

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-15454-4 — The Cambridge History of the American Civil War
Volume 3: Affairs of the People
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PART I
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VALUES

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I

Wartime Masculinities

JAMES J. BROOMALL

Civil War soldiers marched home in 1865 as changed men. No longer holiday soldiers, they were now seasoned veterans. In “The Return of the Heroes,” poet Walt Whitman celebrated the “worn, swart, handsome, strong” men who had been made from the “stock of homestead and workshop,” hardened by the “long campaign and sweaty march,” and inured to the “hard-fought, bloody field.”¹ Disease or marching had enervated all; shot and shell had maimed some and shaken others. Whitman nevertheless projected a vision of regenerative masculinity. The immortal ranks tramping through the poem’s stanzas displayed a manliness grounded in the work of the antebellum era, transformed by the experiences in war, and redeemed by the agricultural pursuits of the postwar years. Whitman’s poem serves as a reminder that nineteenth-century Americans thought deeply about what made a man and recognized masculinity’s mutability.

Americans came to the Civil War with well-developed notions of manliness; they signaled qualities such as strength and fortitude, and located identities in work and family. They had developed ideas about men’s public obligations through self-reflective writings that exhibited a new language of individualism. Beginning in the years of the early Republic, many middle- and upper-class men turned to weekly journals to direct their lives and chart courses for self-improvement. Self-reliance and industry became especially important to Northerners – witness, for example, the significance of labor in Whitman’s poem.² A man’s identity and fulfillment became attached to his

¹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, vol. 11 (New York and London: Knickerbocker Press, 1902), p. 132. Historian James Marten uses Whitman’s poem to frame his exceptional book, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

² Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 155–6. See also Timothy J. Williams, *Intellectual Manhood: University, Self, and Society in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

JAMES J. BROOMALL

work role.³ Elite white Southerners embraced a similar ethos maintaining that individual initiative through education and work promised upward social mobility.⁴ Antebellum men from across the country were self-directed, religious, and independent; they “grounded their own sense of manliness in virtue, honor, and public service.”⁵ The social ideals promoted throughout the antebellum era manifested in military service during the Civil War.

In the years leading up to war, a constellation of experiences shaped American men and their gendered self-identities. Rather than adhering to a rigidly constructed model of manliness, masculinity existed in multiple forms. Most prominently, as Amy S. Greenberg has argued, by the late 1840s a restrained manhood competed with a martial manhood. The domestic arena, evangelical Christianity, and successful businesses underpinned restrained manhood. Many of these men embraced temperance, envisioned the home as a moral center, and followed the example of Jesus Christ.⁶ Conversely, martial men drank excessively, enjoyed displays of strength, and subordinated men and women. They privileged bravery, violence, and aggression, idealizing the adventurous outsider.⁷ Class did not necessarily define who embraced which type of manhood. A soldier’s life tested the restrained Christian gentleman as he encountered the licentiousness and dissipation of large encampments, while the terror and horror of battle caused even martial men to reel.

Marriage and family life were central to men’s self-identities, and military service could strain, or at least test, familial bonds. The antebellum era had witnessed the rise of companionate marriages especially among middle- and upper-class Northerners and Southerners. “Symmetry, reciprocity, and mutuality” were central to these partnerships; yet, “the realities of women’s and men’s different lives” also shaped marriages as historian Anya Jabour observes.⁸ Marriage often remained asymmetrical for many couples because of paternalism, finances, and legal constraints.⁹ Both law and custom, for

3 E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 3.

4 Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee through his Private Letters* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 192.

5 Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 9.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 11. 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

8 Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 5.

9 Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784–1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), pp. 17–18.

Wartime Masculinities

example, granted Southern planters total mastery over the household that included blood kin but also enslaved black families.¹⁰ Although slavery attacked the foundations of family life by separating spouses and selling children, African American families created strong and enduring bonds.¹¹ White assaults on black manhood necessitated models of masculinity that ran counter to white norms. Slaves' quest to enact ordinary virtues, such as dignity and caring, fostered a coherent self-identity.¹² Women and children thus helped shape manliness for black and white Northerners and Southerners. By the antebellum era, childhood for white Americans had also changed. Children tended to stay at home longer and both parents were actively involved in upbringing.¹³ For the college-bound, a young man's departure from the embrace of family marked a critical period in his maturation. Antebellum universities inculcated social values and civic virtue, encouraged male interaction through communal living, fraternities, and debate societies, and taught, albeit with difficulty, self-control and emotional moderation.¹⁴ Complex familial relationships became especially important as men entered military service and were separated from loved ones who, paradoxically, served both as a source of comfort but also conflict.

On the eve of the Civil War, marked regional characteristics of masculinity signaled cultural differences that contributed to growing sectional tensions. White Southern men demanded the firm control of women, children, and the enslaved, anathema to the domestic ideals of Northern middle-class reformers. Mastery directed the behavior of Southerners, and their public interactions were guarded and shaped by cultivated masks that maintained rigid gender and racial hierarchies. The maintenance of mastery was essential and any attack on it signaled an assault upon an honor that anchored a man's reputation, secured his social rank, and grounded his

¹⁰ Nancy D. Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861–1875* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 3.

¹¹ Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), p. 67.

¹² Edward E. Baptist, "The Absent Subject: African American Masculinity and Forced Migration to the Antebellum Plantation Frontier," in Craig T. Friend and Lorri Glover (eds.), *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 159.

¹³ Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, p. 59.

¹⁴ On Northern education, see Kanisom Wongsrichanalai, *Northern Character: College-Educated New Englanders, Honor, Nationalism, and Leadership in the Civil War Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 19–34. On Southern education, see Lorri Glover, "'Let Us Manufacture Men': Educating Elite Boys in the Early National South," in Friend and Glover (eds.), *Southern Manhood*; Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), pp. 9–22; and Williams, *Intellectual Manhood*.

JAMES J. BROOMALL

understanding of self.¹⁵ Politics had become deeply personal. Middle- and upper-class men above the Mason–Dixon line increasingly embraced evangelism and moral reform; some even directly attacked slavery and the Southern slave oligarchy.¹⁶ The urban North witnessed a flurry of reform movements in which black and white men were heavily involved. These benevolent societies posited “masculine ideals based on independence and civic virtue,” as historian Bruce Dorsey explains, and created an environment that promised African Americans freedom but still maintained white paternalism.¹⁷ Although contrasting interpretations of manliness did not produce civil war, men’s different conceptions of self do speak volumes about a cultural clash that carried political repercussions.

As *rage militaire* swept across the North and the South in 1861, tens of thousands of young men flocked to join the armies. Historian Nina Silber explains that Civil War soldiers were ideologically driven but also intensely aware of personal obligations. They “may have spoken of their private responsibilities to home and family as a way to show their investment in a nation-state, a state that, in turn, protected their homes and made possible their private pursuit of happiness.”¹⁸ Gender was integral to why Northerners and Southerners participated in the war. Americans understood military participation as a maturation process – citizens became soldiers and boys became men.¹⁹ A man’s military service secured his family’s legacy and honor.

Soldiering demanded that men embody different masculinities as they transitioned from a civilian to a military world.²⁰ A successful citizen soldier had to carry within himself elements of both a restrained manhood and a martial manhood, which were forged into new wartime masculinities. Nineteenth-century Americans looked to the Greeks and Romans as models

15 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 14.

16 Take, for example, the powerful words of Charles Sumner, “The Slave Oligarchy and its Usurpations,” Speech by Hon. Charles Sumner, November 2, 1855, in Faneuil Hall, Boston (Washington, DC: Buell and Blanchard, 1855).

17 Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 13.

18 Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 3.

19 Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, “Rethinking Southern Masculinity: An Introduction,” in Friend and Glover (eds.), *Southern Manhood*, p. vii; and Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 4.

20 Robert A. Nye, “Western Masculinities in War and Peace,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 112, no. 2 (April 2007): 417.

Wartime Masculinities

for the citizen soldier and venerated George Washington who had symbolically turned his ploughshare into a sword for service in the American Revolution. Americans quickly drew parallels between 1776 and 1861, and both Union and Confederate soldiers claimed that their cause upheld the legacy of the American Revolution.²¹ “On *their* shoulders,” writes historian James McPherson, “rode the fate of the great experiment of republican government launched in 1776.”²²

Northern men’s obligations to country gave their military service a distinctly public face while also fulfilling a personal masculine ideal. For young white Northerners, the war served as an opportunity to “reclaim a manhood that had been dismissed as enervated and effete” but also a chance to fulfill their roles as virtuous republican citizens.²³ As one Philadelphia minister proclaimed, civil war “puts our young men upon a training which will nourish their manly virtues.”²⁴ For elite New Englanders, a young man’s legacy assumed transcendent qualities as they looked publically to national patriotism and the republic’s rebirth.²⁵ White Northerners of all classes employed the language of family to explain why they had to preserve the Union for past and future generations.²⁶ The Union had to be maintained at all costs, for it was the legacy of the founding generation that guaranteed political liberty and economic opportunity for all Americans.²⁷

The antebellum tensions between restrained and martial masculinities were apparent in whites’ responses to black military service. The Civil War marked “a watershed for black manhood.”²⁸ On the one hand, many whites charged that only “real” black men fought slavery until death, thereby affirming a martial masculinity.²⁹ Black manhood could only be redeemed by the murder of men as W. E. B. Du Bois famously contended.³⁰ On the other

21 James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10 and 27–8.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

23 Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 73.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 73. 25 Wongsrichanalai, *Northern Character*.

26 Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair*, pp. 14–16.

27 Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2.

28 Jim Cullen, “‘I’s a Man Now’: Gender and African American Men,” in Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins (eds.), *A Question of Manhood*, vol. 1: *A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 77.

29 Baptist, “The Absent Subject,” p. 138.

30 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935; reprinted New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 110. Du Bois’s powerful observation has led historian Carole

JAMES J. BROOMALL

hand, African Americans who demonstrated restraint received the approbation of elite white New Englanders especially. Men's self-control even under the worst of circumstances signaled the elevation and triumph of character. Soldiering thus became a complex, even ambiguous experience for African Americans.³¹ The ardent Massachusetts abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson, for example, exhibited a range of attitudes toward the black enlisted men under his command. Higginson deemed his soldiers "affectionate, enthusiastic, grotesque, and dramatic beyond all others"; he maintained that the soldiers were childish and unmanly.³² Higginson accordingly commanded with a "paternal model of authority" against which many soldiers surely bristled.³³

Confederate military service demonstrated both a public sense of nationalism and an internalized masculinity that demanded action. White Southern men interpreted the North's political actions as an affront to their independence and a violation of their honor.³⁴ The army offered Southerners a path to defend, and indeed redeem, their manhood. For posturing Southern youth "arguing the secession line," observes historian Stephen Berry, "there was a sort of bristling manliness that better comported with their sense of who it was they wanted to be in the eyes of others."³⁵ Once in uniform youthful soldiers such as Private James T. Thompson of the 11th Georgia sought to prove their manliness upon the field of battle. After missing the Battle of Bull Run Thompson crowed, "All i want is a crack at a Yankey boy."³⁶ For older

Emberton to argue, "The realization that black men could only gain whites' respect by fighting, and that their ultimate worthiness as men and potential citizens could be proven only through their deaths, created a momentary rupture in Du Bois's signal effort to revise the history of African Americans and their role in bringing about the end of slavery." Carole Emberton, "'Only Murder Makes Men': Reconsidering the Black Military Experience," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, vol. 2, no. 3 (September 2012): 370.

31 Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (eds.), *Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1–2.

32 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood and Co., 1870), p. 4.

33 Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair*, p. 60.

34 LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860–1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 17; Aaron Sheehan-Dean, "Everyman's War: Confederate Enlistment in Civil War Virginia," *Civil War History*, vol. 50, no. 1 (March 2004): 7; and Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

35 Stephen W. Berry, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 167.

36 J[ames] T. Thompson to "Father & Mother," July 27, 1861, in Aurelia Austin (ed.), "A Georgia Boy with 'Stonewall' Jackson: The Letters of James Thomas Thompson," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 70, no. 3 (July 1962): 316.

Wartime Masculinities

men, the military ensured their family's honor and legacy. North Carolina officer William J. Clarke proclaimed to his wife Mary, "I pray for strength that I may do my duty under all circumstances, and 'quit' myself as becomes the husband of a heroic woman, who would rather wear weeds for a brave man than smile welcome to a craven and a coward." Clarke continued in language reminiscent of his Northern counterparts by framing military service in domestic imagery. As he wrote, "If I leave no other heritage to our noble boys this at least they shall have a name unsullied by cowardice, unblackened by treachery!"³⁷ For both the young and the old, then, military service bolstered a man's public reputation and his personal sense of manliness.

For Northern and Southern men alike, familial and state obligations played out across the country in intimate exchanges among family, elaborate flag ceremonies, and regiments' departures for the front. In Fayetteville, North Carolina, an early war embarkation provoked an outpouring of emotion: "Ah – how mournfully it sounded – I never saw such a shaking of hands – so many goodbyes & God bless you's to be said – at last they were 'all aboard!'" The "touching scene" continued as "tears streamed from the eyes of men and soldiers as well as from women and children as they waved their last adieus . . . Isn't it sad to think how many such partings are taking place all over our land."³⁸ Farther north in Rhode Island, Elisha Hunt Rhodes recounted how his mother was moved to accept her son's desire to enlist because it was his sacred duty and her noble sacrifice. Her "patriotic spirit" inspired Rhodes's "young heart." His regiment mustered into service shortly thereafter and Rhodes described the scene as a "solemn one and the impression made upon our minds will last a long time."³⁹ For the newly created 54th Massachusetts – an African American regiment – the state's governor, John A. Andrew, as well as luminaries such as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Frederick Douglass participated in the flag ceremony. Governor Andrew spoke before Colonel Robert G. Shaw at the presentation and invoked the language of manliness and duty. The regiment marked a vindication of "the character, the manly character, the zeal, the manly

37 William J. Clarke to Mary Bayard Clarke, May 23, 1861, in Mary Bayard Clarke, *Live Your Own Life: The Family Papers of Mary Bayard Clark, 1854–1886*, ed. Terrell Armstrong Crow and Mary Mouton Barden (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), p. 74.

38 Louis to Mame, May 2, 1861. Lenoir Family Papers. Documenting the American South. University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/imls/lenoir/lenoir.html>, accessed July 28, 2011.

39 Elisha Hunt Rhodes, *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes* (1985; reprinted New York: Vintage Books, 1991), pp. 4 and 6–7.

JAMES J. BROOMALL

zeal, of the colored citizens of Massachusetts, and of those other States which have cast their lot with ours.”⁴⁰ Despite the difference in cause and the expansiveness of geography, Americans invoked a shared language of manly duty that demanded personal service and sacrifice for family, community, and country.

Military service separated families for extended periods of time, which at once strained and strengthened personal bonds. Home endured as a powerful anchor for Civil War soldiers – indeed, their identities were linked to women and children – but also induced anxiety and depression.⁴¹ New Yorker Charles Biddlecom opined to his wife, Esther, for example, “I think of home a great deal and I think of you and the children almost all of the time. It makes me so homesick that I could cry any time.”⁴² The separation of spouses paradoxically fostered the expression of deeper feelings and permitted greater accessibility.⁴³ Men were not always comfortable with their new openness, though, because it produced feelings of vulnerability. Soldiers nevertheless drew great succor from their roles as defenders of family once in uniform. Georgian Marion Hill Fitzpatrick concluded one letter by describing his internal tensions to his wife: “I hate to quit writing, I feel like I was talking to you, but it is simply I must be more of a man, so good-bye.”⁴⁴ Victorian Americans believed that fighting was a man’s duty that upheld family honor and demanded self-sacrifice.⁴⁵ Accordingly, spouses had to endure separation because of familial and social expectations. Important exceptions to this rule did exist, however, as seen with the Confederate guerrillas operating in Missouri, for example. Their style of warfare depended upon proximity to the household and women supplied guerrillas with the food and clothing

40 Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* (Boston: Boston Book Co., 1894), p. 26.

41 LeeAnn Whites, “The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender,” in Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (eds.), *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 16. On the broader methodological point, see also Toby L. Ditz, “The New Men’s History and the Peculiar Absence of Gendered Power: Some Remedies from Early American Gender History,” *Gender and History*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2004): 1–35.

42 Charlie to Esther, November 20, 1863, in Katherine M. Aldridge (ed.), *No Freedom Shrieker: The Civil War Letters of Union Soldier Charles Biddlecom* (New York: Paramount Market Publishing, 2012), p. 60.

43 Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 118.

44 M. Hill Fitzpatrick to Amanda, February 14, 1865, in Jeffrey C. Lowe and Sam Hodges (eds.), *Letters to Amanda: The Civil War Letters of Marion Hill Fitzpatrick, Army of Northern Virginia* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), p. 200.

45 Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and their Experiences* (New York: Viking, 1988), pp. 17–18.