fact that at least one Yankee finally understood.²⁴

On May 12, 1909, the Wirz monument, after surviving the arduous debate about its merits and location, made its public debut in the “historic little town” of

²³ Gibbons, “The Monument to Captain Henry Wirz,” 226, 233-34; “Maj. Henry Wirz,” *Confederate Veteran* 16 (May 1908): 199; see also *The Trial and Death of Henry Wirz* (Raleigh, N.C.: E. M. Uzzell & Co., Printers, 1908).

²⁴ James M. Page, *The True Story of Andersonville Prison* (1908, repr., Scituate, Mass.: Digital Scanning, Inc., 2000), 245-247.

Andersonville, a short walk from the prison grounds and cemetery. The *Times Recorder* estimated that some three to four thousand cheering spectators turned out, and without incident, enjoyed the “magnificent” occasion. The UDC deserved congratulations, the *Americus* paper admitted, for “this splendid consummation of their work of love and devotion to the cause which they represent.” Unlike the dedication of the Northern monuments at Andersonville, however, no mention of forgiveness escaped the lips of the southern presenters. According to the southern defenders of history, Wirz, as a Confederate “martyr” and symbol of “humanity,” offered a true contrast to “the North’s terrible policy” and Edwin Stanton’s “cold blooded cruelty.” One part of the inscription on the finished shaft quoted Jefferson Davis, one of the few Confederate officials vilified even more than Wirz and a constant defender of the Confederate prison system before his death. “When time shall have softened passion and prejudice,” Davis once, either optimistically or naively, stated, “when reason shall have stripped the mask of misrepresentation, then justice, holding even her scales, will require much of past censure and praise to change places.” For the Southerners who witnessed the ceremonies, at least for one day, those scales seemed a little more balanced.²⁵

After the unveiling of the Wirz monument, northerners continued to express disgust at the audacity of the UDC and the “misguided” southerners who supported their efforts. Just over a month after the mid-May Andersonville ceremony, the Women’s Relief Corps held its annual convention in Salt Lake City, at which the Andersonville

²⁵ *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, May 13, 1909, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Burnett, “The Wirz Monument,” p. 11. See also William Mickle, “General Orders,” 22 May 1909 in Augustus W. Graham Papers, Series 2.6, Folder 251, 1909-1913, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Prison Board reported that “the beauty” of the park “is grand,” with only “one object to mar” the “view, and that is the monument erected to the infamous, inhuman keeper of this prison.” The members of the WRC openly wished for a “thunderbolt” to “lower the statue with the name ‘Wirz’ chiseled upon it.” In 1910, General John Stibbs, the last surviving member of the military commission that tried Wirz, ended his long public silence on the subject at a speech in Iowa City, Iowa. “After a monument was erected to perpetuate the memory of Wirz and he was proclaimed a martyr who had been unfairly tried and condemned,” Stibbs explained, “I wanted” to “tell, as I alone could tell,” the “unanimous action of the Court in its findings.” Stibbs swore to the impartiality of the Wirz commission, reminded his audience that “there were no dissenting opinions” among its members, and, as “for myself,” he insisted that “there has been no time during the forty-five years that have intervened since this trial was held when I have felt that I owed an apology to anyone, not even the Almighty, for having voted to hang Henry Wirz by the neck until he was dead.” Thomas Sturgis, unsurprisingly, also entered the fray in his 1911 speech, condemning the “personal brutality” of Wirz. “I am led to speak” about Wirz, Sturgis said, “because many of our younger generation are ignorant of the facts, and because the women of Georgia recently erected a statue to him as a martyr.” The ongoing northern outrage, focused on how the Wirz monument undermined the real story of Civil War prisons, reflected the larger concern, particularly among veterans like Stibbs and Sturgis, that if the South won more historical victories by establishing more monuments like the Wirz shaft, the cause of “true history” faced grave peril. Future generations, without the actual presence of the battle-hardened Union veterans to remind

them, might unknowingly begin to accept the heresies symbolized by the Wirz monument as truth.²⁶

One of the reasons the Wirz monument seemed such an overt threat to the northern interpretation of history was that throughout the early 1900s southerners continued to construct their own alternative version of history. In 1899, the Southern History Association republished an article from the mid-1890s by Reverend Adolphus Mangum describing Salisbury prison, which after Andersonville, held notoriety as one of the worst Confederate prisons. A resident of Salisbury for part of the war, Mangum felt inspired to write about the prison, and the efforts made there to care for the Union prisoners, primarily because of two questions: “Why, then, all this unrelenting bitterness—this bloodthirsty, inexorable vengefulness towards the South,” and “where is the apology for the barbarities and murders of Northern prisons?” “Impartial history,” Mangum concluded, “will show that in the article of prisons,” the South ““was more sinned against than sinning.”” Southern prison survivors also produced more accounts of their suffering throughout this period as well—memoirs that still displayed a deep-rooted anger at the northern public’s insistence of the superiority of Union prisons. In his 1904 book, Dr. John King, motivated by the northern “spirit of enmity,” confessed that he lacked the ability to properly depict his experiences at Camp Chase. “I have no words at my command,” he stated, “with which to describe the horrors of the Yankee prison at Camp Chase. One would have to follow ‘Dante’ in his descent to Hell, and in his wanderings among its inmates, to find an approach to it.” Like Sturgis, King and his

²⁶ Burnett, “The Wirz Monument,” p. 12; John H. Stibbs, “Andersonville and the Trial of Henry Wirz,” *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 9 (1911): 34, 53; Sturgis, “Prisoners of War,” 311; see also J. W. Elarton, *Andersonville* (Aurora, Neb.: privately printed, 1913).

fellow chroniclers of prison life in the North felt compelled to write even after all these years because they shared the same goals, if opposing viewpoints, and similar tales of suffering. But by the early 1900s, southern prison survivors no longer fought the battle for history alone. A combination of southern voices, male and female, sons and daughters, all protested, like the Wirz monument itself, against the supposed northern innocence and purely southern guilt concerning the subject of Civil War prisons.²⁷

The fact that so many voices on both sides of the prison controversy continued to extol their sectional virtues and the faults of their former enemies between 1898 and 1913 is ironic, given that on the whole, from a national perspective, it was truly an era of sectional reconciliation. Adding even more irony to the ongoing hostility was that the same factors that encouraged national reconciliation continued to promote discord in the specific instance of Civil War prisons. The first trend involved the impending deaths of

²⁷ A. W. Mangum, "History of the Salisbury, N. C., Confederate Prison," *Publications of the Southern History Association* 3 (1899): 336; John H. King, *Three Hundred Days in a Yankee Prison* (1904, repr., Kennesaw, Ga.: Continental Book Company, 1959), 3, 84-5. For additional southern prison accounts, see Marcus B. Toney, *Privations of a Private* (Nashville, Tenn.: privately printed, 1905); William A. Fletcher, *Rebel Private* (1908, repr., Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1954); Alexander Hunter, *Johnny Reb and Billy Yank* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1905); Randolph H. McKim, *A Soldier's Recollections* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911); John N. Opie, *A Rebel Cavalryman* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1899); L. W. Hopkins, *From Bull Run to Appomattox* (Baltimore, Md.: Fleet-McGinley Co., 1908); I. Hermann, *Memoirs of a Veteran* (Atlanta, Ga.: Byrd Printing Company, 1911); Wayland F. Dunaway, *Reminiscences of a Rebel* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1913); Robert Drummond Papers, Folder 1, Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. For examples of lingering southern bitterness over the prison controversy in the *Confederate Veteran* and *Southern Historical Society Papers*, see W. J. Bohon, "Rock Island Prison," *Confederate Veteran* 16 (July 1908): 346-47; George L. Christian, "Report of the History Committee," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 29 (January-December 1901): 99-131; George L. Christian, "Treatment and Exchange of Prisoners," *SHSP* 30 (January-December 1902): 77-104; R. A. Goodwin, "Memorial Sermon," *SHSP* 37 (January-December 1909): 338-347.

the Civil War generation in the years immediately following the Spanish-American War. As they passed from the scene, veterans on both sides rejoiced that they lived long enough to witness the incredible emerging power of the United States on the world stage. And as both sides met at battlefield reunions, no one could dispute the intensity and devotion displayed by the North and South. Regardless of side, all congratulated themselves that their martial spirit of their mutual brotherhood remained strong in the current generation of soldiers. But that shared recognition of what it meant to be a soldier only extended to the battlefield. In the prison camps of the Civil War, however, the vast majority of soldiers who endured capture saw only the one terrible half of the equation, the experiences that many could never forgive or forget. Before they died, prison survivors, and those dedicated to their memory, felt a duty to remind future Americans of the horrors of the prison camps, and thus, over and over, reopened the wounds anew.

The other reason for the lingering hostility over the prison controversy during this period centered on the very nature of reconciliation itself. The idea of reconciliation implies a mutual sacrifice, to be made by one or both parties, who admit to their sins and agree to attempt to put the past behind them. Again, from a national perspective, for many Americans from both sections, by the 1900s, given the incredible development of the United States, 1865 was a long time ago. But for the prison survivors and those, North and South, who remained emotionally invested in the topic, reconciliation could only become possible with a complete annihilation of the historical perspectives of the previous forty years. In the North, Union veterans, their health destroyed by their prison experiences, devoted their energies throughout the rest of their lives to denouncing the

brutalities of the Confederate prison system, and in the South, Confederate veterans did likewise against the Union prisons. Having ravaged them physically and mentally, the prison camps of both sides committed a final injustice against these men—defining their identities and hardening their prejudices throughout their final decades. That was why, by 1913, reconciliation on this particular subject remained impossible. Northern overtures of forgiveness, as demonstrated by the Andersonville monuments, came only on the condition that the South accept sole responsibility for the prison suffering. When the South rejected these terms, the rhetorical war resumed, this time for control of the historical legacy of Civil War prisons. Not until the Civil War prison survivors finally disappeared and Americans discovered anew the horrors of war would sincere reconciliation of the prison controversy truly occur.

CHAPTER 6: "A MORE PROPER PERSPECTIVE"

By 1914, the year World War I began, fifty years separated the Civil War generation, most of whom were long in their graves, from the terrible memories of their prison experiences. Despite the passage of time and veterans alike, those horrors still evoked emotions from Americans, as the controversy over the Wirz monument made apparent. But with the onset of the shocking carnage of the World War I, the even greater devastation of World War II, and the uneasy brinkmanship of the early Cold War, Americans of all sections gained a new perspective on the past tragedy of Civil War prisons. An understanding emerged that perhaps places like Andersonville and Elmira were not isolated examples of unparalleled human cruelty, but were, when compared to the Holocaust or internment in a Japanese prison camp in the 1940s, instead symptoms of the cost of modern war. For the first time, instead of overt sectional bias determining where the blame or guilt should fall for the 56,000 dead Civil War prisoners, the generations in the midst of learning anew man's destructive capabilities began to look beyond the emotions stirred up by the Civil War. The flood of prison accounts rehashing the old arguments slowed to a trickle, and then all but stopped, while the first objective attempts to re-assess the Civil War prisons appeared. The decreasing intensity of the old sectional perspectives testified to the critical, if depressing, realization that, when interpreted in the harsh new light of the wars of the early and mid-twentieth century, the prison experience of the Civil War did not represent a break from the past but perhaps instead the origins of a grim pattern.

In 1914, however, thanks to Woodrow Wilson's official policy of neutrality, the growing horror of World War I still seemed far away. Both North and South continued the process of honoring, or defending their treatment of, what had become, in the words of New York's Andersonville Monument Dedication Commission, which that year finally unveiled its long-delayed monument, "a handful of survivors of the many thousands of their comrades with whom they had shared unutterable privations in the war that saved the Union." Two years later, Minnesota added its monument to the collection at Andersonville, joining Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, and curiously, Tennessee in doing so. Confirming Tennessee's status as one of the states most divided by the Civil War, in 1915 Grand Army of the Republic veterans from the state dedicated a monument at Andersonville to the 712 Tennesseans who died there. The monument committee admitted that while the final, "somewhat inartistic" sculpture could not match the beauty of the other more lavishly funded northern monuments, some of which cost ten or twenty thousand dollars each to build, it accurately reflected the "rugged loyalty" of the Union men from Tennessee. Despite some embarrassment at raising only eight-hundred and sixty-six dollars for the project, seven hundred and fifty of which went to the construction of the monument, the finished product took its rightful place in Andersonville as a testimonial to the "patriotism of the men." The lack of financial support from many in Tennessee revealed the ongoing split between Union veterans who wanted to preserve the legacy of what they felt was unparalleled sacrifice and southerners

who remained frustrated with what they felt was unparalleled hypocrisy at the one-sided interpretation of Civil War prisons.¹

While state monuments dominated the Andersonville prison and cemetery grounds, the Women's Relief Corps continued to play an important role in memorializing the prison site as well. Between 1901 and 1928, the organization dedicated several small monuments at Andersonville, including one in 1915 honoring Clara Barton for her role in organizing the national cemetery and identifying the names of more than twelve thousand out of the thirteen thousand dead prisoners. In 1936, the WRC fittingly brought this period of monument construction to an end with the unveiling of the "8 State Monument," a tribute to the prisoners who died from states that had yet to build their own shrines. The monument recognized the nearly fifteen hundred victims of Andersonville from Delaware, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, Vermont, and West Virginia. With all the Union states officially present and accounted for at Andersonville, the process of honoring their sacrifice seemed complete. Several decades would pass before new monuments appeared.²

As the final state monuments went up at Andersonville, the few living Union survivors of Confederate prisons offered their testimony about what they endured in captivity. In 1922, Captain H. M. M. Richards compiled a tribute to one of the last prison

¹ *A Pilgrimage to the Shrines of Patriotism* (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1916), 25; see also "Report of the Minnesota Commission," Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; William Burnett, "Tennessee Monument," in "Andersonville Monuments," p. 2-3, Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

² William Burnett, "Clara Barton Monument," in "Andersonville Monuments," p. 1-2, Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; William Burnett, "8 State Monument," in "Andersonville Monuments," p. 1, Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

survivors, Samuel B. Trafford. One more time the old accusations surfaced, as Richards described the “deliberate attempt to starve the prisoners to death” and lamented how “many” captives “were driven insane” by the Confederacy’s treatment of them. When Peterson Cherry published his 1931 memoir, *Prisoner in Blue: Memories of the Civil War after 70 Years*, along with his discussion of the “awful confinement,” he included inflammatory drawings of prisoners being attacked by hounds and of Jefferson Davis trying to escape by disguising himself as a woman. Cherry’s rehashing of the traditional insults towards the South negated his attempt at magnanimity when he concluded, despite “my being chased by bloodhounds, my capture and terrible mistreatment,” the “Civil War is so far past that, no matter what was done by either side in the heat of conflict, such spiteful letters and acts should stop.” Appropriately then, Cherry’s account was one of the last Union prison memoirs that had, since the 1860s, recycled the same arguments of exceptional southern cruelty. By the 1930s, with the death of all the Union prisoners, the “spiteful” accusations finally started to diminish. Only a handful of edited prisoner accounts appeared between the late 1930s and 1960.³

³ H. M. Richards, “In Rebel Prisons: A Tribute to Samuel B. Stafford,” *Lebanon County Historical Society* 8 (1922): 275; Peterson H. Cherry, *Prisoner in Blue: Memories of the Civil War after 70 Years* (Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Co., Inc., 1931), 70. For additional Union accounts, see Charles A. Humphreys, *Field, Camp, Hospital and Prison in the Civil War, 1863-1865* (1918, reprint, Freeport, N.Y.: Books For Libraries Press, 1971); A. L. Spencer, *Reminiscences of the Civil War and Andersonville Prison* (Ottawa, Kans.: The Fulton Printing House, 1917); Daniel A. Langworthy, *Reminiscences of a Prisoner of War and his Escape* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Byron Printing Company, 1915); Emogene Niver Marshall, *Reminiscences of the Civil War and Andersonville Prison* (Sandusky, Ohio: Krewson’s Printers and Publishers, 1932); Walter R. Robbins, *War Record and Personal Experiences of Walter Raleigh Robbins* (N.p.: privately printed, 1923); David S. Whitenack, “Reminiscences of the Civil War: Andersonville,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 11 (June 1915): 128-143; Henry Devillez, “Reminiscences of the Civil War: Andersonville,” *Indiana Magazine of History*

In response to these last living Union prisoners, between 1914 and the 1930s, southerners, particularly Confederate prisoners and those in memorial organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy, continued to defend the South's treatment of prisoners. The central theme of their efforts remained combating the northern interpretation of the Civil War prison history that portrayed good Union prisons in contrast to bad Confederate prisons. The last survivors of Union prisons released accounts such as *The Life Record of H. W. Graber*, which discussed Graber's imprisonment at Camp Chase and Fort Delaware in part in a chapter entitled, "The Inhumanity of the Federal Government." These former Confederate prison narratives retained their bitterness towards the Union prisons as well. David E Johnston, in a 1914 memoir discussing his captivity at Point Lookout, recounted his amazement at losing nearly forty pounds in just over two months as a prisoner. "Carrying out the ratio," he stated, "if I had stayed there six months I would have weighed nothing." Like their Union counterparts, the ex-rebels still fervently believed in the singular brutality of their treatment and blamed the Union for destroying the exchange cartel. These ex-Confederates insisted that for these reasons, responsibility for the prison suffering belonged to the Union.⁴

11 (June 1915): 144-147; C. M. Destler, "An Andersonville Prison Diary," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 24 (March 1940): 56-76.

⁴ H. W. Graber, *The Life Record of H. W. Graber* (N.p.: privately printed, 1916), 136; David E. Johnston, *The Story of a Confederate Boy in the Civil War* (Portland, Ore.: Glass & Prudhomme Company, 1914), 341. For additional Confederate prison accounts, see John A. Wyeth, *With Sabre and Scalpel* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1914); Jno B. Castleman, *Active Service* (Louisville, Ky.: Courier-Journal Job Printing Co., Publishers, 1917); Absalom Grimes, *Confederate Mail Runner*, ed. M. M. Quaife (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1926); John Dooley, *Confederate Soldier*, ed. Joseph T. Durkin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cayuga Press, 1945).

After 1914, the loudest defenders of southern innocence in the prison controversy came not from Confederate veterans, but from the organizations that had spent the previous decades venerating the Lost Cause. Although after 1913, the *Southern Historical Society Papers* focused on reprinting the proceedings of the Confederate Congress, the *Confederate Veteran*, until its final issues in the early 1930s, remained steadfastly devoted to the southern perspective on Civil War prisons. Within its pages, month after month, articles appeared discussing the prison controversy. Some pieces focused on commemorative events, such as the memorial shaft placed at Fort Delaware by the United States Government in 1914 “to mark the burial place of 2,436 Confederate soldiers who died at Fort Delaware while prisoners of war,” while others, like “Seventeen Months in Camp Douglas,” described the “barbarity” of the Chicago prison. Periodic discussions of “Treatment of Prisoners of War,” and “Prison Horrors Compared” also indicated an ongoing desire to vindicate the South’s reputation in the historical controversy over the prisons.⁵

Other defenders of southern honor included stalwart groups such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Confederate Veterans, who joined the UDC in protecting the South’s good name. In the aftermath of World War I, in 1920, the SCV published *The Gray Book*, a “purely defensive” publication designed to fend off the “attacks and untruthful presentations of so-called history.” Although *The Gray Book* reflected the traditional general defensiveness of the South, in large part the publication was intended as a response to the parallel drawn between Wirz and the German atrocities

⁵ “Monument to Confederate Dead of Fort Delaware,” *Confederate Veteran* 22 (March 1914): 125; R. T. Bean, “Seventeen Months in Camp Douglas,” *CV* 22 (June 1914): 270; Bennett H. Young, “Treatment of Prisoners of War,” *CV* 26 (November 1918): 470, 501; “Prison Horrors Compared,” *CV* 27 (November 1919): 410-11.

of World War I. As a January 1919 *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* editorial declared, “it is certainly lamentable” that “the case of Major Henry Wirz” and “the execution of this unfortunate officer” was, during World War I, “instanced as a just precedent for the execution of Von Tirpitz and the other detested leaders of Germany.” To answer this grievous affront, the third (and longest) chapter of *The Gray Book*, just after two sections on the role of slavery in the Civil War, was “Treatment of Prisoners in the Confederacy.” Motivated by the comparison of “Confederate treatment of prisoners with Prussian outrages in Belgium and France,” the author of the chapter, Matthew Page Andrews, declared his regret that even now, after a reunited America had fought and won two major wars since the Civil War, the “sweeping condemnation of James G. Blaine,” delivered back in 1876, “is still, in a general way, believed by Americans.” That belief remained deeply rooted among many Americans, stated UCV General A. T. Goodwyn in a 1926 speech, because the execution of Captain Wirz “was a smoke screen to divert the attention of the good people of the North from the prisoners-of-war question, as well as to misrepresent the South in its treatment of prisoners.” The Northern government used this tactic, Goodwyn argued, because they were “conscious that they themselves were morally responsible for the painful conditions prevailing in prisons.” What the North called history, Andrews and Goodwyn called conspiracy. Overcoming the distortions of the past and restoring the South’s reputation depended on the active defense of the Confederacy’s prison record.⁶

⁶ “Major Henry Wirz,” *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 27 (January 1919): 145; The Gray Book Committee S. C. V., *The Gray Book* (N.p.: privately printed, 1920), 2-3, 18-19; General A. T. Goodwyn, *Memorial Address*, (Montgomery, Ala.: privately printed, 1926), 4.

Of all the defenders of the South after 1914, none demonstrated the vehemence of Mildred Lewis Rutherford, Historian General of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Throughout her career Rutherford used her position to address the historical injustices that continued against the South. In 1914, Rutherford gave a speech titled, “Wrongs of History Righted,” in which she identified seven glaring historical inaccuracies, ranging from the causes of the Civil War, to the character of the institution of slavery, to Andersonville prison, Henry Wirz, and the “Cruelties in Northern Prisons,” which “we of the South have borne too long and too patiently.” Against the ongoing condemnation of the North and “the falsehoods that have crept in and are still creeping in,” the only chance to combat this “anti-Southern atmosphere,” Rutherford declared, lay in restoring the “truths of history.” This process, she believed, would restore the South’s reputation.⁷

A few years later, in 1921, in her capacity as state historian for the Georgia UDC, Rutherford set out specifically to challenge the northern portrayal of Wirz as an inhuman devil. Like Matthew Andrews, Rutherford resented the connection of the Swiss-born Wirz, and therefore the Confederacy, to the German atrocities of World War I. Another factor motivating Rutherford was an incident of vandalism in the town of Andersonville. In May 1919, three U. S. soldiers painted part of the Wirz monument red, black, and yellow—the colors of the German flag. Instead of causing people to forget Wirz and his supposed misdeeds, World War I created anti-German sentiment and re-ignited the hatred towards the German-speaking Wirz. In an attempt to show the misguided nature of the continued anti-Wirz prejudice, Rutherford wrote a book defending Wirz, titled, *Facts and*

⁷ Mildred L. Rutherford, *Wrongs of History Righted*, (Savannah, Ga.: privately printed, 1914), 2-4.

Figures vs. Myths and Misrepresentations: Henry Wirz and the Andersonville Prison.

Primarily a compendium of excerpts from the trial of Wirz, his execution, and a review of the tumultuous process of creating and dedicating the Wirz monument, Rutherford's book, at least in its sources, broke little new ground. But Rutherford was more interested in argument, as her concluding question revealed: "is it any wonder that those boys of the North reading in France such vilification of the South should attempt to desecrate that Wirz monument when they returned to America?" By making the truth "known," Rutherford hoped to dispel what seemed to her and many southerners an irrational, and at this point in time, unnecessary, prejudice in the North against Wirz. Given her obvious pro-southern viewpoint, however, she convinced few not already in the fold.⁸

Rutherford's fanatical approach infused the UDC with the most endurance of all the southern memorial organizations on the subject of Civil War prisons. Throughout the late 1920s and on into the next two decades, the UDC continued to keep alive the fight for the southern interpretation of the Civil War prison camps. And occasionally, as in Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind*, these arguments still surfaced in mainstream popular culture. If "Andersonville was a name that stank in the North," Mitchell wrote, "so was Rock Island one to bring terror to the heart of any southerner who had relatives imprisoned there." Rutherford herself could not have stated the UDC's position more succinctly—if the South was bad, so too was the North. While the prison controversy obviously received only peripheral attention in Mitchell's sprawling depiction of the destruction wreaked upon the old South, these types of minor successes

⁸ *Americus Daily Times Recorder*, May 15, 1919, May 16, 1919, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Mildred L. Rutherford, *Facts and Figures vs. Myths and Misrepresentations: Henry Wirz and Andersonville Prison* (Athens, Ga.: privately printed, 1921), 52.

encouraged the UDC in its devotion to the cause. One speaker at a UDC gathering, Landon Bell, referred to “the inhuman policy of the military despotism,” a restatement of the old southern argument that blame for the prison suffering rested on the Union government for its refusal to exchange prisoners. In 1937, the UDC unveiled a monument to the approximately three thousand dead Confederate prisoners at Elmira, New York. The Elmira statue joined the existing Confederate monuments at Fort Delaware, Camp Chase, Johnson’s Island, and Camp Douglas as the UDC strove to balance history by equaling the amount of bronze, marble and granite deposited at Andersonville. At the 1939 annual convention of the UDC, the Georgia Division, preferring not to wait for the patient work of Mother Nature, announced its efforts “to correct un-true statements which have been carved in marble at Andersonville National Cemetery in Georgia.” Aside from this symbolic and ultimately fruitless effort, throughout the 1940s and 50s, as the strongest remaining voice of the pro-Confederate South, the UDC continued to publish articles in its monthly periodical such as “Henry Wirz, the Martyr.” But at this late date, closing in on nearly a century since Appomattox and with the original and most dedicated generations of Confederates and those devoted to their memory long since dead, even the surprising tenacity of the UDC made little real impact on the battle for the historical record except to remind southerners, especially those already hyper-sensitive to the negative perception of the South, of the ongoing discrepancy between the North and South on the prison controversy.⁹

⁹ The Margaret Mitchell quote comes from Edgar Stewart, review of *Camp Morton, 1861-1865: Indianapolis Prison Camp*, by Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *The American Historical Review* 47 (October 1941): 199; Landon C. Bell, *An Address at Johnson’s Island*, (N.p.: privately printed, 1929), 18; *Minutes of the Forty-Fourth Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (N.p.: privately

Despite the fervent sectional devotion displayed by a Rutherford or even Cherry, their traditional, and by the 1920s and 30s, redundant arguments served not to convince Americans that either the Union or Confederacy deserved all the blame for the prison tragedy, but instead catered to older generations who remembered the Civil War as the central event of their childhood or as the source of compelling stories told them by their Confederate or Union grandfathers. After the gruesome brutality of World War I divorced many Americans from their Progressive beliefs and shocked them into the modern world, the context of prison suffering changed rapidly, defying the attempts of the old defenders of true history to define the prison tragedy in shades of black and white at the very moment that those defenders finally faded from the stage. With the monuments built, memoirs written, and stories told, not only was there seemingly nothing left to say about the prison controversy, but, with the exception of a few southern defenders, no one left to protest as the subject faded from the public mind. Civil War prisons, and the war itself, began to lose relevance in contemporary American culture and popular interest in the subject correspondingly waned.

The drop in public interest in the prison controversy did not mean the disappearance of the subject of Civil War prisons—instead it represented a transition that often occurs in the construction of historical memory as events lose the context of their immediate relevance and become the property of the historians who interpret them.

Although most Americans forgot about or were oblivious to the once emotional tragedy,

printed, 1937), 185; *Minutes of the Forty-Sixth Annual Convention of the United Daughters of the Confederacy* (N.p.: privately printed, 1939), 299; Elizabeth L. Parker, “Henry Wirz, the Martyr,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* 12 (March 1949): 18. Parker’s article comes from Elizabeth L. Parker, “The Civil War Career of Henry Wirz and its Aftermath” (M. A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1948).

the fading intensity of public discourse also presented historians and writers with an opportunity for a more critical appraisal of Civil War prisons. As a result, a new generation of Civil War prison historiography began in the 1920s and 30s, as American scholars started to revisit the prisons, not to assign blame, but instead to seek understanding of, and perhaps solutions to, the universal problem of how to more appropriately treat future prisoners of war.

In 1924, Major Herbert Fooks wrote *Prisoners of War*, an examination of how prisoners of war fared in captivity from as far back as Philip of Macedon and the Punic Wars of Rome (not well) through the end of World War I (somewhat better). His comparative study included chapters on the “Immediate Consequences of Capture” and the “Organization of Enclosures” and discussed examples from the Crimean War, the Boer War, and the Russo-Japanese War, along with many other conflicts. But while Fooks briefly touched on the treatment of prisoners of war in these various episodes, he devoted most of his attention to the Civil War and World War I. He found that Civil War prisons “were poorly organized” compared to enclosures for World War I and “an extreme scarcity of food” plagued Civil War prisoners, in contrast to the more “fortunate” World War I prisoners. Fooks also noted unfortunate similarities between Civil War prisons and the camps of World War I; some prisoners in both wars suffered from maltreatment. Fooks admitted that because of the “civil strife” between 1861 and 1865, “the exact truth” of what happened at places like Andersonville remained somewhat clouded by “unpleasant memories, passions, and prejudices,” but nevertheless believed that both North and South desired a “humane” policy towards prisoners. Both sides, according to Fooks, simply fell victim to “the harsh customs of previous wars.” After

summarizing some of the sensational accusations made against the officials in charge of Union and Confederate prisons, Fooks compared the treatment of Civil War prisons to that of World War I. After exonerating the behavior of the United States towards German prisoners, Fooks overlooked his prior statements about the obscuring potential of emotion and denounced the German treatment of captives as “frightful.” While Fooks’ objectivity in making that statement remains open to interpretation, the degree of German guilt for various atrocities matters less than the fact that for the first time since the Civil War, somebody other than Henry Wirz and Edwin Stanton received the accusations of deliberately cruel treatment of prisoners. For Fooks, distinguishing between the Civil War prison systems of the North and South was less important than learning from the mistakes made by both sides, and his argument emphasized that the traditional sectional perception of either the Union or Confederacy as representing aberrant brutality towards prisoners no longer made as much sense when one considered the actions of the Germans.¹⁰

Another benefit of examining the prisons of past wars in a comparative manner appeared as Fooks assessed each conflict on its own merits, stripping each event of the bitterness endemic to the discussions of the past. When viewing the overall pattern of treatment of prisoners of war throughout history, Fooks concluded that there was reason for optimism on the subject. The days of killing or enslaving prisoners seemed safely in the past; “great progress has been made.” Here Fooks revealed that despite that progress,

¹⁰ Herbert C. Fooks, *Prisoners of War* (Federalsburg, Md.: The J. W. Stowell Printing Co., 1924), 263, 124, 145, 224, 143, 156, 152, 156, 178, 184. For an example of Southerners comparing the Union’s treatment of prisoners to the German atrocities of World War I, see anonymous editorial, “Major Henry Wirz,” *William and Mary Quarterly Historical Magazine* 27 (January 1919), 145-153.

the recent experiences of the Civil War and World War I showed that a “great task” remained—to ensure that future generations of prisoners fared better, so “that the lives of all those who have suffered and died to bring about these results shall not have been sacrificed in vain.” In the end, Fooks declared, in a touching if somewhat naïve statement, that only when all nations “bear in mind the golden rule,” a difficult concept to grasp during times of war, will prisoners of war finally receive the fair treatment they deserve. No matter how unrealistic the use of the golden rule might be as a protective shield against atrocities towards captives, Fooks’ book helped usher in the new era of Civil War prison historiography. Instead of adding to the vilification provoked by Civil War prisons in the past, Fooks recognized that, in the aftermath of World War I and its own controversy over prisoners of war, perhaps the old story of Civil War prisons contained some lesson about how to solve the universal and apparently age-old problem of how to improve as captors and captives. It was a lesson needed even in a modern world.¹¹

Like Major Fooks, William Hesseltine had World War I in his thoughts as he approached the subject of Civil War prisons, realizing that the reappearance of such horrors begged impartial investigation. As the first and, until recently, the only professional historian to analyze the topic of Civil War prisons, Hesseltine’s landmark 1930 work, *Civil War Prisons: A Subject in War Psychology* remains the essential historical treatment of the subject. From the opening page of the book, Hesseltine, born in Virginia but professionally trained at Ohio State University, assured readers of his objectivity. “The hatreds of those war times have been cooled,” he stated, and the war

¹¹ Fooks, *Prisoners of War*, 313.

finally “may be dealt with in a more proper perspective.” And, in the mind of his peers at least, Hesseltine succeeded in his attempt to handle the volatile subject delicately; reviewers hailed the “judicial spirit” and “cool detachment” of the “critical study.” Drawing primarily on evidence from *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* as well as the scores of published prison accounts, Hesseltine reduced the overall controversy over Civil War prisons into individual pieces, including the issue of prisoner exchange, conditions in the prison systems on both sides, and the heated emotions generated by the suffering. He then systematically and dispassionately explained the reasons behind the tragedy of the Civil War prison camps.¹²

Hesseltine began his dissection of the prison controversy by exploring the question of responsibility for the breakdown of the exchange cartel. Had the policy of exchange continued throughout the war, instead of halting in 1863, the camps at Andersonville and Elmira need never have existed, and so Hesseltine spent over a third of the book sorting out how exactly the exchange process came to an end. Ever since the 1860s, northerners argued that the Confederacy’s refusal to recognize the rights of African-American prisoners prompted the Union’s principled stand of exchanging no prisoners with the Confederacy unless black troops received the same treatment as white Union soldiers. Southerners fired back that the Union government always opposed the

¹² William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; repr., Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), xxiii. On Hesseltine’s background, training, and motivation, see William Blair, “Foreword,” in *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology*, by William B. Hesseltine (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1998), ix-xx. Charles W. Ramsdell, review of *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology*, by William B. Hesseltine, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17 (December 1930): 481; Thomas Robson Hay, review of *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology*, by William B. Hesseltine, *The American Historical Review* 36 (January 1931): 455.

cartel because it returned Confederate soldiers to the front lines and slowed down Grant's strategy of attrition and that the North used the rights of African-Americans purely as a smokescreen to distract northern families from the fact that Lincoln and Stanton made conscious decisions to sacrifice their sons in Southern prisons. On the cartel issue, Hesseltine clearly sided with the southern perspective, claiming that the Union government waited "until the country showed signs of restlessness" with the lack of exchange to declare the South's policy towards captured African-American soldiers as "reason for the non-exchange of prisoners."¹³

But if Hesseltine favored the Confederate position on the issue of exchange, he took a different stance on the conditions experienced in the camps of both combatants. Given that "both belligerents" lacked proper "organization for the care of prisoners of war," Hesseltine believed that one of the major components of the story of Civil War prisons was the scrambling of North and South to create a prison system from scratch, first in 1861 as prisoners began arriving behind the lines, and then all over again in late 1863 and 1864 as the war reached its destructive peak just as the exchange agreement collapsed. Despite the lack of foresight on both sides, Hesseltine credited the North with executing "definite plans" to organize its "prison system" and acknowledged the "military administration" expertise of the officers in charge in the North. Of the Confederate "prison system," Hesseltine described it as "less worthy" and as "the result of a series of accidents." Not until "the last months of the war," far too late to make a difference, did the Confederacy finally establish a proper administrative structure for its prisons. This clear discrepancy, Hesseltine argued, led directly to the terrible suffering in

¹³ Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 113.

southern prisons, which Hesselstine thoroughly explored in the individual chapters “Libby and Belle Isle,” “Andersonville” and “Other Southern Prisons.”¹⁴

In his emphasis on “organization,” “plans,” and “administration,” Hesselstine offered a novel theory about the reason behind the tragedy of Civil War prisons—bureaucratic inefficiency. This organizational approach represented a major break from the decades of argument over the relative guilt or innocence of individuals like Wirz, Davis, and Stanton. What Hesselstine suggested was that those involved in the historical battle of vilifying or defending these polarizing figures were caught in a circular and ultimately unanswerable debate. Individuals certainly should and could have done more, Hesselstine believed, but the widespread scale of the suffering testified to the need for a deeper explanation of the “prison system.” Andersonville, as the worst individual prison of the Civil War, provided Hesselstine with powerful evidence supporting the organizational explanation by showing how that system failed. Hesselstine described, how, from its origins, “execution of the plan” to build a prison at Andersonville suffered from “distance,” “delay,” and a lack of men and supplies. “In the midst of the preparations for equipping the prison,” the Confederate government started shipping prisoners to the Georgia prison “before the preparations for their reception had been completed.” From Hesselstine’s perspective, prisoners accumulated and died at Andersonville because of poor planning and bureaucratic mismanagement, not inhuman cruelty.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ibid., 34, xxv, 114, 133, 159.

¹⁵ Ibid., 135, 133-158.

Hesseltine's argument that the Confederate prison system lacked organization compared to the Union's camps brought him to the final piece of the prison controversy. Why, if the South was derelict in its duty to Union captives, were the death rates of Confederates in northern prisons even comparable? "Polemical" northern writers, Hesseltine, "were faced with a problem when they came to an enumeration of deaths to prove their thesis that the South deliberately murdered prisoners. The numbers given in the official reports were not sufficiently large for those who desired to prove deliberate murder." As Hesseltine reported, traditional Union estimates placed mortality rates in Union prisons at twelve percent and Confederate prisons at seventeen percent. Confederate defenders insisted that the casualty rates stood at twelve percent in Union prisons and only nine percent in Confederate prisons. Whatever the real figures, however, what struck Hesseltine was that the death rates were markedly similar, a finding that undermined the validity of the organizational explanation given his demonstration of the superiority of the Northern "prison system." Hesseltine concluded that while organizational failings explained the Confederacy's mistreatment of prisoners, another rationale was needed to adequately explain the Union's almost identically poor prison record.¹⁶

Hesseltine found his answer in the fashionable contemporary theory of psychoanalysis, which as historian Peter Novick states, scholars of Hesseltine's era believed to be "devoted to unearthing objective truth." According to Hesseltine, the grim record of the more prepared, wealthier, and provisioned Union prisons could only be explained as the result of "war psychosis," a psychological condition which he described

¹⁶ Ibid., 254-256.

as inspiring “the fiercest antagonism toward that country’s enemies.” As the war continued and northerners heard more about the sufferings taking place in Confederate prisons, “the inevitable reaction of the prisoners and the people of the North was to demand that the prisoners in the Northern prisons should be given a similar treatment.” In other words, the psychological desire for revenge caused the public and Union officials to treat their prisoners badly by reducing rations and withholding supplies when, unlike in the South, the food and supplies existed to properly care for the Confederate captives. So thorough was “war psychosis,” Hesseltine observed, that even as conditions deteriorated in the Union prison system, northerners still believed that “prisoners in the Northern prisons were accorded excellent treatment.” One of the most remarkable features of Hesseltine’s “war psychosis” involved its durability. After Appomattox, “war psychosis” still contained such emotional power that it continued to fuel the prison controversy, as demonstrated throughout the late nineteenth century with the execution of Wirz, the waving of the bloody shirt, and the appearance of scores of prisoner memoirs. Hesseltine thus categorized the postwar years of northern indignation over the prisons as a sincere, if hypocritical, reflection of the passion stirred up by the prison controversy during the war. Hesseltine’s “study in war psychology” also once again attacked the traditional argument that evil individuals bore responsibility for the tragedy and instead confirmed the modern, more scientifically nuanced perception of how the world worked. Hesseltine’s revisionist combination of objective psychoanalytic theory and the impersonal dominance of large bureaucratic organizations, with their capacity for mismanagement, made for a compelling case when compared to the old accusations of singular brutality.¹⁷

¹⁷ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the*

If, in his new theories behind the tragedy of Civil War prisons, Hesseltine leaned towards the southern interpretation of the prison controversy, one of the main reasons could be found in an article he published in *The Journal of Southern History* in 1935, titled “The Propaganda Literature of Confederate Prisons.” In it Hesseltine expressed the understandable frustration he felt during his years researching his ground-breaking book as he sorted through the hundreds of memoirs that prisoners published, almost all of whom, he argued, “took up a reminiscent pen” in order “to convince his readers of the essential brutality of his captors.” Hesseltine briefly traced how the Union government publicized the suffering in Confederate prisons during the war as well as how the post-war government continued to publish reports and investigations rehashing the treatment of prisoners into the late 1860s. These actions, Hesseltine argued, inflamed northerners and “made the recounting of atrocity stories an act of high patriotism.” From Reconstruction throughout the late nineteenth century, as Union prisoners leveled exaggerated charges of Confederate brutality in their memoirs, they therefore drew much of their inspiration from official sources and the desire to defend the government, just as they had on the battlefield between 1861 and 1865.¹⁸

The focus of Hesseltine’s research on the prison systems and the immediate aftermath of the war naturally led to his somewhat pro-southern interpretation of Civil War prisons, because northern voices exclusively dominated the debate over the prisons

American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 558; Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 172, 177, 175-76.

¹⁸ William B. Hesseltine, “The Propaganda Literature of Confederate Prisons,” *The Journal of Southern History* 1 (February-November 1935): 56, 61. Another scholar, Chester Dunham, recounts the escalating sentiment in the North over the prison controversy, this time from the perspective of the clergy. See Chester Forrester Dunham, *The Attitude of the Northern Clergy toward the South* (Toledo, Ohio: The Gray Company, Publishers, 1942), 150-164.

at least until the mid to late 1870s. This one-sided discourse failed to reflect accurately the more ambiguous truth about the prisons. In his attempt at objectivity, Hesseltine overcorrected in an effort to compare more fairly what happened in Andersonville and the other Confederate prisons to Elmira and the Union camps. By emphasizing the North's psychological desire for revenge, Hesseltine made the Union prison casualties seem more deliberate when compared to the inept bungling that characterized the disorganized Confederate prison system. But Hesseltine did not excuse the actions of the Confederacy. In his final analysis, both sides bore responsibility for the disaster because both the Union and Confederacy played politics with the lives of their men during the negotiation and then collapse of the exchange cartel. Neither made appropriate preparations to handle the increasing volumes of prisoners and the Confederacy, in Hesseltine's view, demonstrated flagrant negligence towards their prisoners. He insisted that despite the deteriorating conditions in the South, the Confederacy should have done better. In succumbing to "war psychosis," Union officials also deserved blame for intentionally causing the suffering of their Confederate prisoners while igniting hostility over the prisons that still lingered as Hesseltine wrote. Neither section, from Hesseltine's point of view, despite all their attempts to do so, could still legitimately contend that their prison record truly improved on their opponent's. That recognition was Hesseltine's most important achievement. Although it took until 1930, Americans who desired an impartial analysis of what took place in Civil War prisons, one that recognized the nature of modern war in all its sad complexity and attempted a more scientific evaluation of the responsibility for the suffering, appreciated Hesseltine's candor.

Between 1930 and 1960, historians, when commenting on the topic of Civil War prisons, based their arguments primarily on Hesselstine's work. One scholar, Richard Hemmerlein, offered his own interpretation of the prisons in his 1934 book *Prisons and Prisoners of the Civil War*. Although poorly researched compared to Hesselstine's volume (Hemmerlein did not even acknowledge Hesselstine in his brief bibliography), Hemmerlein took both North and South to task for abandoning "all human consideration" in caring for their prisoners, and, like Hesselstine, concluded that both sides deserved their share of blame. A more reputable historian, Ella Lonn, cited Hesselstine when she defended Henry Wirz in *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, published in 1940. Lonn claimed that Wirz, in part because of his Swiss birth, made an easy, if undeserved, target for the "inflamed war feeling" of the North and that his execution, or "sacrifice," as she termed it, occurred solely to satisfy northern demands for retribution. In a review of Lonn's book, R. Walter Coakley agreed with her that Wirz was "unjustly cited." Although not exonerating Wirz of all blame, Lonn followed Hesselstine's lead in arguing that responsibility in the matter of Civil War prisons, with all of its dimensions, could not possibly in fairness rest on the shoulders of one particular individual. As another scholar, Dr. William Maxwell, pointed out in his 1956 study, *Lincoln's Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission*, the Sanitary Commission bore some of the responsibility for stirring up northern passion over the prisons with the release of its 1864 report on the "privations and sufferings" taking place in the Confederacy. Maxwell called the report, which attacked southern prisons while absolving northern camps of any wrongdoing, a "diatribe" and a "false position." The intensity of the war, Maxwell explained, in a statement reminiscent of "war psychosis," caused the

commission to lose “their sense of fairness and objectivity, forgetting the suffering of Confederates in Northern camps.” And one of Hesseltine’s own graduate students at the University of Wisconsin, William Fletcher Thompson, declared in his 1960 book, *The Image of War*, the “conditions within the prison camps of both belligerents were frightful.”¹⁹

Other historians relied even more closely on Hesseltine’s arguments. One of the foremost chroniclers of the Reconstruction-era “bloody shirt” phenomenon, Reinhard Luthin, adopted Hesseltine’s psychological vocabulary when he declared in 1960 that the goal of northern Republicans after the Civil War was to keep “the war psychosis alive.” Republicans succeeded at this, in part, Luthin believed, because of the efforts of such men as James G. Blaine, who in 1876 famously “delivered an incredibly foul verbal attack” on the subject of Jefferson Davis’ responsibility for the horrors of Andersonville. Public reminders of Andersonville and other Confederate prisons cemented northern popular support for the Republican party, Luthin suggested, and helped preserve the unity

¹⁹ Richard F. Hemmerlein, *Prisons and Prisoners of the Civil War* (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1934), 112; Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 275; R. Walter Coakley, review of *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, by Ella Lonn, *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* 22 (January 1942): 78; William Q. Maxwell, *Lincoln’s Fifth Wheel: The Political History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1956), 308; William F. Thompson, *The Image of War* (1959, repr., Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 92. For another perspective on the U. S. Sanitary Commission, see William Y. Thompson, “The U. S. Sanitary Commission,” *Civil War History* 2 (June, 1956): 41-63. Other examples of Hesseltine influenced works include George G. Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), No. 20-213; H. H. Cunningham, *Doctors in Gray: The Confederate Medical Service* (1958, repr., Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Frank Friedel, “General Orders 100 and Military Government,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 32 (March 1946): 541-556; Edward Steere, “Genesis of American Graves Registration,” *Military Affairs* 12 (Autumn 1948): 149-161.

of the wartime period. The work of another scholar, Frank Byrne, also revealed the debt that historians owed to Hesseltine. In his 1958 article, "Libby Prison: A Study in Emotions," Byrne explored the implications of Hesseltine's "war psychosis" theory. Byrne concluded that, during the war, the raw emotions stirred up by the Richmond prison resulted from the "interaction of the guards' fear and the prisoners' hate." Libby prison became, at its core, "a cauldron of emotions," and the intensity of feeling, as Hesseltine and Luthin suggested, would continue to linger long after 1865 in the form of "war psychosis." By 1960 then, among serious historians at least, Hesseltine's psychological theory of "war psychosis" had been met with widespread acceptance, as had his objective insistence that the tragedy of Civil War prisons resulted from the actions of both the Union and Confederacy. And, of equal if not more importance, Hesseltine's example also started to inspire those outside the inner circle of professional historians.²⁰

One example of the increasing influence of more rigorous scholarship on the subject of Civil War prisons was Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore's 1940 history, *Camp Morton, 1861-1865: Indianapolis Prison Camp*. Although neither was a professional historian, Winslow and Moore based their study of Camp Morton on solid documentation and traced the wartime history of the facility from its origins as a recruiting and training ground for Union soldiers to its eventual conversion to a prison camp for Confederate captives. In its conception, the idea of a history of an individual

²⁰ Reinhard H. Luthin, "Waving the Bloody Shirt: Northern Political Tactics in Post-Civil War Times," *The Georgia Review* 14 (Spring 1960): 64, 67. See also Reinhard H. Luthin, "Some Demagogues in American History," *The American Historical Review* 57 (October 1951): 40-41. Frank L. Byrne, "Libby Prison: A Study in Emotions," *The Journal of Southern History* 24 (November 1958): 444.

prison broke no new ground. But unlike earlier camp histories, such as Clay Holmes' 1912 work on Elmira, Winslow and Moore made no apologies about the difficult conditions at Camp Morton and openly discussed the prison's shortcomings, including the role that the Union government played in the suffering. Many of the deaths of the winter of 1865, they argued, resulted "from the haggling over hospitals and winter quarters" for the prisoners, as poor communications between the officers in charge of the camp and Washington prevented proper preparations. Winslow and Moore's focus on the managerial and bureaucratic nature of the problems that led to prisoner misery at Camp Morton once again reflected the influence of Hesselstine's organizational interpretation of Civil War prisons, and the honesty of their assessment led to favorable reviews in both *The Journal of Southern History* and *The American Historical Review*. Anyone interested in the subject of "man's inhumanity to man," reviewer Edgar Stewart declared, "would find Winslow and Moore's book 'well worth the attention.'"²¹

Thus led by Hesselstine, historians after 1930 rejected the old sectional arguments about Civil War prisons, of one-sided innocence or guilt, and instead approached this particular example of man's inhumanity to man with the objective goal of more faithfully chronically and explaining the horrors of Civil War prison camps in terms of scientific theory. To the credit of these scholars, their efforts, coinciding with the deaths of the fierce sectional defenders, started the process of understanding Civil War prisons in the

²¹ Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *Camp Morton, 1861-1865: Indianapolis Prison Camp* (1940, repr., Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1995), 122; Stewart, review of *Camp Morton, 1861-1865: Indianapolis Prison Camp*, 199; Oscar O. Winther, review of *Camp Morton, 1861-1865: Indianapolis Prison Camp*, by Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *The Journal of Southern History* 7 (August 1941): 413. For another example of an objective assessment of Civil War prison by an amateur historian, see Hugh P. Williamson, "Military Prisons in the Civil War," *The Bulletin* 16 (July 1960): 329-332.

modern context of the 1920s and 30s. But the victory for objectivity soon proved insufficient. As the 1930s ended with the outbreak of World War II, an even more appalling story of man's inhumanity to man, historians began, in an overt response to the numbing violence of the fight against fascism in the 1940s, to address the parallels between such atrocities as the Holocaust, the Bataan Death March, and the prisons of the Civil War as all being symptomatic of the destructive capacity of modern war. The context provided by World War II lent a further gravitas to the subject of Civil War prisons. The dramatic escalation of the scale of atrocity frightened scholars and alleviated any lingering sentiment that the treatment of Civil War prisoners remained a quaint, abstract historical problem. Historians and writers turned with a new sense of urgency to the story of Andersonville, not to attribute blame, but in a desperate search for understanding. If the process of atrocity could be explained, then it might be prevented in the future.

In response to this imperative, the most eloquent discussion of the commonalities between the suffering that took place in Civil War prisons and the brutality of Nazi Germany came from the pen of James Bonner, chair of the history department at the Georgia State College for Women. In 1947, Bonner published "War Crimes Trials, 1865-67," in which he discussed the postwar controversy over the treatment of Jefferson Davis and, of course, the trial and execution of Henry Wirz. From the outset, however, Bonner made no effort to disguise his real motivation—the troubling connection between 1865 America and 1940s Germany, and in particular the question of how to accomplish justice in the aftermath of atrocity, whether at Andersonville or Auschwitz. "Thoughtful Americans," Bonner wrote, "attempting to find a rational submission to the reality of the

Nuremberg trial,” would unfortunately find little “tranquility of mind” from “our previous experiences with war crimes and atrocities.” Bonner referred to the concept of “war psychosis” and described how it unjustly fueled Wirz’ execution and raised the fear that history was repeating itself in the Nuremberg trials. The “atrocities stories” of the Civil War, Bonner argued, “bore some of the flavor of Dachau and Belsen,” and Wirz “received more venomous invectives” in 1865 than “Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi Gestapo chief” in the 1940s. Although Bonner agreed with the outcome of the Nuremberg trial, as it sealed the “well-deserved fate” of “a group of evil men,” the self-congratulatory attitude of America and its allies throughout the process troubled him. In assuming that they were somehow incapable of such atrocities, Americans ignored the precedent of Civil War prisons at their peril. “Will history,” Bonner asked, “accept and justify the legality of the war crimes commission, or will future generations associate its proceeding with ex post facto and fait accompli achievements,” and can we ever feel assured “that retributory crimes of vengeance will not be repeated—that two wrongs do not make a right?” Americans needed to remember the painful lessons of Civil War prisons and redouble their efforts for humanity and justice in the future, Bonner suggested, because what happened in Nazi Germany was not so far removed from the barbarities of the Civil War. To Bonner, the Holocaust and Andersonville, although separated by time and space, confirmed the fundamental evil inherent in modern society. The only defense against the shockingly easy acceptance of atrocity, Bonner warned, lay in constant vigilance—repeatedly reminding ourselves to guard against the mistakes of the past.²²

²² James C. Bonner, “War Crimes Trials, 1865-1867,” *Social Science* 22 (April 1947): 128, 130, 131, 134.

The influence of World War II also appeared in the work of one of the most prolific historians of the Civil War, Bruce Catton. Like Bonner, Catton viewed the story of Civil War prisons as a combination of Hesseltine's interpretation that both sides bore responsibility for the disaster and that Andersonville and the other camps remained relevant to the present as a cautionary tale about the nature of modern war. In a 1959 *American Heritage* article, Catton enthusiastically reminded his readers that "the passage of the years has at last brought a new perspective." Andersonville remained "the worst of a large number of war prisons," but all prisons, North and South, "were almost unbelievably bad." "The real culprit" for the suffering, Catton declared, instead of "Wirz, the luckless scapegoat," was "war itself." Catton's focus on the inherent evil of war reflected a sense of weariness with the tragic development of world events. By 1959, with the experience of the Civil War, World War I, World War II and the Korean War, Catton and many Americans recognized that, starting with the Civil War, in each and every instance war meant the infliction of unspeakable cruelty, no matter when or where it took place. "If the people of the North in the fall of 1865 had used the language of the late 1940s," Catton argued, "they would have said that Captain Wirz was a war criminal who had been properly convicted and then had been hanged for atrocious war crimes." The only difference between 1865 and 1945, then, was that in a world unfamiliar with the atrocities to come in the twentieth century, Wirz had been demonized and executed as both a miserable excuse for a human being and as a symbol of everything wrong with the South. Given the decades of ongoing bitterness over the prison controversy, Wirz' death,

in Catton's words, "did not help anybody very much." No one would feel better about the atrocities of 1865, and in turn the atrocities of the 1940s, except with time.²³

Throughout the decades to come, historians would search for links between the atrocities of different generations in an effort to find understanding, if not meaning, in what happened in Civil War prisons. But, as is often the case, historians did not engage in this quest by themselves. By the late 1950s, particularly in the field of literature, two authors in particular, MacKinlay Kantor and Saul Levitt, were already inspired, if such a word could be appropriate, to revisit the story of Civil War prisons, and through it, perhaps come to terms with the awful reality of the present and find some explanation as to why such horrors continued to haunt humanity. Their mission also testified to how the meaning of history and memory had changed by the 1950s. For the Civil War generation and their immediate descendants, contesting the prison controversy provided ammunition for the ongoing rhetorical war about the justice of the Union or Confederate cause. Beginning with Hesseltine, however, historians and writers, who in theory benefited from emotional distance from the prison tragedy, remembered Civil War prisons instead as a chance to investigate and perhaps even understand the contemporary horror of modern war. The influence of this new purpose of memory clearly existed in the work of both Kantor and Levitt. Although they wrote about Andersonville, the shadow of the Holocaust and its troubling implications appeared throughout their books.

In 1955, the first of these two authors, the famous novelist MacKinlay Kantor, published *Andersonville*. By 1955, the native Iowan had already established a sterling

²³ Bruce Catton, "Prison Camps of the Civil War," *American Heritage* 10 (August 1959): 97, 5. Along with Catton and Bonner, another defender of Wirz was Darrett B. Rutman, "The War Crimes and Trial of Henry Wirz," *Civil War History* 6 (June 1960): 117-133.

reputation in the literary world based on the merits of his many novels, most notably *Long Remember*, a 1934 retelling of the Battle of Gettysburg that, before Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels*, was widely considered the best fictional description of the battle, and *Glory for Me*, a story of the reintegration of World War II veterans back into American society, which was adapted to the big screen in 1946's Academy Award-winning *The Best Years of our Lives*. But for all his success on these and other projects, *Andersonville* represented Kantor's crowning achievement. The idea of a novel about the notorious prison camp first occurred to Kantor in 1930, the same year Hesseltine, with whom Kantor credited a "specific approach to the topic of Andersonville," published *Civil War Prisons*. Over the next twenty-five years, in fits and starts, Kantor researched and worked on the manuscript. After so many years, Kantor finally summoned the will to finish the book after a visit to the Andersonville prison grounds in late 1953. In an October 1955 article written for the *New York Times Book Review*, Kantor described how at five o'clock in the morning he stood at the site of the old stockade and listened to the ghosts of the thousands of dead Union prisoners. "They had come," he wrote, "to tell me that there must be no compromise. I had invoked their name and thought for nearly twenty-five years; they were thronging at last to force me to the task. I was crying. I had not cried in many years, but now I was crying." That sincere emotion permeated the seven hundred plus pages of the finished novel.²⁴

Although emotional, as scholar Jeff Smithpeters suggests in a recent dissertation, *Andersonville* was also an extremely calculated novel. In investigating Kantor's motivation for the novel, Smithpeters asserts that Kantor, who visited the concentration

²⁴ *The New York Times Book Review*, October 30, 1955; MacKinlay Kantor, *Andersonville* (1955, repr., New York: Plume, 1993), 761.

camp at Buchenwald near the close of World War II, approached the topic of Andersonville and atrocity in general through the lens of the Holocaust. By telling the story of Andersonville, Smithpeters argues, Kantor used the setting of the Civil War “to sift mid-20th century discourses into a more digestible substance.” The Holocaust also made *Andersonville* more accessible to the public by providing a natural frame of reference. The power of Kantor’s novel derived in part from the natural connections readers made between the images of German concentration camps and the descriptions of emaciated Union prisoners. Indeed, as Smithpeters declares, Kantor counted on evoking the Holocaust, not to further denounce the Germans, but instead to facilitate American understanding of the universal nature of atrocity. A pragmatic sense of contemporary politics motivated Kantor, according to Smithpeters, to encourage forgiveness of the Germans, who by the 1950s had been transformed from enemy to Cold War ally. Andersonville thus became Kantor’s subject because he wanted to establish “that a real concentration camp and a semblance of a Holocaust had happened in America.”²⁵

Despite the clear influence of the Holocaust on the novel, at the core of *Andersonville* lay Kantor’s mission of recreating as faithfully as possible the historical sequence of events from the selection of the prison site through the removal of all the prisoners and the arrest of Henry Wirz. Although the inhabitants of the town of Andersonville were fictitious, as were some of the prisoners, Kantor prided himself on creating “portraits” of the Confederate prison officials and many of the prisoners who actually suffered in the stockade. But suffering belonged not solely to the thousands of

²⁵ Jeff Smithpeters, “‘To the Latest Generation:’ Cold War and Post Cold War U.S. Civil War Novels in their Social Contexts” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2005), 31, 58.

Yankees prisoners—Kantor also presented a moving and convincing portrayal of how the war slowly destroyed the town of Andersonville and degraded the Confederate officials and guards in charge of the madness taking place inside the stockade. The eminent historian Henry Steele Commager proclaimed the novel “the greatest of our Civil War novels” and praised it for creating a sense of how the prison “submerges” all involved, whether prisoner, guard, or observer “in a common humanity or inhumanity.” Lawrence Thompson, another scholar, complemented Kantor for achieving “Olympian objectivity” towards “human beings caught in the maelstrom of war.” While “no student of Civil War history need be told that Buchenwald and Belsen would have had no special horrors for anyone lucky enough to have survived the pest-ridden valley at Anderson Station in central Georgia,” Thompson declared, the sublime nature of Kantor’s achievement stems from the author’s desire “to find out what made Wirz and millions of his contemporaries behave as they did.”²⁶

From a purely literary standpoint, Kantor’s novel qualified as an unabashed success. Not only was the book universally acclaimed and selected as the *New York Times* November 1955 Book-of-the-month, it won Kantor the Pulitzer Prize. But viewed from a historical perspective, *Andersonville* also contained an important flaw. One of the strengths of the novel, noted correctly by both Commager and Thompson, centered on Kantor’s ability to recreate a world so corrupt that a place like Andersonville could exist even though it horrified those who encountered it. Kantor’s vision of Andersonville showed how barbaric supposedly civilized people become when officials and guards

²⁶ Kantor, *Andersonville*, 761; *The New York Times Book Review*, October 30, 1955; Lawrence S. Thompson, “The Civil War in Fiction,” *Civil War History* 2 (March 1956): 93-94; see also Charles T. Miller, ed., “Book Reviews,” *Civil War History* 1 (December 1955): 431-434.

forget their shared humanity with their prisoners, when captives prey upon each other, when bureaucracy pushes paper instead of solves problems, and when the local townspeople do nothing to ameliorate the suffering. Kantor implied that, the long decades of sectional arguments notwithstanding, neither the Confederacy nor the Union alone deserved excoriation on the specific issues of exchange or treatment of prisoners but instead both sides together merited universal condemnation for allowing such a tragedy. The power of this insight derived from recognition of the repetitious pattern of atrocity in the modern era, of the persistence of apathy, blind obedience, and misguided patriotism, and the role these human failings played in history from the prisons of the Civil War to the concentration camps of the Holocaust. While *Andersonville* thus pinned responsibility for the suffering on all involved, à la Hesseltine, because Kantor was a novelist and not a historian, he also took certain liberties in the interest of a good story. And every good story needs a villain.

In the case of *Andersonville*, Kantor had two tailor-made historical figures for the role: John Winder and Henry Wirz. Clearly influenced by Hesseltine's concept of "war psychosis," Kantor depicted his villains as psychologically disturbed. Winder was insane with "hatred" for his father, whose failed generalship led to the British capture of Washington in the War of 1812, and the national government, which "became a composite demon" because it refused to recognize his military accomplishments and held his father's failures against him, an injustice that turned Winder's "blood to black." "John Winder," Kantor wrote, "desired that children should be trained to scorn the National government as he scorned it, to loathe the Yankees as he loathed them, to crush all supporters of that Faith as one would snap the shell of a cockroach with his boot sole

and feel the shell pop.” This irrational hatred finally led Winder “to kill as many of the prisoners as he could. It was as simple as that.” Wirz, meanwhile, crazed with pain from a wound at Seven Pines, thinks of the prisoners not as people but as animals. Although, also in keeping with Hesseltine, Kantor infuses Wirz with the organizational desire to bring a spirit of “order” to the administration of the prison, Wirz’s psychological failings lead him to view the Union captives as “fast-bred rodents.” Kantor also exaggerates Wirz’ tendency to lapse into his native German, and so he punctuates Wirz’ dialogue with “ja,” “nein” and “ach” (which although not a word sounds stereotypically German), along with other German words. Near the conclusion of the novel, Union troops arrive at Andersonville to arrest Wirz. After years speaking English in times of peace and war, Kantor has Wirz pretend not to be able to understand English. While Kantor’s novel warns us of the inherent predilection of man for evil, by portraying Winder and Wirz, the two men most directly involved in the running of the camp, as insane, he dilutes that message. By making the immorality of Winder and Wirz result from their personal demons and individual failings, Kantor undermines his criticism of the capacity of modern government and society for evil, and, perhaps unintentionally, provides the old excuse that while modern society may allow such horrors it takes inherently depraved men to accomplish them. And by constantly having the Swiss-born Wirz muttering in German Kantor overtly seeks to link the atrocities of Andersonville with the Holocaust, which although a valid point, also deflects attention from the fact that while what happened at Andersonville paralleled the disintegration of German society into brutality, the events of the Civil War resulted from the cracks of our own civilized veneer. The distorted depiction of these two key characters has the important effect of lessening any

specific criticism of American values or society, unsurprising perhaps given that Kantor wrote in an era of conformity. Although the undeniably powerful novel succeeds despite these flaws, part of its appeal lay in how Kantor simultaneously decried modern society while subtly pardoning Americans from worrying that such horrors could ever occur here again.²⁷

In its timing and complexity, *Andersonville* revealed the degree to which the point of interpreting Civil War prisons had changed. Ostensibly a novel about the treatment of Civil War prisoners, Kantor's novel combined numerous perspectives on the prison controversy in that it recognized but refused to pander to the traditional animosity inherent in the material, nodded to the groundbreaking interpretations of Hesseltine, and recast the prison's history in the context of the Holocaust and the Cold War. The ambition of *Andersonville* may or may not, as Smithpeters believes, have reflected Kantor's goal to become America's "spokesman," but it certainly showed Kantor's belief that the tragedy of the past provided a means to understand the horrors of the present. At its core, *Andersonville* offered, in the spirit of Hesseltine and Bonner, a cautionary tale about the fragile nature of morality, the insidious capacity for evil inherent in humanity, and the need for vigilance against future atrocity.²⁸

With the celebration of Kantor's novel in the form of awards, recognition and publicity, along with its timely moral, *Andersonville* garnered deserved attention across America in 1955. As an unintended consequence, the popularity of the novel also generated an unprecedented wave of interest in Andersonville and the subject of Civil

²⁷ Kantor, *Andersonville*, 140, 142, 168, 171, 344, 739-740.

²⁸ Smithpeters, "To the Latest Generation," 29.

War prisons. Between 1955 and 1960, academic journals like *Civil War History*, *Nebraska History* and *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* all published previously unpublished wartime journals or post-war reminiscences of Civil War prisoners. In the December 1956 issue of *Civil War History*, Ovid Futch's article about the Andersonville raiders, the six Union prisoners who terrorized their fellow captives, appeared, followed soon after by Virgil Carrington Jones' June 1958 piece, "Libby Prison Break," an account of how hundreds of Union prisoners, some fifty-nine of whom succeeded, plotted their escape from the notorious prison. And as Richard Barksdale Harwell prepared his two volumes, *The Confederate Reader* and *The Union Reader*, published respectively in 1957 and 1958, he included the testimony of prisoners from both sections. Clearly *Andersonville* seemed to spark a new public interest in the topic of Civil War prisons, although Kantor's influence was not inevitably positive. In their 1960 textbook *The New Nation, 1865-1917*, Columbia University historians Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch, in describing how the Wirz trial reflected the bitterness of Reconstruction, utilized the popular psychological interpretation of Wirz and referred to him as "the crazed and cruel Swiss-American who was in charge at Andersonville."²⁹

²⁹ Watt P. Marchman, ed., "The Journal of Sergt. Wm. J. McKell," *Civil War History* 3 (September 1957): 315-339; Donald F. Danker, ed., "Imprisoned at Andersonville: The Diary of Albert Harry Shatzell, May 5, 1864-September 12, 1864," *Nebraska History* 38 (June 1957): 81-124; J. B. Stamp, "Ten Months Experience in Northern Prisons," *The Alabama Historical Quarterly* 18 (Winter 1956): 486-498; Ovid Futch, "Andersonville Raiders," *Civil War History* 2 (December 1956): 47-60; Virgil C. Jones, "Libby Prison Break," *Civil War History* 4 (June 1958): 93-104; Richard B. Harwell, *The Confederate Reader* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1957); Richard B. Harwell, *The Union Reader* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958); Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch, *The New Nation, 1865-1917* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), 5.

Of all these Andersonville-inspired publications, one of the most important was the 1957 reprinting of *This Was Andersonville*, by John McElroy, one of the Andersonville prisoners whose work, first printed in 1879, contributed to the agitation over the subject of Civil War prisons throughout the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Kantor, as he had Hesseltine, openly acknowledged the influence of McElroy's well-written account, probably a result of McElroy's background as a newspaperman in an era when most of his contemporaries enjoyed little literary training. The new edition contained an introduction by Roy Meredith, who placed McElroy's incendiary works in the emotional context of Reconstruction and explained that "McElroy was extremely biased" and made "erroneous statements in the heat of anger at his captors." The real importance of McElroy's book, as interpreted through the eyes of Meredith seventy-eight years later, came from its relevance as an account of the most "appalling incident during the Civil War, which had no precedent until the Second World War, when the prison camps of Belsen and Dachau and the unforgettable Death March in the Philippines overshadowed anything that had gone on before in warfare." Meredith finished his introduction by stating the lesson so painfully learned not just at Andersonville, but in the much more recent past. "All that can be said for Andersonville, after almost a century, is that it stands as an indictment against war in all its forms," Meredith claimed, "and places the Civil War in the category where it belongs, as one of the most terrible wars the world has ever known." Although depressing, the subject of Civil War prisons offered a way for Americans like Kantor and Meredith not just to reject

what happened at Andersonville and in the Holocaust as unacceptable, but to caution future generations to guard against such horrors.³⁰

Besides the thought-provoking questions of morality and responsibility posed by Kantor's novel, *Andersonville* also sparked a revival of interest in the prison site itself. On May 28, 1957, an editor for the *Atlanta Journal* stated that "until the publication of McKinley Kantor's best-selling novel, 'Andersonville,' this peaceful cemetery and prison park was seldom visited by tourists and usually ignored by nearby residents." With the "throngs" now jumping "by leaps and bounds," the editor reported, "park employees are bracing themselves for an increasing influx of visitors." A few days later, W. S. Kirkpatrick wrote an article in the *Atlanta Constitution* declaring that "The Bitterness is Gone at Andersonville." According to Kirkpatrick, Kantor deserved credit for providing "evidence to show that Southerners of the 60s were not the beasts the hysteria of the times caused them to be considered in the North." As a result more and more tourists came to Andersonville each year, not to rehash old arguments but simply out of a curiosity to see the grounds after reading Kantor's novel.³¹

With traffic through and around the town of Andersonville on the rise, in 1957, it came to the attention of the Georgia UDC that the old monument to Wirz, which stood "in the midst of a cluttered commercial-garage district, oftentimes surrounded by garbage,"

³⁰ John McElroy, *This Was Andersonville*, with an introduction by Roy Meredith (New York: Bonanza Books, 1957), xx-xxi.

³¹ *Atlanta Journal*, May 28, 1957; *Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1957, along with numerous articles in the *Atlanta Constitution* that also discussed the surge of interest in Andersonville or specific aspects of the prison during this period. See *Atlanta Constitution*, October 6, 1957, June 29, 1958, October 29, 1958, April 22, 1959, August 30, 1959, September 1, 1959, September 5, 1959, September 22, 1959, November 22, 1959, December 1, 1959, and December 15, 1959, clippings in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives.

badly needed repair. In January 1958, the UDC sponsored a resolution to appropriate state funds “to clean the stained and corroded statue.” Controversy over Wirz once again flared, and, after a debate led by seventy year old Representative Ulysses S. Lancaster, “a former school-teacher with a knowledge of history,” who stated that “according to what I’ve heard about it we did a lot of the things we’ve accused the Germans of doing,” the measure failed to pass. Refurbishing the monument to “the Himmler of the Confederacy,” as columnist Celestine Sibley called Wirz, would have to wait. The reluctance of most Georgians to support the measure seemed understandable in the context of the 1950s, as many locals started to realize the benefits of a more positive and accommodating attitude towards the prison controversy. With the success of Kantor’s book, the growing acceptance of the objective theory of Civil War prisons as a mutual rather than sectional failure not only helped restore the reputation of the Confederacy but also brought financial rewards through tourism. Choosing this moment to make a stand in defense of Wirz, always one of the most controversial figures of the Civil War made little sense, except to the UDC, because it threatened the goodwill created by the novel. Americans, and northerners in particular first introduced to Wirz by Kantor, would not find Wirz particularly deserving of sympathy, much less a monument.³²

As the attention surrounding Andersonville grew, writer Saul Levitt also found himself captivated by the historical events at the Georgia prison, and the figure of Henry Wirz in particular, during the mid to late 1950s. Around 1956, Levitt started the script

³² *Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1959; *Atlanta Journal*, January 24, 1958; *Atlanta Constitution*, February 5, 1958; see also *Atlanta Constitution*, February 20, 1958, February 21, 1958, February 6, 1958, and February 9, 1958, clippings in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives.

for what eventually became “The Andersonville Trial.” Originally conceived as a television program (a one-hour version aired on the CBS show, “Climax”) over time Levitt’s idea grew into a full-length play about the Wirz trial. On December 29, 1959, “The Andersonville Trial” made its debut on Broadway, and eventually made its way to London and Andersonville itself. From the outset, Levitt expressed frustration with the reviewers of the show, who inferred a connection between the Wirz trial and the Nuremberg trial, and in one interview he tried to explain his motivation for the play. “I didn’t write this play because of a dedication to Civil War events,” Levitt declared, and “I also didn’t write it because I wanted to make a preachment about war criminals linked to the experience of our own time with the trials of the Nazi leaders at Nuremberg.” Given the content of the play, critics could be forgiven for scratching their heads at Levitt’s cantankerous response.³³

“The Andersonville Trial” commences with the beginning of the Wirz trial proceedings, and for the first three-fourths of the script, Levitt recreates the feel of the actual Wirz trial, even accurately keeping the historical identities of most of the important characters. To give the audience a feel for the atrocities committed at Andersonville, Levitt condenses the huge Wirz trial transcript into a few key witnesses who testify about the horrible conditions Andersonville prisoners endured and whether or not Wirz personally killed any of the prisoners. From the outset, Wirz has no illusions about the purpose of these proceedings, exclaiming in the first act that “all that is wanted of me is my life.” Although the outcome of the trial is never in doubt, as the government’s case against him accumulates, in the second act Wirz takes the stand to defend himself. The

³³ *Atlanta Constitution*, January 31, 1960, clipping in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison, Georgia State Archives.

resulting battle of wits between Wirz and Chipman, the prosecutor, directly reveals the theme of Levitt's play. In his attempts to defend his actions, Wirz repeatedly states that his duty as an officer in the Confederate army requires him to obey his superiors, in this case John Winder. "One does," Wirz argues, "as he is ordered." Even though he watched the suffering of the thousands of Union prisoners, the "situation," Levitt has Wirz declare, "was General Winder's responsibility—not mine." From the perspective of Wirz, the terrible suffering "was to me a military situation." Chipman, however, refuses to accept Wirz's argument that he merely followed his orders to the best of his ability. "Why did you obey," Chipman asked Wirz, when "we who are born into the human race are elected to an extraordinary role in the scheme of things. We are endowed with reason and therefore personal responsibility for our acts." By failing to follow a higher law than that of the chain of command and find some way to ameliorate the suffering of the captives he ruled over, Wirz, at least from Chipman and the North's perspective deserves the death sentence the play concludes with. As Wirz' lawyer, Baker, exits the courtroom following the verdict, he tells Chipman that the prosecutor's faith in human potential is naïve given humanity's inherent weaknesses. "It was a worthy effort," Baker explains in frustration, "though it hasn't anything to do with the real world. Men will go on as they are, most of them, subject to fears—and so, subject to powers and authorities. And how are we to change that slavery? When it's of man's very nature?" Levitt's intentionally dark conclusion reflected his desire to convey the danger of accepting Baker's pessimistic description of human nature and deny any validity to the idea that following orders constitutes a legitimate defense for atrocity.³⁴

³⁴ Saul Levitt, *The Andersonville Trial* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1960),

Levitt's main theme in "The Andersonville Trial," the responsibility of each individual when torn between organizational duty and individual conscience, betrayed his statements to the press. By fictionalizing the proceedings and putting Wirz on the stand, which never happened in the 1865 trial, Levitt clearly wanted to make a statement about human nature and about how people often fail, as did Wirz, when forced to choose between their morals and the demands made on them by organizations. The reason so many critics immediately associated the play with Nuremberg instead of Andersonville involved not only the timing but Levitt's focus on the question of responsibility, an issue perceived much differently in 1865 than in the 1940s. In the actual Wirz proceedings, responsibility applied to Wirz because northerners knew his job entailed dealing with the Union prisoners. Despite the difficult conditions he worked with, the assumption in 1865 was that when someone one failed, of course it was the fault of the individual. By the 1940s, when Nazi war criminals explained that they merely followed orders in committing their atrocities, that explanation, although dismissed as untenable, sent shivers down the spine of Levitt and other observers because everyone, at least in the civilized world, lived the same kind of shadowy existence, where, thanks to entrenched bureaucracy and organizational structures, responsibility often took a back seat to conformity. Levitt's suspicion that "man's very nature" facilitates atrocity came directly from the fearful reality of the Holocaust, but even though his play ultimately focused on the themes of the present, Levitt's work revealed the connection between Wirz and the Nazis. It was not that they all spoke German, it was that in 1865 the actions of Wirz as an individual were viewed as unacceptable in a civilized society, while in the 1940s the

13, 100, 105, 113, 120.

actions of the Nazis as an organization were viewed as unacceptable in a civilized society. The only differences between the two tragedies involved the scale of the slaughter and the fact that the belief in man's innate capacity for good faced a constant challenge from the growing power of organizations. Even the harsh lessons about war in the modern world, however, refused to deter Levitt from exhorting his audience to resist organizational evil and trust their individual morality.

Despite the pessimistic nature of the subject of Andersonville, or more probably, because of it, by 1960, the literary achievements of Levitt and Kantor showed that, almost one hundred years after their existence, the interest in Civil War prisons persisted. Although the period following World War I brought the passing of the generations so consumed with the prison controversy and sectional justification, a new generation of Americans, led most prominently by Hesseltine, Kantor, and Levitt, endeavored to redefine the perception of the prisons. They did so because, amazingly enough, the history and stories of Civil War prisons took on even greater relevance in the context of the destructive wars of the first half of the twentieth century. Traditionally the historical record of Civil War prisons divided Americans, but Hesseltine, Kantor, Levitt, and many others realized that, in the modern world, avoiding future Andersonvilles or Holocausts depended on uniting Americans through a more accurate and usable interpretation of the prison camps. There was an urgency with which these scholars applied new scientific explanations, reminded readers of the need for vigilance against evil, and rejected the concept that just following orders excused atrocity in any form. In that sense one small positive emerged from the destruction of the first half of the twentieth century—the widespread suffering inspired the creation of a new interpretation of Civil War prisons,

one with the admirable, if potentially unachievable, goal of helping humanity start to learn from its past mistakes.

CHAPTER 7: “BETTER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUTSIDERS’ CURIOSITY”

From 1960 through the end of the twentieth century, the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons, that both sides bore some measure of responsibility for the suffering and that both deserved criticism for their failings, became even more firmly entrenched. Instead of leading to the disappearance of the subject, however, the widespread acceptance of this point of view only increased the attention that Civil War prisons received. As the old stigma of deliberate atrocity faded, Andersonville in particular became the focal point of an accelerating trend during these decades—turning Civil War prison sites into tourist attractions. With the success of the emerging tourist interest in southwest Georgia, the realization spread that the old prison controversy still had commercial potential. The enduring interest in the Civil War continued to thrive in American popular culture, as new prison histories, more prisoner accounts, and even movies about or featuring Civil War prison camps appeared. With reconciliation completed and the battle over the prison record seemingly ended, the proliferation of these products resulted from two intertwined motives. The commercialization of Civil War prisons reflected a desire to benefit from the tragedy of the past, while the avid consumption of prison materials also testified to an ongoing need in American society to understand more fully how such atrocities could ever have been possible.

The commercialization of Civil War prisons started in earnest in the early 1960s, during the celebration of the Civil War Centennial, the one hundred year anniversary of the Civil War. Enthusiasm for this commemoration ran high. R. B. Moore, executive director of the Alabama Civil War Centennial Commission, explained that naturally

Americans anticipated their chance to relive the war, which after all, remained “the great national adventure.” Remembering “the sterling qualities” of the Civil War generation and cherishing “our great traditions” also provided an additional benefit, Moore believed—it protected the United States from “communist brain-washers.” As a display of unity, the centennial offered North and South a chance to reconfirm the bonds of sectional reconciliation in the crucible of the Cold War. Participation in the Civil War Centennial equated, at least for Moore, to a stand against the communist Soviet Union. With so many Americans expressing their patriotism by participating in the ceremonies, important Civil War locations prepared for a surge of visitors. Although tourism, especially at Andersonville, where the national government owned the prison site, predated the centennial activities, the long-time interest of Union veterans and, more recently, the notoriety of MacKinlay Kantor’s novel, attracted visitors to the grounds. By 1959, as plans commenced for the national festivities, it became clear that, especially in Georgia, the story of Civil War prisons deserved a place of prominence.¹

In part that recognition stemmed from the direction of the national Civil War Centennial Commission, which in January 1959 created the Committee on Historical Activities to make recommendations about how to effectively promote the centennial and encourage participation across the country. The committee reported that each individual state should set up its own Civil War Centennial Commission, which would help stimulate local interest and involvement and in the process allow for a more thorough recreation of Civil War events in each state. The committee also pushed for the

¹ A. B. Moore, “Memorandum on the Potential Values of the National Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War,” Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 4, Reference Material for Speeches, Articles, etc. 1961, Georgia State Archives.

publication of a national series of official guides to the war that would focus on “topics that need to be investigated,” including “prisoners of war.” Instead of avoiding the once-controversial subject, the Civil War Centennial Commission thus declared that even the terrible subject of Civil War prisons merited inclusion in the celebration. With these national guidelines in mind, Georgia rushed to prepare for its role in the centennial.²

Led by its first chairman, Peter Zack Geer, The Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission emphasized a “grass roots” approach to commemorating the war in Georgia that between 1961 and 1965 encouraged the retelling of “the thousands of true stories of heroism.” In the process, Geer hoped, “each story will endear itself in the hearts and minds of every Georgian.” From the outset, Andersonville featured prominently as one of the most important of Georgia’s Civil War sites, as the prison appeared in almost every catalog of crucial war locations compiled by various centennial committees. The Georgia Civil War Centennial Education Committee organized a list of ways, including field trips, to involve the children of Georgia in the events so that they might learn “the need for adjustment from the Old South to the New.” The Education Committee’s register of approved “educational field trips” rated Andersonville as the fourth most important site to visit, behind only three sites involved with Sherman’s 1864 campaign for Atlanta. Radio advertisements frequently mentioned the chance for Americans to take the opportunity provided by the centennial and come to Georgia to visit not only Atlanta, but Andersonville too. Instead of demonstrating embarrassment over Andersonville’s checkered past, the citizens of Georgia responded to the centennial commission’s lead

² Bell I. Wiley, ed., “Report of the Activities Committee to the Civil War Centennial Commission,” *Civil War History* 5 (December 1959): 374-381, 376.

and welcomed the prospect of featuring the controversial prison site as a part of the commemoration.³

Although sentiments of patriotism and education certainly fueled the embrace of Andersonville by Georgians during the centennial, some pragmatic observers believed that the success of the occasion and the effectiveness of the centennial committee would be best measured in dollars and cents. On July 23, 1960, Milt Berk of Business Boosters, Inc. solicited Geer, informing him of Business Boosters' ability to manufacture some "80,000" promotional items. Selling these "gimmicks" emblazoned with the logos of the various flags of the Confederacy would generate interest among collectors as well as advertise the events of the centennial. Although the products of Business Boosters never received official sanction from Georgia Governor S. Ernest Vandiver and the Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission, a host of souvenir items, including tumblers, ashtrays, flags, cufflinks, cigarette lighters, key rings, bags, and cushions appeared during the centennial. Walt Barber, head of Walt Barber Advertising Specialties and advisor to the centennial commission, explained why so many types of products were necessary. Georgia "expects to bring forty or fifty million visitors to our state," he stated, and "the

³ Peter Z. Geer, "Untitled April 11, 1961 speech," p. 1, 5, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 2, Civil War Centennial Commission 1959-65 Confederate States Civil War Centennial Commission Virginia Civil War Centennial Commission Folder, Georgia State Archives; "Georgia Civil War Historical Sites," p. 2-3, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, Monuments, Memorials & Commemorations Committee Civil War Centennial Commission 1959-60 Folder, Georgia State Archives; "Recapture History," p. 2, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, Correspondence of the Chairman Beverly M. DuBose, Jr. 1964 Folder, Georgia State Archives; "Suggestions for Civil War Centennial Observances by Georgia Schools," p. 1, 3, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 3, Education Outline 1961 Folder, Georgia State Archives; "Georgia Association of Broadcasters Special Tourism Promotion February, 1964 Spots," p. 1, Georgia Historical Commission Papers, Box 3, Miscellaneous Folder, Georgia State Archives.

tourists will spend money—forty to fifty million on souvenirs alone.” In 1959, Bill Corley, the commission’s director of promotion, declared that “if we don’t sell a dollar’s worth of souvenirs to each tourist who comes into the state, we’re missing an opportunity.” Although few, if any, state-sponsored products specifically bore the name or image of Andersonville, the idea that the celebration centered as much on tourism and souvenir consumption as the proper remembrance of history eventually made an impact on the residents of the town.⁴

Despite the clear emphasis of Governor Vandiver and the state officials in charge of the centennial on the importance of tourism and souvenir sales, some Georgians feared that their efforts were not enough to take full advantage of the once in a lifetime opportunity to cash in on the Civil War. In an April 1960 editorial in the *Atlanta Constitution*, Cooper Smith worried that Georgia trailed her fellow southern states, particularly Virginia, in the preparations for the upcoming centennial. “Georgia has on the national dunce cap again,” Smith wrote, referring to what he perceived as slow development of the plans for the centennial celebration. “Will somebody tell me,” he asked, “why this state always has to bring up the cow’s tail?” Although his concerns accurately reflected the bottom line mentality with which many Georgians approached the centennial, Smith’s worries proved groundless. On February 23, 1964, John

⁴ Milt Berk to Peter Z. Geer, 23 July 1960, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, Official Souvenirs Committee Civil War Centennial Commission 1959-61 Folder, Georgia State Archives; Walt Barber to Charles Stelling, 10 June 1960, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, Official Souvenirs Committee Civil War Centennial Commission 1959-61 Folder, Georgia State Archives; S. Ernest Vandiver to Eugene Cook, 9 February 1961, Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, Souvenirs Folder, Georgia State Archives; *Atlanta Journal*, July 30, 1959, clipping in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives.

Pennington, born and raised five miles from the town of Andersonville, acknowledged that, even though Andersonville remained “a monument to an unhappy fragment of our national past,” the Civil War Centennial “has called new attention to it.” “Twenty years ago,” by contrast, Pennington argued, Andersonville “had faded almost from memory.” Thanks to the centennial, and Kantor’s novel before it, even the prison’s location “off the beaten path” could not stop the “thousands of tourists” who “manage to find it yearly.” The successful incorporation of Andersonville into the centennial celebration as both educational subject and tourist attraction indicated that, while its infamy persisted, the prison also piqued a healthy curiosity about the difficult legacy of the treatment of Civil War prisoners.⁵

Although Andersonville, thanks to the presence of the national cemetery and the preservation work of the national government, found itself the best situated to play a central role in the Civil War Centennial commemorations, other Civil War prison sites also served as locations for anniversary celebrations. On Memorial Day, 1961, the town of Elmira, where the most notorious of the Union prison camps once stood, hosted a New York Civil War Centennial Commission function with the dual purpose of “honoring the dead of all wars” and uniting America against “the communist menace.” Again the backdrop of the Cold War and the need to maintain patriotic solidarity against the Soviet threat provided strong incentive for Americans to celebrate the Civil War as the story of how sectional division became national unity. In keeping with that message, one member of the New York commission, Dr. Wilbur Glover, gave a speech in which he offered an

⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, April 21, 1960, February 23, 1964, clippings in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives.

objective interpretation of Civil War prisons. “In this year of 1961, we realize that savage as the war became, later accounts have exaggerated the cruelties somewhat.” But today, “we recognize that Northern prisons—as well as Southern—left much to be desired.”⁶

Tributes to prisoners also extended beyond the actual prison sites of Andersonville and Elmira. In late 1963, the Centennial Center in Richmond, Virginia, opened an exhibit titled “The Civil War Prisoner,” which featured pieces of Libby Prison and works of art depicting “the capture and treatment of prisoners,” “prison life,” “prisoner exchange,” and “retaliation and atrocity.” The successful and harmonious presentation of the Andersonville, Elmira, and Richmond centennial activities showed how thoroughly the objective interpretation of the controversial subject of Civil War prisons had been reinforced by the environment of Cold War patriotism.⁷

Along with the increasing visits to the actual prison sites, the centennial also inspired a surge in the number of publications devoted to the subject of Civil War prisons. People who could not travel to Andersonville or one of the other old locations could at least read about what took place there. Books about Civil War prisons generally took one of two forms between 1961 and 1965: official state centennial commission-sponsored histories of the war and prisons or new editions of previously printed or unpublished prisoner accounts. Although neither source offered any new interpretations

⁶ “Reconciliation at Elmira,” *New York State and the Civil War* 1 (July 1961): 13, article in Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 1, New York State Civil War Centennial Folder, Georgia State Archives.

⁷ “The Civil War Prisoner,” *Centennial News Letter* 5 (August 1963): 1-2, article in Georgia Civil War Centennial Commission Papers, Box 2, Virginia Civil War Centennial Commission Centennial Newsletters Folder, Georgia State Archives.

of the prisons and thus inspired little change in the public's perception of the subject, the ready availability of these volumes testified to the centennial's ability to generate interest in Civil War prisons among the general public. And the success of the magazine *Civil War Times Illustrated*, which made its debut in 1962 and remains in publication today, proved beyond doubt that stories about the Civil War, and prisoners of war in particular, still captivated and entertained audiences. From its inception, *CWTI* used a formula that remains almost identical today, frequently running excerpts from unpublished prisoner accounts. The April 1962 debut issue included "The Amazing Ordeal of Pvt. Joe Stevenson," an article that recounted the horrors of Andersonville. With an incredible variety of unpublished prison sources to choose from, the current editors of the magazine continue to print prison materials, a practice supplemented by occasional articles about the various prison camps.⁸

⁸ On state commission centennial histories, see Philip R. Shriver and Donald J. Breen, *Ohio's Military Prisons in the Civil War* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 1964); Victor Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1966); William J. Petersen, ed., *The Palimpsest* 42 (June 1961): 209-281; Harold R. Manakee, *Maryland in the Civil War* (Baltimore, Md.: The Garamond Press, 1961). For individual prison accounts see John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1962); R. Henderson Shuffler, ed., *The Adventures of a Prisoner of War* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1964); Mary Lasswell, ed., *Rags and Hope* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1961); Bell I. Wiley, ed., *Four Years on the Firing Line* (Jackson, Tenn.: McCowat-Mercer Press, Inc., 1963); Thomas B. Turley, *A Narrative of His Capture and Imprisonment during the War between the States*, with an introduction by John H. Davis (Memphis, Tenn.: Southwestern at Memphis, 1961); Susan W. Benson, ed., *Berry Benson's Civil War Book* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1962). See also William H. Price, *Civil War Handbook* (Fairfax, Va.: L. B. Prince Co., Inc., 1961); Charles E. Frohman, *Rebels on Lake Erie* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio Historical Society, 1965); "The Amazing Story of Pvt. Joe Shewmon," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 1 (April 1962): 45; an extremely selective list of *CWTI* articles on various aspects of Civil War prisons over the years includes James D. Jones, "A Guard at Andersonville—Eyewitness to History," *CWTI* 2 (February 1964): 24; Robert E. and Katharine Morsberger, "After Andersonville: The First War Crimes Trial," *CWTI* 13 (July 1974): 30; Tony Trimble, "A Quiet Sabbath:

By including Civil War prisons in the national story of the larger war, the Civil War Centennial Commissions, on both the national and state level, encouraged Americans to revisit the controversial issue of the treatment of prisoners as part of a positive celebration, rather than as a reason for discord. Although the centennial presentations of Civil War prisons broke no new scholarly ground, the festivities exposed many Americans to the arguments of Hesseltine, Kantor, Levitt et al. for the first time. In the context of American patriotism and heritage, at the moment when the Cold War threat of communism peaked, the early 1960s, the national commemoration helped the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons gain further acceptance. Meanwhile, the successful marketing tactics of the various centennial commissions in fusing historical interpretation, tourism, souvenirs, and education set a precedent. After 1965, in order to take advantage of the ongoing public interest in the subject of the Civil War and its prisons, efforts to commemorate the sacrifices of the dead prisoners increasingly combined with the industry of tourism. Residents of Andersonville provided the foremost example of the commercialization of Civil War prisons, as the town embraced the business strategy of selling its past to a curious public.

In the aftermath of the Civil War Centennial, Andersonville's remarkable turnaround from obscure village to bustling community continued. When the Mullite Company, taking advantage of "the richest deposits in the entire world" of bauxite and kaolin, two crucial ingredients in the production of steel, commenced mining operations just outside town in 1968, the economic growth of the community accelerated. The infusion of mining dollars into Andersonville's coffers brought with it an important

Reflections from Johnson's Island," *CWTI* 22 (January 1984): 20; Philip Rutherford, ed., "I Escaped from Andersonville," *CWTI* 27 (May 1988): 36.

change. The once predominantly agricultural town, despite its tiny population of approximately 300 inhabitants, started to accumulate disposable income—and at precisely this moment, local Georgians began to plan for an even brighter economic future.⁹

In the early 1970s, Bobby L. Lowe, the executive director of the Middle Flint Area Planning Commission and resident of nearby Ellaville, Georgia, oversaw a scheme to capitalize on the historical notoriety of Andersonville and in the process boost the economies of the surrounding towns as well. The challenge lay in properly using the potential benefits of Interstate 75, which ushered traffic just to the east of Andersonville and the surrounding region. Lowe believed that in order to lure tourists off the interstate into the “real Georgia,” the communities of southwest Georgia, the local towns needed to unite their efforts. Thus the idea of “The Andersonville Trail” was born, a tourism campaign that linked Americus, Andersonville, and several other Georgia towns and cobbled their historical resources together. By linking these various historical sites, Lowe hoped to transform a once isolated area into what he in 1976 referred to as “a unique stop for interstate travelers.” His decision to center the trail on Andersonville made sense in light of the more positive recent portrayal of the prison in the centennial commemorations and the lesson that the shame of the past could yield commercial benefits in the present.¹⁰

⁹ Peggy Sheppard, *Andersonville Georgia USA* (1973, repr., Andersonville, Ga.: Sheppard Publications, 2001), 80.

¹⁰ *Macon Telegraph*, September 3, 1971, clipping in Andersonville Vertical File, Andersonville National Historic Site; Bobby L. Lowe to John D. Sewell, 26 April 1976, Georgia Department of Community Affairs Papers, Box 12, Andersonville Trail Study Folder, Georgia State Archives.

Quickly picking up on Lowe's ideas, the newly prosperous citizens of Andersonville, led by their mayor, Lewis Easterlin, embraced an all-out marketing strategy in the early 1970s. In 1973, residents of the town formed the Andersonville Guild. The organization intended to turn "back the clock in Andersonville to make the town look much as it did in Civil War days." If tourists traveled off the beaten path to revisit the controversy of the Civil War, Andersonville intended to give them what they expected to see. Flush with mining dollars, the guild put that money to work. Its early activities included moving an old log-cabin church from the outskirts of town into the downtown and installing an old railroad depot as the town's official information center. By 1975, Easterlin and his guild supporters embarked on an even grander plan to increase Andersonville's tourist appeal with the proposal of the "Andersonville Mall." At an estimated cost of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, one hundred and fifty thousand of which would come from a government grant, the initiative called for the sweeping redesign of downtown Andersonville. Containing shops, landscaping and pedestrian walkways, along with ample parking, the mall, according to the town boosters, would entice tourists who visited the actual prison site on the other side of the highway to come spend time and dollars in an authentic Civil War-era town. The Wirz monument provided the main attraction as the literally central feature of the mall, given its location in the middle of the town square. Unfortunately for Easterlin and the guild, the mid-1970s hopes for the mall never completely panned out. Over the next few decades, the restoration of downtown Andersonville proceeded, one shop or museum at a time, while the more elaborate dreams of landscaping and parking lots failed to materialize. But as it

turned out, even the partial accomplishments of Andersonville's revitalization soon garnered attention.¹¹

With the reconstruction of the town underway, and the Andersonville Trail drawing curious motorists off the interstate, by 1975, the residents of Andersonville realized the need for an annual event to increase further the town's desirability as a tourist destination. In October 1976, the first annual Andersonville Historic Fair drew crowds to the small village. A parade led by Georgia Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller, who insisted on riding his own horse at the festivities, highlighted the proceedings, along with a performance of Saul Levitt's "The Andersonville Trial," staged across Highway 49 at the national park. Throughout the late 1970s and 80s, to the delight of Easterlin and the guild, the fair brought tens of thousands of participants to Andersonville each October. Over time, besides the traditional parade and play, the celebration expanded to include an outdoor flea market, "bands," "beauty queens," "Civil War units," "magic shows," "clogging," "puppet shows," and, in 1985, "a circuit-riding preacher who arrived on horseback." For all the entertainment the visitors enjoyed, however, the real magic trick involved the transformation of Andersonville's image. Although Easterlin and the Andersonville Guild used the infamy of the town to attract visitors, the general festivities that took place at the historic fair often had little or nothing to do with Andersonville's history. But as the word spread of the charming hospitality of the town, newspaper and magazine articles appeared praising the town's attempts, as one 1982 *Florida Times*

¹¹ T. H. Watkins, "A Heritage Preserved," *American Heritage* 31 (April/May 1980): 101; "Andersonville's Depot Part of Planned Tourist Boom," 1975 unidentified newspaper clipping in Andersonville Vertical File, Andersonville National Historic Site; "Grant Application to Coastal Plains Regional Commission for Direct Grant (Andersonville Mall) by City of Andersonville November 1975," Georgia Department of Community Affairs Papers, Box 12, Andersonville Mall Folder, Georgia State Archives.

Union and Jacksonville Journal article put it, “to shed its old image.” So thorough was the transformation that the “shackles of shame,” Alan Patureau of the *Atlanta Constitution* declared, the “old Andersonville” had disappeared.¹²

The success of the Andersonville Historic Fair, followed by the creation of the Andersonville Antiques fair each Memorial Day, testified to the profitability of Andersonville’s public relations campaign. And the welcome publicity that accompanied Jimmy Carter’s rise from Plains, Georgia, located, like Andersonville, in Sumter County, to the presidency of the United States, only added to the growth of tourism along the Andersonville Trail. All the while, the marketing strategy devised by the Andersonville Guild of presenting their town not as the site of atrocity but instead as simply a Civil War village remained effective. Today, shops, museums, a bed and breakfast, and a restaurant still cater to tourists. Pens, postcards, pamphlets and pins are just a few of the various Civil War memorabilia products available for purchase at the town’s gift shops. At the entrance to the town, a billboard welcomes visitors to “Andersonville, Civil War Village,” while over in the town square, a short distance from the Wirz monument, sits a covered wagon with an identical message. By camouflaging Andersonville’s specifically notorious past with a general presentation of Civil War period history, the opportune calculations of Andersonville residents like Peggy Sheppard continue to pay off. “I

¹² Zell Miller to Peter J. Novak, 20 August 1976, Georgia Lieutenant Governor’s Office Papers, Box 2, 10/2/76 Andersonville Historic Fair Americus, GA Sumter Co. Folder, Georgia State Archives; *Americus Times Recorder*, October 7, 1985, April 8, 1985; *Florida Times Union and Jacksonville Journal*, October 31, 1982; Alan Patureau, “Old Andersonville Emerges without Shackles of Shame,” undated *Atlanta Constitution* article; *Rapid City Journal*, January 9, 1983, all clippings in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; see also Watkins, “A Heritage Preserved,” 100-101.

figured it was better to take advantage of outsiders' curiosity," Sheppard explained to one reporter, "than to resent it."¹³

Beneath the bland veneer of Civil War nostalgia that the town of Andersonville peddled, however, Andersonville remained the home of the Wirz monument and Wirz Street. As a result, since the 1970s Andersonville also served as a central attraction for diehard pro-Confederate supporters of Wirz. After the disappearance of the generations of southerners devoted to the Lost Cause and the fictionalized portrayals of Kantor and Levitt, a relative quiet settled over the subject of Wirz and his execution. The successful rehabilitation of Andersonville's reputation in the 1970s, ironically, also helped revive, on a very limited scale, the flagging interest of southerners who once again began to herald Wirz as a martyr to the Confederate cause and clung to the old southern interpretation of history—that if either side deserved blame for the prison controversy, it was the North, not the South. The opportunity to confirm southernness by celebrating Wirz attracted southerners who sought to assert the legitimacy of their heritage in a difficult era of turbulent race relations and political transition. At a time when the South received so much negative attention, the positive atmosphere created by the combination of thousands of visitors and the congratulatory press coverage offered hope that Andersonville, Wirz, and therefore the South as well, need apologize no longer for the past. As new generations of southerners encountered the Wirz monument, a few embraced the history of their forebears and took up the old fight to clear Wirz's name.

¹³ Patureau, "Old Andersonville Emerges without Shackles of Shame," Andersonville Vertical File, Andersonville National Historic Site; see also Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 312-335.

In the late 1970s, the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy began co-sponsoring annual memorial services on or around November 10, the date of Wirz's execution in 1865. The SCV awarded Wirz the Confederate Medal of Honor in 1981, and Tony Horwitz, whose account of one of these memorial programs appears in *Confederates in the Attic*, reported that the SCV also paid tribute to Wirz by declaring November 10, 10:32 A.M. "the moment of martyrdom" and by referring to Wirz as a "Confederate Hero-Martyr." In the 1980s, newspaper accounts of these ceremonies revealed, attendance fluctuated but never reached more than one hundred and fifty people, highlighted each year by the small group of Confederate re-enactors who fired a volley in Wirz's memory. By the time Horwitz attended the event in the mid 1990s, only forty "neo-Confederates" showed up to protect the "memory of the Confederacy and of hero-martyrs like Henry Wirz."¹⁴

The persistence of the strange band of Wirz supporters reveals the ongoing paradox that many southerners face as new generations, each more divorced from the actual events, come to terms with the legacy of the Civil War. Although Andersonville residents like Sheppard continue to defend Wirz's innocence, the financial interest of the town depends on a muted portrayal of the prison controversy. The community benefits far more from the yearly visits of the tens of thousands of casually interested tourists, many of whom know nothing about what happened at Andersonville prison and have little personal stake in dwelling on the controversy, than from the gatherings of the pro-Confederate diehards. For most participants in the Historic Fair, enjoyment of the rustic

¹⁴ Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic*, 325-329; *Americus Times Recorder*, November 20, 1982, November 12, 1984, November 11, 1985, November 10, 1986, November 7, 1987, clippings in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

Civil War town's appearance is all that matters. While the reputation of Andersonville sparks interest, the design of the town and its annual celebrations acknowledges the controversy but refuses to risk alienating potential visitors. Andersonville thus offers its history on two levels, the general ambiance of the Civil War-era, intended to charm the crowds of infrequent tourists, and the opportunity to learn of Wirz's unjust execution, targeted at southerners more deeply interested in the subject of Civil War prisons. The resulting presentation of the town's history feels somewhat artificial; the town remains caught in a trap of its own devising. Andersonville reintroduces visitors to the subject of Civil War prisons but, upon arrival, those same tourists encounter little of the actual history of the prison controversy. As the emphasis on general ambiance continues the influence and numbers of Wirz supporters correspondingly decline. Although a few southerners cling to the heritage of their Confederate ancestors and make their token appearance to honor Wirz every November, the waning intensity of the devotion suggests that Wirz, the prison controversy, and even the Civil War itself now exist more as curiosity than cause.

Through the formalized nature of their tribute, the Wirz defenders also indicate just how ritualized, to the point of indifference, the conception of Confederate heritage has become in the contemporary South. The sense of urgency and the need to protect southern honor that once inspired the pen of Jefferson Davis or even Mildred Rutherford dissipated long ago. Although the declining intensity of the sectional perspective emerged as a natural consequence of the passage of time, the commercialization of the prison controversy also explains why the pro-Confederate voices of today lack the conviction of the past. While contemporary publications outlining the old southern

argument that the Confederacy cared as best it could for its prisoners while the Union deliberately refused exchange and intentionally deprived its captives of food and supplies still appear, the old goal, to present true history and convert new disciples, has faded. Articles in *Blue and Gray* and *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine*, or books like *Andersonville: The Southern Perspective*, seem calculated for the small minority audience already initiated into the circle of southern apologists. Current devotees to Confederate heritage expect a little protest against the injustices of history, not because they still believe that the South will rise at any moment, but because previous generations of southerners fought the same rhetorical war as well. Flashing the scars of defeat, in contrast to the disappearance of the old northern sectional argument of deliberate southern cruelty in recent years, keeps southern identity alive, albeit on life support. While Yankees can finally afford to let go of the prison controversy because they won, Confederate heritage groups cannot because the stain of defeat, and in the case of Civil War prisons, years of vicious accusations, still requires refutation. Holding on to Confederate mythology also offers white southerners who participate an opportunity to, in a thinly veiled but still socially acceptable manner, confirm their feelings of racial superiority. As a result, the half-hearted recycling of the old prison arguments reflects a sense of obligation to the past rather than actual optimism that Wirz or the Confederacy will at this late date find their reputations fully restored. The personal stake in the past that once infused the Lost Cause with energy has been replaced by attempts to cash in on its corpse. As long as a few southerners continue to show up in Andersonville on November 10, subscribe to Civil War magazines and buy copies of pro-Confederate

books, the defense of Wirz and the Confederate prison system will persist not because of devotion to history but the opportunity of profit and the stubbornness of identity.¹⁵

But the final, and perhaps most compelling, reason for the declining support among southerners for the defense of Wirz and the Confederate prison system hinges on the fact that since 1960, the traditional sectional arguments, at least in the perception of most observers of Civil War prisons, seem increasingly irrelevant and superfluous in light of the ever-growing acceptance of the objective interpretation of the prison controversy. Over the last few decades, an avalanche of printed materials ranging from articles, dissertations and theses, prison histories, prisoner memoirs and comparative studies have begun to answer the challenge of meeting “the need,” in the phrase of historians James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., for a deeper understanding of Civil War prisons. Built on the edifice of the objective approach of Hesseltine, these studies, in all their different approaches, reinforce the idea that the story of Civil War prisons was a national tragedy with roots in both the Union and Confederacy, and in the process, drown out the voices of southern protesters.¹⁶

In the early 1960s, two works in particular argued for a better national understanding of Civil War prisons. The first was the 1961 edition of James G. Randall and David Donald’s *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. The second was a 1962 issue of

¹⁵ Roger Long, “Northern Comment: The Truth about Andersonville Prison,” *Blue & Gray* 3 (December-January 1985-86): 22-28; James W. Thompson, “Southern Comment: Andersonville—Truth Versus Falsehood,” *Blue & Gray* 3 (December-January 1985-86): 28-35; Melanie Campbell, “Fort Delaware,” *The United Daughters of the Confederacy Magazine* 42 (November 1999): 36-37; J. H. Segars, ed., *Andersonville: The Southern Perspective* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 2001); see also Annette Gee Ford, ed., *The Captive* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Bookbinding Co., 2000).

¹⁶ James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr., eds., *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 4.

Civil War History devoted entirely to the prison controversy, guest edited by William Hesseltine, and later reprinted as a collection of essays titled *Civil War Prisons*. Both publications reflected prevailing trends on the subject of the prisons such as the national embrace of reconciliation inspired by the Civil War Centennial and the scholarly perception that responsibility and blame for the prison suffering belonged in equal measure to the North and South—or even the nature of modern war. “The fair-minded observer,” according to Randall and Donald, “will be likely to discountenance any sweeping reproach by one side upon the other.” “Whatever be the message of the dead at Andersonville and Rock Island,” they concluded, “that message is not to be read as a mandate for the perpetuation of sectional blame and censure.” And while Hesseltine acknowledged “that the custodians were hardly a loveable lot” and deserved the criticism they received, he also declared that the prison controversy revealed “that the atrocities of the prison camps were only phases of the greater atrocity of war itself.” The real point of studying Civil War prisons, these scholars concluded, was that it was less critical to measure the exact amounts of sectional responsibility, as had been the goal for so many decades after the war, than to instead push for a recognition of the horrors to insure that history would not repeat itself in the future. By 1988, when James M. McPherson published his best-selling *Battle Cry of Freedom*, the idea that responsibility was even worth arguing seemed increasingly outdated. “The treatment of prisoners during the Civil War,” McPherson stated, “was something that neither side could be proud of.” Even recent attempts at revision of the objective interpretation, led by Charles Sanders, who claims that conscious policy choices, rather than “war psychosis,” explain the terrible casualty rates in Civil War prisons, instead confirm the prevalent theory that both

Union and Confederacy share equal guilt (whether intentional or accidental) for the debacle.¹⁷

Since the 1960s, with objectivity secured and responsibility evenly dispersed, some historians, primarily amateurs drawn to the subject by the sensationalistic tales of suffering, responded to a gap in the historiography of Civil War prisons by publishing individual histories of almost every major camp. These chroniclers provide readers with a historical narrative of the specific events that occurred at Point Lookout, Andersonville, Rock Island, Fort Delaware, Camp Douglas, Elmira, Libby Prison, Belle Isle and Salisbury during the war. A glance at such titles as *Elmira: Death Camp of the North*, *Andersonville: The Last Depot*, and *To Die in Chicago*, shows the purpose of these scholars. Each and every Union and Confederate prison witnessed human misery, they explain. Only the numbers of those who suffered varied, an interpretation that suggested that bad luck more than anything else doomed the Andersonville prisoners and added little substance to the objective theory of Hesseltine.¹⁸

¹⁷ J. G. Randall and David Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D. C. Heath and Company, 1961), 339; William B. Hesseltine, "Civil War Prisons—Introduction," in *Civil War Prisons* (1962; repr., Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995), 6, 8; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 802; see also Bruce Catton, *Reflections on the Civil War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981). Current revisionists include Charles W. Sanders, Jr., "This Sad Business: The Union and Confederate Prison Systems of the American Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Kansas State University, 2001); Michael Horigan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2002).

¹⁸ Horigan, *Elmira*; William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Benton McAdams, *Rebels at Rock Island* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Dale Fetzer and Bruce Mowday, *Unlikely Allies: Fort Delaware's Prison Community in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2000); George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas 1862-1865* (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1999); Ovid Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison* (Indiantown, Fla.:

One exception to the trend toward individual prison studies, however, exists in the work of Lonnie Speer, whose 1997 *Portals to Hell* marked the first attempted overview of Civil War prisons since the 1930s. The reason that so much time passed between Hesseltine's and Speer's work manifests itself in how completely Speer accepts Hesseltine's interpretation, adding only that "the failure to plan ahead often condemned thousands of POWs to suffering." The strength of Speer's book lay in its attention to detail—whereas Hesseltine's 1930 *Civil War Prisons* explained the story of what happened in the prison controversy, Speer provides a summary of each individual prison and what took place inside its walls.¹⁹

With the contemporary shift in focus away from exploring the larger question of responsibility in favor of investigating the individual aspects of prison life and the daily prison experience, Civil War prisoner accounts also returned to the spotlight and the cottage industry of reprinting these memoirs resumed. One critical difference, however, distinguished the volumes of post-1960s prisoner narratives from past editions. When first published between the 1860s and 1930s, the accounts, almost always dominated by the sentiment of sectional hostility, represented an obvious attempt to add evidence to one

University of Florida Press, 1968); Otis B. England, *A Short History of the Rock Island Prison Barracks* (Rock Island, Ill.: Historical Office, U. S. Army, 1985); Edwin Beitzell, *Point Lookout Prison Camp for Confederates* (N.p.: privately printed, 1972); Sandra V. Parker, *Richmond's Civil War Prisons* (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1990); William O. Bryant, *Cahaba Prison and the Sultana Disaster* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1990); Louis A. Brown, *The Salisbury Prison: A Case Study of Confederate Military Prisons 1861-1865* (Wilmington, N.C.: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1992).

¹⁹ Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1997), xv; see also Lonnie R. Speer, *War of Vengeance: Acts of Retaliation against Civil War POWs* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2002).

side or the other of the debate over whether the Union or Confederacy bore more responsibility for or committed greater crimes in Civil War prisons. Today, whether in new editions of old accounts or previously unprinted diaries or memoirs, editors now justify the recycling of these hostilities with claims of their redeeming educational or entertaining qualities. The 1995 version of Benjamin Booth's *Dark Days of the Rebellion*, originally published in 1897, instead of inciting sectional discord, according to editor Steve Meyer, provides a "microcosm of the great conflict which refined and defined our great nation during its trial from 1861 to 1865." Newcomers to the 1998 copy of J. V. Hadley's *Seven Months a Prisoner*, which dated back to 1898, were encouraged by editor Libbe Hughes to enjoy "a story of imprisonment and escape, adventure and suspense." Through these introductions, editors of prison narratives downplay the sectional hatred inspired by the war and attempt to divorce these accounts from their original, now unseemly moral that Yankees or Rebels intentionally committed atrocities. To appeal to a contemporary audience that often views the Civil War as a fascinating story and the Union and Confederacy as quintessential American protagonists, the goal of softening the strident rhetoric of the prison accounts may be calculated to maintain interest. The popularity of current editions of prison narratives depends as much on being a good yarn as in offering a window into the real war.²⁰

²⁰ Benjamin F. Booth and Steve Meyer, *Dark Days of the Rebellion* (1897; repr., Garrison, Iowa: Meyer Publishing, 1995), vii; J. V. Hadley, *Seven Months a Prisoner* (1898; repr., Hanover, Ind.: The Nugget Publishers, 1998), i. Other selected prison accounts include Thomas M. Boaz, *Libby Prison & Beyond* (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1999); Francis W. Dawson, *Reminiscences of Confederate Service 1861-1865*, ed. Bell I. Wiley (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1993); Robert H. Kellogg, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* (1865; repr., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971); J.C. Poe, ed., *The Raving Foe: A Civil War Diary and List of Prisoners* (Eastland, Tex.: The Longhorn Press, 1967).

Although the plastic surgery done on the old prisoner accounts indicates the enduring interest in and commercial potential for the subject of Civil War prisons, some current authors make even less of an attempt to hide their hopes of cashing in on the prison controversy. Books like *Best Little Stories from the Civil War*, *The Amazing Civil War* and *Blood: Stories of Life and Death from the Civil War* contain sensationalistic excerpts of prisoner suffering or great escapes devoid of any historical context. Although they offer no interpretation of substance, such opportunism testifies to the ongoing financial profitability of the Civil War legacy.²¹

Crass profiteering aside, the booming interest in Civil War prisons among amateur historians demonstrated in the proliferation of camp histories and edited memoirs also influences contemporary regimental and state histories, as well as more general studies such as David Madden's *Beyond the Battlefield* and Ray M. Carson's *The Civil War Soldier*. The cumulative impact of these sincere efforts to apply the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons to each individual camp, prisoner, regiment, state, or Civil War soldiers in general, adds an important dimension to the understanding of the subject. As these histories pile up, they confirm the perception that prison suffering occurred in equal measure on both sides while also building a case for the centrality of the prison experience to the overall story of the Civil War.²²

²¹ C. Bryan Kelly, *Best Little Stories from the Civil War* (1994; repr., Nashville, Tenn.: Cumberland House, 1998); Webb Garrison, *The Amazing Civil War* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998); Peter Kadzis, ed., *Blood: Stories of Life and Death from the Civil War* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press and Balliett & Fitzgerald, Inc., 2000).

²² For examples of regimental histories, see Joseph Gibbs, *Three Years in the Bloody Eleventh* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002); Raymond J. Herek, *These Men have Seen Hard Service* (Detroit: Wayne State University

In contrast to the focus of amateur historians on fleshing out the details of Civil War prisons, since the 1960s professional scholars, having digested the objective interpretation of the topic, began to investigate the subject of treatment of prisoners during the Civil War in the context of their increasingly specialized disciplines. Archeologists researched the sites of Andersonville and Johnson's Island to gain, in the words of David Bush, "a specific appreciation of those confined on the island." Arch Blakey published the first biography of General John Winder, the man in charge of Confederate prisons, in 1990, nineteen years after the only study of General William Hoffman, Winder's counterpart, appeared as an unpublished dissertation. Michael Gray offered a unique perspective on the story of Elmira with *The Business of Captivity*, an examination of how the economics involved in running a prison camp affected the town and its captives. Other academics detailed the role of religion in Civil War prisons or examined how the camps became fodder for propaganda.²³

Press, 1998. Two examples of prison discussion in state histories can be found in William J. Jackson, *New Jerseyans in the Civil War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Alan A. Sigel, *Beneath the Starry Flag: New Jersey's Civil War Experience* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001). David Madden, ed., *Beyond the Battlefield: The Ordinary Life and Extraordinary Times of the Civil War Soldier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Ray M. Carson, *The Civil War Soldier* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2000).

²³ David R. Bush, "Interpreting the Latrines of the Johnson's Island Civil War Military Prison," *Historical Archeology* 34 (Number 1, 2000): 62; see also Clarence R. Geier and Stephen R. Potter, eds., *Archeological Perspectives on the Civil War* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2000), 165-187. Arch F. Blakey, *General John H. Winder C. S. A.* (Gainesville, Fla: University of Florida Press, 1990); Leslie G. Hunter, "Warden for the Union: General William Hoffman (1807-1884)," (Ph. D. diss., University of Arizona, 1971); see also Gayla M. Koerting, "The Trial of Henry Wirz and Nineteenth Century Military Law," (Ph. D. diss., Kent State University, 1995). Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and its Civil War Prison* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 2001). Additional recent approaches to the topic of Civil War prisons can be found in Steven E. Woodworth, *While God is Marching On: The*

Along with these innovative studies, other scholars delved deeper into Civil War prisons using the more traditional organizational approach. Joseph P. Cangemi and Casimir J. Kowalski, in their respective capacities as a psychology professor and director of international relations, looked at what might be gleaned from the tragedy of Andersonville in 1992's *Andersonville Prison: Lessons in Organizational Failure*. One essay in Cangemi and Kowalski's collection came from the pen of Kerry M. Hart, of the Organization Development Section of the General Motors Corporation, who argued that "an individual in any organization today can identify with particular characteristics of the prison." Apparently learning from Andersonville's spectacular record of failure could prevent similar mistakes in the business world.²⁴

Although these studies may seem tangentially connected, the work of these scholars actually shared three themes beyond the common topic of Civil War prisons. Whether biographical, archeological, economic, or organizational these perspectives confirmed the ongoing relevance of the subject of Civil War prisons and, just as importantly, pointed out possible avenues of inquiry. This glimmer of versatility offered

Religious World of Civil War Soldiers (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Steven E. Woodworth, ed., *The Loyal, True, and Brave: America's Civil War Soldiers* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2002); Stephen B. Oates, *A Woman of Valor: Clara Barton and the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1994); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988); Kathleen Collins, "Living Skeletons," *History of Photography* 12 (April-June 1988): 103-120; Leslie J. Gordon-Burr, "Storms of Indignation: The Art of Andersonville as Postwar Propaganda," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (Fall 1991): 587-600; Andrew Skolnick, Medicine and War: Recognizing Common Vulnerability of Friend and Foe," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 265 (February 20, 1991): 834, 837.

²⁴ Kerry M. Hart, "Andersonville: Lessons for Today's Managers," in *Andersonville Prison: Lessons in Organizational Failure*, Joseph P. Cangemi and Casimir J. Kowalski, eds. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 1992), 78-79.

fresh insight into a field traditionally dominated by a straightforward narrative approach. And finally, contemporary scholarship provided further confirmation of the objective consensus regarding Civil War prisons.

Freed from the historical straightjacket that previously constricted the field of Civil War prison studies, other recent historians, most notably Reid Mitchell, turned to a comparative methodology in their investigation of Civil War prisons in the specific hopes of drawing valuable parallels about the larger questions posed by modern war. In an 1997 essay published in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, Mitchell commented on the slippery issues of where the atrocities committed in Civil War prisons belonged in relation to the brutalities committed in other modern wars and also the inherent difficulty of placing the atrocities of any war in proper perspective. “The relationship of Civil War prisons to the evolution of total war is a historical problem,” Mitchell argued, a conundrum complicated by his belief that “the concept of total war itself is problematic.” After all, he declared, “where do we look for our model of total war?” Identifying the Civil War as a total war and equating Andersonville and Elmira with the Holocaust or the Bataan Death March, in Mitchell’s opinion, “trivializes the horrors that the twentieth century concocted.” Despite the inherent uncertainties and value judgments that inevitably color historical analysis of cruelties committed in any war, one truism, according to Mitchell, remained constant. “Modern wars,” he concluded, “are detestably cruel to prisoners.” On that point at least,

no matter the difference of opinion as to which historical atrocities represent the nadir of modern civilization, few could disagree.²⁵

Mitchell's attempt to reconcile the atrocities of Civil War prisons with those committed in World War II followed a tradition that dated back to James Bonner, MacKinlay Kantor and Saul Levitt. But by the 1970s, the controversy over the Vietnam War and how its prisoners of war fared provided scholars with yet another comparative model. In 1974, the Institute for World Order, an international organization devoted, among other goals, to world peace, released *War Criminals, War Victims: Andersonville, Nuremberg, Hiroshima, My Lai*. As part of a series of books called "Crises in World Order," *War Criminals, War Victims* presented the view that these four tragedies shared common origins. The juxtaposition of these four case studies of atrocity was intentionally calculated to force readers to address what the editors called the "central" question provoked by the recurrence of atrocities with each successive modern war. Their assessment of the relationship between "law," "morality," and "individual conscience" and how those abstract concepts applied to the problem of "individual responsibility in time of war" anticipated Mitchell's findings. The most troubling aspect about the stubborn appearance of atrocities over the course of a century involved humanity's painfully slow learning curve. When Lieutenant William Calley stated, "I am hopeful that My Lai will bring the meaning of war to the surface not only to our nation but to all nations," the irony lay in the fact that if the horrors of Andersonville,

²⁵ Reid Mitchell, "'Our Prison System, Supposing We Had Any': The Confederate and Union Prison Systems," in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, ed. Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 584-85; see also Gerald F. Linderman, "Battle in Two Wars: The Combat Soldiers's Perspective," in *War Comes Again*, ed. Gabor Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96.

Nuremberg and Hiroshima combined failed to drive home the meaning of war, My Lai had little chance to accomplish that idealistic goal.²⁶

Beyond the general comparison of atrocities in modern war, for Eric T. Dean and Robert C. Doyle, Vietnam also served as a lens through which to better understand the nature of the prisoner of war experience in all modern wars. While Dean's *Shook over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* focused on the effects of combat on soldiers in both wars and argued that the postwar lives of Civil War prisoners exhibited similar symptoms to those of Vietnam veterans, Doyle's *Voices from Captivity* examined the remarkable consistency of prisoner of war accounts regardless of the conflict they described. "Although the technology of warfare has changed," Doyle pointed out, "the fearful horrors of captivity have not." The common themes of food, escape, boredom, exchange or release dominated prisoner narratives regardless of the particular war. By echoing Hesseltine's statement of "the greater atrocity of war itself," Doyle thus simultaneously confirmed the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons as well as the unsettling suspicions of Dean, Mitchell and the Institute of World Order that the cycle of atrocity seemed endless. Such sentiments made sense in the depressing aftermath of the Vietnam War and showed why the understanding of Civil War prisons remained important—that such atrocities occurred in the Civil War brought into question our American national character, while the persistence of similar atrocities throughout the twentieth century reveals that our sense of morality has not improved.²⁷

²⁶ Institute for World Order, *War Criminals, War Victims: Andersonville, Nuremberg, Hiroshima, My Lai* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), 1, 4, 48.

²⁷ Eric T. Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81-87; Robert C. Doyle,

Given the fragmentation of the historical profession since the 1960s, a process from which Civil War prison scholarship has clearly not been exempted, recent intellectuals, despite their insights, made little impact on the public perception of Civil War prisons. Instead, led by the overt commercialization of the prison controversy in the town of Andersonville, it seems particularly appropriate to recognize that over the last few decades, the industry that is American popular culture churned out prison-related products and thus played the dominant role in shaping contemporary conceptions of Civil War prisons. The appearance of a host of movies, novels, children's books and even a folk rock song continued to shape public discourse on the responsibility for and the meaning of the prison atrocities while demonstrating once again that pesky history can interfere with a good story.²⁸

One of the best examples of the resulting incongruities that occur when history and popular culture collide involved the 1996 TNT movie, *Andersonville*. Intended as an introduction to the daily sufferings of the prisoners, *Andersonville* focused on the deprivation of the Union prisoners-of-war, who maintain an unbroken spirit despite the constant death that surrounds them. The Wirz depicted in the movie resembles the old caricature, a less than human figure ultimately responsible for the thousands of fatalities.

Voices from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 294-295; Hesseltine, "Civil War Prisons—Introduction," 8.

²⁸ A sample of these materials includes Herbert Collingwood, *Andersonville Violets: A Story of Northern and Southern Life* (1889; repr., Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 2000); Vigilantes of Love, "Andersonville;" Douglas J. Savage, *Prison Camps of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000); Civil War Journal, *The Legacies* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1999), 437-469; Robert D. Dean, *Echoes of Andersonville* (Franklin, Tenn: Heritage Press, 1999); David Madden, *Sharpshooter* (Knoxville, Tenn: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Robert Vaughan, *Andersonville* (New York: Boulevard Books, 1996).

Obsequious before superior officers, Wirz berates helpless prisoners and callously disregards men dying in his stocks. During the final scene, a camera slowly pans backward to reveal the 13,000 white headstones that mark the graveyard. As the screen fades to black, the final words pronounced the familiar judgment of Wirz: “After the war, Wirz was hanged, the only soldier to be tried and executed for war crimes committed during the civil war.” But the central concept behind the movie was not to revive the demonized image of Wirz. Instead *Andersonville*, like all forms of popular culture, simply played on the stereotypes available to it—in this case the demonic reputation of Wirz and Andersonville. Confirmation of the dread symbolic power that the name of Andersonville still conjures up came from author Sarah Vowell, who wrote in 2002’s *The Partly Cloudy Patriot*, “In my self-help universe, when things go wrong I whisper mantras to myself, mantras like ‘Andersonville.’” “‘Andersonville,’” she explained, “is a code word for ‘You could be one of the prisoners of war dying of disease and malnutrition in the worst Confederate prison, so just calm down about the movie you wanted to go to being sold out.’”²⁹

²⁹ *Andersonville*, VHS, produced and directed by John Frankenheimer and David Rintels, Turner Pictures, 1996. In 1970, a PBS movie on Andersonville appeared: *The Andersonville Trial*, VHS, produced and directed by George C. Scott, KCET Los Angeles, 1970. Supposedly based on the Kantor novel, this picture more than likely portrays Wirz in a negative light. Unfortunately, I cannot say for sure, because the movie has been withdrawn from video libraries. A televised version of Levitt’s play also remains out of my grasp. A brief scene in the 1985 mini-series, *The Blue and the Gray*, perhaps two minutes in length, takes place at Elmira prison, in New York; the scene describes Elmira as “hell.” The rest of the scene occurs in an Union office, however, and does not depict the horrors of the stockade or the brutality of individual officers. *The Blue and the Gray*, VHS, directed by Andrew V. McLaglen, Columbia Pictures Television, Inc., 1982. Sarah Vowell, *The Partly Cloudy Patriot* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 40.

The persistence in popular culture of the old perception of Andersonville as a place of exceptional cruelty indicated that the legacy of Civil War prisons, despite the widespread acceptance of the objective interpretation, remained contested even at the dawn of the twenty-first century, not in terms of reconciliation, but in terms of motivation for broaching the subject of the prisons. The malleable nature of the prison controversy meant that it served the interests of those who manipulated it in the name of inspiring Cold War patriotism, promoting tourism, rallying Confederate heritage, exploring the lessons of history, seeking the meaning of modern war, or simply cashing in on various products. Those who looked more deeply at the events of the twentieth century, however, found the prison controversy discomfiting as the pattern of atrocity eerily replicated itself with each new war. Well over a century after the horrors of Civil War prisons occurred, the enduring fascination with this sordid episode of history continued to spread, promulgated both by commercialization and the nagging instinct of curiosity, that there remained a useful lesson in the story, if it was possible to learn.

CHAPTER 8: “THE TASK OF HISTORY IS NEVER DONE”

Since its brief but devastating existence during the Civil War, Andersonville represented more than just the name of a prison camp, as it became a term synonymous with cruelty. Despite the emergence of the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons during the twentieth century, the stigma of the past continued to linger. The focal point of that remaining bitterness, the ground zero of Civil War prisons, was located at the same spot as in 1865—Andersonville National Cemetery, resting place for the thirteen thousand dead prisoners, and the adjacent prison grounds. Throughout the years Andersonville became increasingly and naturally central in the public perception of Civil War prisons for several reasons. Its 13,000 casualties represented nearly one-fourth of all the prisoners who died in the Civil War, and its twenty-nine percent mortality rate made it the deadliest prison on a comparative basis as well. The execution of Henry Wirz as alone responsible for the deplorable conditions further marked Andersonville as the singularly important Civil War prison. While survivors of other camps wrote memoirs and discussed the horrors they experienced, as the largest prison Andersonville inspired the most narratives and monuments, including the controversial Wirz memorial. Artists from Thomas Nast to MacKinlay Kantor chose Andersonville as the primary symbol of Civil War prisons. Andersonville also claimed one other dubious advantage in the postwar contest for public attention—as a result of the federal government’s establishment of Andersonville National Cemetery in 1865 and its assumption of ownership of the prison grounds in 1910, by the late twentieth century it was the only major Civil War prison site left largely intact.

Across Highway 49, the town of Andersonville attempted to shed the guilt of the past and embraced the opportunity of commercializing the prison controversy. The care of the actual site of some of the worst Civil War atrocities, however, required a more delicate sense of respect. In the last half of the twentieth century, the national government, after years of passive oversight, became interested in developing the Andersonville site. Along with the process of preservation came the recognition that success in this undertaking depended on the creation of a usable interpretation of Andersonville's legacy.

Between 1910, when the national government accepted stewardship of the Andersonville prison grounds from the Women's Relief Corps, and the late 1950s, little change occurred at the location as the number of visitors and public interest in Civil War prisons declined. Under the management of the Department of the Army, the minimal preservation efforts at Andersonville Prison Park and the National Cemetery not only reflected public apathy but also the government's willingness to allow the once intense controversy over the sensitive subject of Civil War prisons to fade. With the exception of the efforts of Civilian Conservation Corps laborers during the 1930s, improvements took place only sporadically. The hands-off approach of the Army at Andersonville worked prior to the late 1950s because of the gradual declining interest in the site after the deaths of both Civil War veterans and those who most staunchly vied to establish their interpretation of the history of Civil War prisons. The peace and quiet that settled over Andersonville quickly dissipated beginning with the 1955 publication of MacKinlay Kantor's *Andersonville*. By the late 1950s tourists started to overwhelm the limited Army staff, and the Civil War Centennial celebrations focused more attention on

Andersonville. As early as 1959, Army officials recognized the impracticability of the current state of affairs and let it be known that “the operation and maintenance of the park” had become burdensome.¹

As rumors of Andersonville’s uncertain future swirled in the early 1960s, the question of what would happen to the site next became paramount. With the growing acceptance of the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons, especially after the harsh lessons of World War II atrocities, and the rising tourist interest sparked by Kantor and the Civil War Centennial, some Georgians saw dollar signs when they looked at the prison and began a campaign for “a properly developed and promoted Andersonville historical complex.” In early 1966, Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell arranged a meeting between prominent Georgian supporters of the idea and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. Along with Georgia’s other Senator, Herman Talmadge, State Senator Jimmy Carter, the chairman of the West Central Georgia Area Planning and Development Commission, led the delegation, which requested Udall’s support for a proposed “national historical memorial on the site of the Confederate prison near Andersonville, Ga.” Carter took pains to assure Udall that Georgians had no intent “to reconstruct a one-sided version of what took place at Andersonville,” but rather, in a statement in keeping with the objective sentiments of Hesseltine, preferred to focus on the “national significance” of Andersonville “as part of the nation’s history.” Udall,

¹ Fred Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 7; for Civilian Conservation Corps activities, see Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; Robert J. Hill and William B. Keeling, *Preliminary Development Study Andersonville Historical Complex* (Athens, Ga.: The Bureau of Business and Economic Research and The Institute of Community and Area Development, The University of Georgia, 1965), 1.

although non-committal, indicated that the concept intrigued him. “I like the idea,” Udall declared, because “that is the story of life.” “History,” he stated, “contains many things that are pleasant and unpleasant.” The meeting of these officials marked the true beginning of the campaign to transform Andersonville into a national park. If properly presented, the history of Andersonville promised not only financial benefits but a chance to further defuse the sectional animosities of the past and, unfortunately, present. In the recent climate of the Civil Rights movement, which once again pitted the South against the rest of the nation, the opportunity to recast a symbol of sectional bitterness as a healing memorial to all prisoners of war made both financial and political sense. By the fall of 1966, a National Park Service planning study expressed the increasing interest in assuming control of the “grim” site and its unique legacy. “Since many people tend to think of the Civil War in terms of gallant charges and nostalgic battle songs,” the report concluded, “it is, perhaps appropriate that they have an opportunity to see a side of the War that was only too familiar to the men who fought in it.”²

Although many Georgians and National Park Service members saw the possibilities of Andersonville, as Fred Boyles, the current superintendent of Andersonville National Historic Site, points out, the transition of the grounds from the Department of Defense to the Department of the Interior was no “easy task” because the creation of a national park required Congressional approval. In September 1970, Georgia Congressman Jack Brinkley, one of the staunchest supporters of preserving the prison

² Hill and Keeling, *Preliminary Development Study Andersonville Historical Complex*, 36; *Atlanta Constitution*, March 25, 1966, clipping in Civil War Miscellany Papers, Box 1, Andersonville, Georgia, Military Prison Folder, Georgia State Archives; *Planning Study Report Andersonville Prison Park Georgia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1966), 13.

location and sponsor of the bill to turn the prison into a national park, addressed the House of Representative to explain why the creation of an Andersonville National Historic Site was necessary. Andersonville “is the only Civil War prison site in the Nation physically in existence and still untouched by urban growth,” Brinkley stated, and therefore its preservation was vital. But if the importance of history failed to rally supporters to the cause, Brinkley also reminded listeners that, as “an outstanding point of interest,” Andersonville “will attract many, many thousands of visitors each year.”³

Brinkley’s persuasive case aside, an understated but critical source of motivation for the establishment of Andersonville National Historic Site came from the contemporary events taking place in Vietnam. On October 7, 1970, the day the Senate passed Brinkley’s bill, the Senate placed into the official record an excerpt from a Senate report that advocated adoption of the measure. Not only would the creation of Andersonville National Historic Site pay tribute to the “painful sacrifices of those who preceded us,” the report stated, but Andersonville would also serve “as a memorial” to “all Americans who have served their country, at home and abroad, and suffered the loneliness and anguish of captivity. It is the undaunted spirit of men such as these that keeps America the Nation that it is.” The harsh lessons being learned once again in Vietnam about the suffering of prisoners of war helped propel the Senate’s understanding of Andersonville as an important opportunity to recognize permanently the “grim” reality of the “story of captivity.” Although Vietnam never received explicit mention, the universal language with which the Senate report discussed the bill clearly reflected the

³ Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” 7; Congressman Brinkley of Georgia speaking for Authorizing the Establishment of the Andersonville National Historic Site, GA, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 116, pt. 23 (14 September 1970): H 31454.

impact of that terrible war and provided a powerful incentive to support the measure. The combination of Brinkley's pragmatic presentation and the desire to recognize the current prisoners of war won the day; the transfer of the grounds to the National Park Service became official. Andersonville National Cemetery and the Andersonville Prison Park merged together to form the Andersonville National Historic Site.⁴

Although the successful creation of Andersonville National Historic Site helped inspire the "Andersonville Trail" and the Andersonville Guild's restoration of the town itself, not all Georgians viewed the government's plan to raise Andersonville's national profile as a positive step. As the bill emerged from the congressional labyrinth, the controversy over Andersonville flared once again as a debate ensued over the future of the park and the appropriate role of the federal government in promoting, according to the language of one congressional report on the matter, "the interpretation of the life of a prisoner-of-war and the role of prison camps in history." Leadership of the opposition came from the organization long distinguished by its singular devotion to righting the historical injustices committed against the South, the United Daughters of the Confederacy. J. G. Madry, the national chairman of the UDC's Andersonville committee, explained that Brinkley in particular "got our dander up" because he "turned against the South." In 1971, the UDC began a campaign to repeal the legislation designating Andersonville as a national park. Madry and the UDC resented that "this prison is being singled out," when "we feel that what happened to our Confederate soldiers in Northern prisons is as bad as what happened to Union soldiers at Andersonville." "Most tourists aren't historians," she exclaimed, and therefore, no

⁴ Andersonville National Historic Site, GA, 91st Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* 116, pt. 26 (7 October 1970): S 35403.

matter how objective the presentation of history or strong the emphasis on the universal story of prisoner of war suffering, the site would only reconfirm the “malicious and libelous, insulting and injurious myth” of Andersonville’s singular reputation for cruelty.⁵

In early 1972, UDC Vice President Mildred Veasey wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter, then Governor of Georgia, “expressing resentment” over the travesty of “the so-called National Historic Site at Andersonville, Georgia.” Although Veasey recognized that, thanks to the support of a powerful alliance of Georgia politicians and businessmen behind the project, repeal of the law seemed unlikely, she hoped that Carter would at least consider delaying any appropriations to Andersonville “unless and until” additional laws gave the UDC and Sons of Confederate Veterans the means to prevent the “injurious myth” from spreading further. Veasey asked that the UDC be allowed to participate in the process of interpreting history at Andersonville by placing monuments “honoring Southern men who died in Northern prison camps,” constructing markers “giving the South’s historic position before the war,” including “information about conditions and deaths in Northern prisoner-of-war camps” in “any exhibits, speeches, or recordings at the center,” and appointing “representatives to serve on any historical committee.”⁶

The demands of the UDC apparently made little impact on Carter, whose staunch support for the Andersonville National Historic Site dated back to the 1960s. Rather than allow the UDC to rehash the old prison debate, Carter instead ignored their demands and

⁵ Andersonville National Historic Site, Ga, *Congressional Record*. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., Vol. 116, pt. 26 (7 October 1970): S 35403; *Atlanta Constitution*, November 12, 1971, November 7, 1971, clippings from Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

⁶ Mildred Veasey to Jimmy Carter, 16 February 1972, Georgia Governor’s Office Papers, Box 12, Andersonville National Park Governor’s Commission Folder, Georgia State Archives.

embraced the concept of transforming Andersonville into a symbol of the universal suffering of prisoners of war. As part of his efforts to turn division into unity, Carter in 1972 appointed a Governor's Commission and charged it with the creation of a Georgia monument at Andersonville National Historic Site. In 1973, the commission, led by Congressman Brinkley, selected University of Georgia sculptor William Thompson for the task of the Andersonville monument (as well as a statue of Senator Russell). The following year Thompson described his intentions for the Andersonville sculpture at a presentation of his proposed model. The statue consisted of three emaciated, wounded prisoners of war, each struggling to assist his comrades. The monument was designed to provoke the realization, Thompson explained, "that the conditions I am trying to depict are universal." The emotional scene, he hoped, conveyed the feelings of all prisoners, from the "combination of resignation to the tragedy of confinement and hope for freedom and a new life." For Thompson and Carter at least, these broader feelings and lessons about the prisoner of war experience, at a time, as Thompson acknowledged, when "prisoners of war from Viet Nam were returning," comprised the heart of Andersonville's legacy. One hundred thousand dollars, the amount earmarked for the project, seemed a small price to pay for a monument designed to generate a positive perception of Andersonville.⁷

On Memorial Day, May 30, 1976, Thompson unveiled his finished monument to all American prisoners of war. As the *Americus Times-Recorder* noted, it was the "first

⁷ *Atlanta Constitution*, October 11, 1974, clipping in Georgia Governor's Office Papers, Box 12, Andersonville National Park Governor's Commission Folder, Georgia State Archives; William J. Thompson, "Prisoners of War Memorial Georgia Memorial Andersonville, Georgia," undated statement in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

of its kind erected.” Located at the entrance to Andersonville National Cemetery, the inscription on the base of the statue, in contrast to the old state monuments with their lists of casualties, took a passage from the book of Zechariah, “turn ye to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope.” Speaker Brinkley reminded the crowd of about fifteen hundred that, in keeping with the spirit of Thompson’s monument, “we should remember the most recent war when our soldiers fought without question.” Vietnam veterans, especially former prisoners of war, Brinkley stated, “should be saluted and their families given deep gratitude.” The vision of Thompson, Brinkley, and Carter conflated the separate prisoner of war tragedies into one presentation that acknowledged the sacrificing nature and heroic qualities displayed by POWs in all wars. Although they echoed the Civil War prison narratives in their emphasis on the themes of sacrifice and heroism, Thompson, Brinkley, and Carter focused on the unifying power of that patriotic message, and in doing so, set the tone for the interpretation of history at Andersonville National Historic Site.

Thompson’s statue confirmed the growing acceptance of the arguments of Hesseltine, Bonner, Kantor, and Levitt, among others, all of whom viewed Civil War prisons as part of the larger context of modern war in general. Recast as a monument to the universal tragedy of war, Andersonville National Historic Site continued the unlikely transformation from a symbol of shrill sectional division into a solemn testament to the sacrifice of all prisoners of war.⁸

⁸ *Americus Times Recorder*, May 31, 1976, clipping in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; William Burnett, “Memorial Day through the Years,” p. 18, Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site; for an analysis of the Thompson sculpture, see Michaela Oberlaender, “William J. Thompson’s Andersonville Memorial: Historical Precedents and Contemporary Context,” (M. A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1993).

Although the objections of the UDC complicated the efforts of Carter and Brinkley in the early 1970s, National Park Service officials at Andersonville faced an even more demanding task as they, in the words of Superintendent Boyles, “were busy in the 1970s telling the story of Andersonville.” Although the overall mission of Andersonville National Historic Site, according to the 1971 master plan for the location, centered on the “presentation of an effective interpretive story” of “life and death in military prisons throughout the ages of man,” making that ambition a reality at Andersonville would require years of work. The immediate priority, argued historian Edwin Bearss, had to be the preservation and interpretation of the “structural history of the prison.” His 1970 “Historic Resource Study and Historical Base Map” created the framework for this initial goal. The years of relative neglect needed to be overcome in order to achieve the broader message, and the development of the old stockade proceeded slowly during the 1970s.⁹

By 1974, with restoration efforts underway at the prison site, the NPS again examined the problem of how to juxtapose the specific story of Andersonville during the Civil War with the universal interpretation of prisoner of war suffering. The 1974 “Interpretive Prospectus” for Andersonville National Historic Site acknowledged that the “touchy” subject of Andersonville made it essential that visitors to the park proceed through an “interpretive facility” before touring the prison and cemetery. A combination of lobby, “mood room,” and brief audio-visual presentation on the general experience of

⁹ Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” 8; *Master Plan* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1971), iii; Edwin C. Bearss, *Andersonville National Historic Site Historic Resource Study and Historical Base Map* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1970), i.

prisoners of war would establish the broad context of what it meant to be held as a prisoner of war. As tourists then viewed the specific story of Andersonville, park officials hoped that the visitors would understand that, as unpleasant as Andersonville had been, the suffering there was simply one chapter in a larger, ongoing tale. “We would like visitors,” the prospectus stated, “to leave the area with a feeling of antipathy for war, hope for peace.” Due to limited budgets and the demands of getting the new unit at Andersonville up to speed, however, as Boyles explains, expanding on the “little attention” given to “the larger story of all POWs” remained difficult. The NPS’ 1979 “Environmental Assessment for General Management Plan/Developmental Concept Plan” admitted that, after almost a decade of operations, the park still failed to meet its obligations of emphasizing the theme of the overall experience of prisoners of war. The “small” size of the “visitor contact facility” prevented any substantial presentation of the larger interpretation, while the “inadequate” and “hazardous” nature of the facilities and circular access route through the prison grounds further discouraged repeat visits. As Andersonville National Historic Site entered its second decade of existence, much work lay ahead before realization of its core mission.¹⁰

In the early 1980s, Boyles reports, Chief Ranger Alfredo Sanchez “recognized that the park was ignoring its larger mission of commemorating all POWs.” By now accustomed to budget shortages, Sanchez turned to a private group, the American Ex-Prisoners of War, as a potential ally to help achieve that goal. By 1984, the AXPOW

¹⁰ John E. Jensen, *Interpretative Prospectus* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1974), 3-5, 19; Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” 8; Denver Service Center, *Environmental Assessment for General Management Plan/Development Concept Plan, Andersonville National Historic Site, Georgia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1979), 3.

agreed to support the building of a museum “on site to tell the larger story.” To fund the proposed National Prisoner of War Museum, the AXPOW created the Andersonville Fund, a campaign that hoped to raise two and a half million dollars and thus offset any residual effects of the government’s underfunding of the Andersonville National Historic Site. Throughout the 1980s, Sanchez and park superintendent John Tucker continued to reach out to various POW organizations. Efforts to expand the small visitor center to include “exhibits on recent wars,” along with invitations to groups like AXPOW, the American League of Families for Ex-POWs and MIAs and Nam-POWs to attend ceremonies at Andersonville encouraged the growing visibility of the park among all veterans, not just prisoners of war. New “unbiased” NPS brochures also appeared in 1987, and the redesigned pamphlets offered comparative death rates of prisoners in the Civil War, World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam. Slowly but surely the interpretation of the universal prisoner of war story started to come into focus.¹¹

Thanks to a Congressional appropriation in the early 1990s, Boyles stated, planning for the National POW Museum “began in earnest.” The alliance between the NPS and AXPOW led to the formation of the Andersonville Task Force Committee, ex-prisoners from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam who offered their input on the museum’s design and overall interpretation of the prisoner of war experience. The NPS also reached out to the local community, particularly Friends of Andersonville, a group, as Boyles noted, led by a former POW, Carl Runge. Runge spearheaded efforts to raise

¹¹ Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” 8; articles on POW activities at the prison can be found in *Americus Times Recorder*, April 30, 1984, May 31, 1984, November 9, 1987, while information on the new brochures appears in *Citizen & Georgian*, February 18, 1987, all clippings in Andersonville Vertical Files, Andersonville National Historic Site.

an additional four hundred thousand dollars for the museum, led a successful campaign to have the government build a new park entrance road to the facility, and “developed national publicity for Andersonville and the museum” by getting Turner Productions interested in filming the TNT movie *Andersonville* in the mid-90s.¹²

Despite the cooperation of the NPS, AXPOW, and Friends of Andersonville, as Wayne Hitchcock, National Commander of AXPOW wrote in “The Coin that Made the Museum Possible,” the original two and a half million dollar goal remained out of reach in the early 1990s. Although the government agreed to match the money privately raised with federal funds, unless an additional source of revenue could be found, the National POW Museum would remain in limbo. In 1993, to secure the necessary funding for the project, Florida Congressman Pete Peterson, a Vietnam POW, introduced a bill for the minting of a “Prisoner of War Commemorative Coin.” On one side of the proposed coin, an inscription read “freedom” next to the image of “a chained eagle” breaking through barbed wire, the remnants of the chain dangling from its leg. The opposite side of the coin featured a depiction of the hoped-for National POW Museum. By the end of 1993 Congress approved the coin, and the proceeds of the sales, although not as brisk as anticipated, raised nearly three million dollars for the project.¹³

With the financial hurdles finally overcome, on July 15, 1996, The Mitchell Group, a Georgia company, received the nearly four million dollar contract and began construction. The National POW Museum was underway. As NPS architect Carla

¹² Boyles, “The Evolution of the National Prisoner of War Museum,” 8-10.

¹³ Wayne Hitchcock, “The Coin that Made the Museum Possible,” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 15-16.

McConnell explained it, several considerations influenced the museum's location and design, but the overall purpose "has been to develop an architectural vocabulary which reinforces the stories related by all POWs. A new entry road funneled all visitors "directly to the Museum," she pointed out, and although the large museum needed to be "dramatically visible," the issue of the building's height initially proved troublesome. Too tall, the structure detracted "from the Andersonville prison site," McConnell pointed out, and so the finished product took the form of a "long, low solid dark-maroon brick building punctuated with three grey granite towers." The museum's appearance "is reminiscent of prisons," she argued, "and uses the thematic elements common to all POW stories: towers, gates, confinement, water and light." The addition of the outdoor Commemorative Courtyard behind the museum, an open space containing a "meandering stream" and sculptures provided a peaceful spot of contemplation as well as an opportunity to gather one's thoughts before proceeding on to the prison stockade or the National Cemetery.¹⁴

Since the outside of the National POW museum invoked the universal themes of prisons, the interior design was calculated to do the same. J. Scott Harmon, exhibit planner at the Harpers Ferry Center, described the collaborative process of his NPS unit with the Denver Service Center, AXPOW and Barry Howard Associates, a California exhibit design company over "the guiding principle" that "we were to tell the story of all of America's prisoners of war, not just the Civil War story of Camp Sumter, or Andersonville." An initial proposal of a chronological design starting with the French

¹⁴ Carla McConnell, "The Architecture of the National Prisoner of War Museum," in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 13-14.

and Indian War through the Persian Gulf War met with rejection due to too “much repetition.” Instead, Harmon explained, the planners realized that the exhibits needed “to focus on those experiences that are common to all prisoners of war.” Visitors would circulate through a series of exhibits, starting with “What is a POW?,” followed by “Capture,” “Living Conditions,” “News and Communications,” “Those Who Wait”, “Privation,” “Morale and Relationships,” and “Escape and Freedom.” The series of exhibits ended by depositing viewers in a central corridor that displayed “more specific interpretation” about Civil War prisons and Andersonville. Thus museum guests only encountered the specific tragedy of Civil War prisons after it had been placed in the larger context of the more general presentation of the experience of all prisoners of war.¹⁵

As visitors passed through the museum, the audio-visual presentation of prisoner interviews and footage of reunions, along with the introductory film, “Echoes of Captivity,” narrated by Colin Powell, drove home the point that while the uniforms and technology changed from war to war, the emotional and physical challenges that prisoners of war faced maintained an unfortunate consistency. The juxtaposition of artifacts from the various wars also reinforced the overall interpretation. In the “Living Conditions” exhibit, canteens and utensils from Andersonville prisoners rested alongside the canteens and utensils of World War II and Korea POWs. Lying side by side, these relics poignantly reminded viewers that the mutual suffering of all prisoners of war crossed historical boundaries. No matter when or where imprisonment occurred, deprivation invariably followed. The relentlessly emotional presentation served a clear

¹⁵ J. Scott Harmon, “Evolution of an Exhibition,” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 18-20.

purpose, one apparent upon entrance into the museum lobby. “The National Prisoner of War Museum,” a dedication panel read, “is dedicated to the men and women of this country who suffered captivity so that others could remain free. Their story is one of sacrifice and courage; their legacy, the gift of liberty.” This acknowledgment of sacrifice not only echoed the words found in the narratives of Civil War prison survivors but congratulated them on their achievement—the protection of freedom for subsequent generations of Americans, some of whom made the same sacrifices in later wars. Although the rhetoric emphasizing sacrifice hearkened back to the explanations of the past, the museum dedication seemed calculated to serve the needs of the present. Despite the inherently depressing subject material, the museum infused the tragedy of war with an optimistic meaning of redemption. The torment experienced by all American prisoners of war, not just those of the Civil War, now took place for a reason. No matter how unspeakable each individual prisoner’s ordeal, all Americans could recognize the heroic courage of prisoners of war, feel comfort in the meaning of each prisoner’s sacrifice, and, as a result, remember their own responsibility to protect the ideals for which those captives suffered.¹⁶

On April 9, 1998, the anniversary of the Bataan Death March, the dedication ceremonies of the National POW Museum drew more than three thousand observers, mostly ex-POWs, to Andersonville National Historic Site. Although President Clinton

¹⁶ Tim Radford, “The Visual Story,” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 22-24; Polly Weister, “Echoes of ‘Echoes’: Reflections on the Making of ‘Echoes in Captivity,’” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 25-26; Barry Howard Limited, “First Draft Exhibit Notebook, National Prisoner of War Museum Book One,” 9 April 1993, 5. 19. T1-5. 21. A1., in possession of the author, Andersonville National Historic Site.

did not attend, he sent his blessing to the attendees, thanking “these American heroes” for reminding us “that freedom does not come without a price.” The main speaker, Senator John McCain, another Vietnam POW, told the crowd that, “all the Andersonvilles in our history” tell the “story of a struggle against daunting odds to choose their own way, to stay faithful to a shared cause.” Many of the former prisoners of war witnessed the ceremony and toured the exhibits in amazement, feeling overwhelmed by the permanent tribute of the museum. Ohioan Harley Coon, a Korean War POW, exulted in the moment, “Americans need to realize the pain and suffering they went through to preserve our freedom.” Even in captivity, Coon remembered, “every day we fought ’em, in any way we could. We disrupted anything we could. We fought with anything we could.” In the midst of the tears of memory, pride, and anguish, a sense of appreciation for the museum’s purpose set in. According to reporter Bill Hendrick, as Georgia Governor Zell Miller observed “a youngster watching a video in the museum, said proudly, ‘that’s what this is about.’”¹⁷

On many levels, the National POW museum qualified as a triumph for the National Park System. Attendance at the park dipped to 129, 316 in 1993, but by 1998, thanks to the interest in the museum, nearly doubled to 221, 546. Although attendance slid until 2001, when 162, 416 made their way to Andersonville, the events of September 11th prompted 190,001 visitors in 2002. The heightened volume of tourists translated into brisk sales of postcards, t-shirts, children’s guides, Andersonville books and prisoner

¹⁷ *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 1; *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 10, 1998, LexisNexis Academic Documents internet database (accessed April 2003); *The New York Times*, April 10, 1998, LexisNexis Academic Documents internet database (accessed April 2003); *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 10, 1998, LexisNexis Academic Documents internet database (accessed April 2003).

narratives at the museum gift shop. To the delight of Lewis Easterlin and Peggy Sheppard, many also crossed Highway 49 to see the quaint little town of Andersonville. At the park, an ongoing effort to record the oral histories of American POWs reflected the continued dedication of the NPS to preserving and interpreting the universal story of prisoners of war. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt might well have had the example of Andersonville National Historic Site in mind when he wrote in 2000, “the task of history is never done.” We “make our future better,” he declared, “by understanding the past.”¹⁸

The ongoing success of Andersonville National Historic Site and its attempt to interpret not just Andersonville, but all Civil War prisons as part of the larger story of prisoners of war, traced its roots back to the 1960s, a critical time in the prison controversy. Without the emergence and acceptance of the objective interpretation in response to World Wars I and II, as well as the Korean War, Andersonville would have remained a symbol of sectional cruelty indefinitely. In that sense the development of Andersonville National Historic Site and the National POW Museum in particular offered compelling evidence that, at long last, the wounds of the Civil War prison tragedy can be considered almost fully healed. Reconciliation, except to the UDC and a few other dissenters, seems almost complete, although the scars will never fade.

¹⁸ “Andersonville Annual Visitation (1992-2002),” in possession of the author, Andersonville National Historic Site; Fred Sanchez, “Andersonville Prisoner of War Oral History Institute: To Preserve the Legacy,” in *National Prisoner of War Museum Andersonville, Georgia Dedication April 9, 1998* (N.p.: privately printed, 1998), 31-33; Bruce Babbitt, “Foreword,” in *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, ed. Robert K. Sutton (New York: Eastern National, 2001), vii.

On the question of determining responsibility for the suffering of Civil War prisoners, however, the impact of the Andersonville National Historic Site provided only an ambiguous response to the old debate. Although the presentation of the National Cemetery and stockade in the context of the larger story of prisoners of war defused to some extent the traditional sectional charges of deliberate cruelty, it did so in large part by ignoring the critical realization that each war, no matter what general characteristics it shared with wars of other generations, also possessed unique qualities. The presentation of the universal experience of prisoners of war actually confused the issue of responsibility for Civil War prisons in two important ways. Taking the long view of prisoners of war subtly excuses the suffering that transpires in each particular conflict because the overall interpretation requires that these martyrs endure hell as a sacrifice for an indefinite, but clearly precious, freedom. The corresponding assumption indicates prisoners of war fare badly in all wars, which lowers expectations for standards of behavior in current and future conflicts, a la Abu Ghraib. The second obfuscation stems from the fact that, in the Civil War, Americans committed these atrocities against each other. By conflating all modern wars the NPS again excuses, or at least distracts attention from, the responsibility that the Union and Confederacy shared for the tragedy of Civil War prisons. In a world where prison atrocities remain prevalent, it seems unsurprising that the slippery issue of responsibility and blame for Andersonville and the rest of the Civil War prison camps remains difficult to grasp and dependent on individual perspective.

In its enthusiasm for the universal interpretation of prisoners of war, the National POW Museum raises one additional point of concern, that, in the attempt to find meaning

in the brutality of the past, perhaps too much importance is placed on the shared sacrifice of all American POWs. Instead of expressing regret or fear about the terrible nature of war, the emphasis on sacrifice actually suggests that the experience of prisoners of war, and even war itself, serves as an opportunity to celebrate liberty and the price we are willing to pay for it. The NPS' presentation of war as positive and meaningful provides a troubling contrast to past scholarship on Civil War prisons. When Hesselstine and other scholars looked at the context of how prisoners fared in all modern wars, they did so in an attempt to show the pervasive evil of war, with the hopes of avoiding future horrors. Although perhaps naïve, that goal should remain an aspiration, and, in its current incarnation, the National POW museum represents, at least to some degree, a missed opportunity in that regard.

The creation of Andersonville National Historic Site also revealed insight about the malleability of public memory and the how the process of historical construction works. The parallels of the universal experience of prisoner of war did not stop after capture, imprisonment, and release. For decades, especially in their twilight years, Civil War prison survivors fought a rhetorical war in the form of monuments and testimonials to reassure themselves that their sacrifices meant something. The same historical concerns motivated the efforts of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam POWs to transform Andersonville into their monument too. By the 1990s, as the World War II and Korean War generation of POWs began to die, the campaign for the National POW Museum and the preservation of their story offered one final chance to feel appreciated and remind all Americans of the significance of their suffering. For Vietnam POWS, it represented yet

another positive step back from the painful divisions of the past. History may not run in cycles, nor is it endlessly repetitive, but some human needs do and are.

At less than a decade old, the National POW Museum's impact on the interpretation of Civil War prisons and the experience of prisoners of war in general remains uncertain. Given the current political climate of hyper-patriotism, the national park today exists as a lesson to the public about the important values of sacrifice and service in the face of terrible adversity, an important message in a time of fear. But this interpretation too will change over time, because one of the fundamental lessons of Andersonville is that people will see in its questions what they want to see. Despite its flaws, Andersonville National Historic Site continues to confirm the objective interpretation of Civil War prisons and attempt to discern some meaning, if any exists to be found, from its harsh lessons. That quest testifies to the enduring importance of the contested legacy of Civil War prisons. Robert Penn Warren once wrote that "the Civil War is our only 'felt' history—history lived in the national imagination." What he did not say, but what the controversy over Civil War prisons makes crucially and painfully clear, is that imagination consists of nightmares too.¹⁹

¹⁹ Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (New York: Random House, 1961), 4.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

From almost the outset of the Civil War down to the present, the controversy over the treatment of Civil War prisoners, and particularly the attempt to pinpoint responsibility for the prisoner suffering, captivated Americans struggling to first understand the meaning of the Civil War, and later the meaning of modern war in general. For several decades, until the horrors of the world wars of the first half of the twentieth century, the prison controversy was perceived historically as an anomaly, an exceptional case of deliberate brutality. Although all agreed that atrocities had been perpetuated, sharp disagreement persisted as to the source of the prison suffering. Some blamed the misery on the ruthless, unfeeling policies of the Union government or the amoral, treasonous nature of the Confederacy. As representatives of the tragedy, individual Civil War officials, most notably Henry Wirz, were condemned as sadistic and demonic. Throughout these years, defenders of the Union and Confederate prison systems recycled the shrill arguments of the war, often for political gain, but always to justify their understanding of what the Civil War really meant. The inherent hostility created by the prison controversy prolonged the intense rhetorical battle to shape the public memory of the Civil War and undermined the slow process of sectional reconciliation.

Although the old animosities over Civil War prisons faded by the midpoint of the twentieth century, in a curious twist on reconciliation, the sectional bitterness dissipated only as Americans recognized that, in the treatment of their prisoners, both the Union and Confederacy deserved scorn. Reconciliation over the prison controversy became possible

in the aftermath of World War I and II for two reasons. The deaths of the last Civil War prisoners and the staunchest sectional defenders coincided with the emergence of a more objective interpretation of Civil War prisons based on the depressing realization that the committing of atrocities against prisoners occurred, alarmingly, in all modern wars. The history of Civil War prisons became a warning, not of the deficiencies of the North or South, but of the need to be on guard against mankind's inherent potential for evil. Recasting the public memory of Civil War prisons helped inspire, at least in theory, that necessary vigilance.

Over the last few decades, the redefinition of the Civil War prison legacy continued with the increasing trend of conflating commemoration and commercialization. Although a few diehards clung to the traditional sectional arguments in the name of heritage (or profit), by 1998, thanks to the passage of time and a historical understanding of the context of modern war, Andersonville had overcome its image as symbol of Confederate brutality and instead, with the encouragement of the national government taken on an identity as the national memorial ground for all prisoners of war. The successful fusion of history, commemoration, and tourism at Andersonville National Historic Site corresponded to the ongoing desire of Americans to demonstrate their admiration for the sacrifices of past soldiers—a sentiment both Union and Confederate prisoners would have appreciated.

Although the currently dominant historical interpretation of Civil War prisons emphasizes a message of unity instead of division, the transformation of the prison controversy from national scar to usable past remains incomplete at best. Recent events have shown that, unfortunately, the lessons of the past have yet to inspire any

fundamental change in our behavior towards prisoners of war. The outrage over the American torture of Al Qaeda suspects at Guantanamo Bay and Iraqi captives at Abu Ghraib testifies to the enduring importance of the issue of proper treatment of prisoners of war and reminds us that the historical example of Civil War prisons remains relevant today. Although the Civil War and the war on terror share little in common, the shock and disgust Americans felt when the knowledge of recent atrocities surfaced echoed the emotions of outrage and disbelief felt in the Union and Confederacy during the Civil War when both sides learned about the scale of the suffering in Civil War prisons. As Americans, we asked ourselves, as our counterparts did in 1865, the old questions of responsibility and meaning, with one difference. Instead of inquiring how this could happen, we wonder how this could happen again. Part of the surprise in learning that our generation can commit similar inhumanities against our fellow human beings came from the shame that we should know better, given our awareness of the mistakes of the Civil War, World War II and Vietnam, among many others. And yet, generation after generation, our deeply rooted belief in American exceptionalism, our ability to idealize the past, whether motivated by puritanism, innocence, or greed, allows us to believe that America still leads the rest of the world down a path of Manifest Destiny, to a world where such horrors no longer hold sway. The lessons of history, however, raise the disturbing suspicion that not only does modern and postmodern civilization not prevent brutality—it may actually facilitate it. That we still have the capacity to express surprise at atrocities committed against prisoners of war after nearly one hundred and fifty years of evidence to the contrary speaks to the equal influence of the positive trait of innate human optimism and the more negative human capacity for delusion. It also suggests

that, despite, or because of, the fluidity of public memory, there are limits on history's power to change human behavior.

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