Heavy Laden

The psychological aftereffects of war are not just a modern-day plight. Following the Civil War, numerous soldiers returned with damaged bodies or damaged minds. Drawing on archival materials, including digitized records for more than 70,000 white and African American Union army recruits, newspaper reports, and census returns, Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck uncover the diversity and severity of Civil War veterans' psychological distress. Their findings concerning the recognition of veterans' post-traumatic stress disorders, treatment programs, and suicide rates will inform current studies on how to effectively cope with this enduring disability in former soldiers. This compelling book brings to light the continued sacrifices of men who went to war.

Larry M. Logue is Senior Fellow at the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University. He received a PhD in American Civilization from the University of Pennsylvania. His books include *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* and *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: Veterans and Benefits in Post-Civil War America*, coauthored with Peter Blanck.

Peter Blanck is University Professor at Syracuse University and Chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute. He received a Juris Doctorate from Stanford University, where he was president of the *Stanford Law Review*, and a PhD in Social Psychology from Harvard University. His recent books include *Routledge Handbook of Disability Law and Human Rights*, coedited with Eilionóir Flynn, and *eQuality: The Struggle for Web Accessibility by People with Cognitive Disabilities*.

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Heavy Laden

Union Veterans, Psychological Illness, and Suicide

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With a Foreword by Elyn Saks

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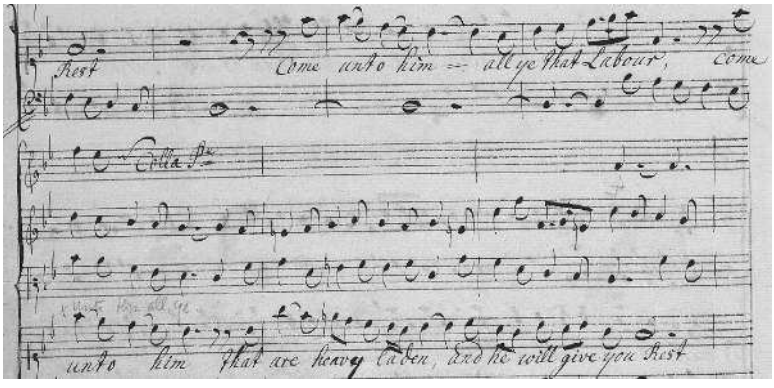

Come unto him – all ye that Labour, come unto him that are heavy laden, and he will give you Rest.

– George Frideric Handel, "He Shall Feed His Flock," *Messiah* (manuscript courtesy of Pierpont Morgan Library Department of Music Manuscripts and Books)

Contents

List of Figures *page* xiii
List of Tables xvii
Foreword by Elyn Saks xxi
Acknowledgments xxv

Introduction 1
1 What Is a Union Veteran? 9
2 Changed Men 31
3 When War Came 47
4 Perilous Years 73
5 Aftershocks 109
6 Trials of Black Veterans 153
7 Heavy Laden 193
Conclusion: This Freedom from Insanity 217

Contents

Appendix: Sizing Up Sources 221
Bibliography 229
Index 255

Figures

1.1 A certificate of discharge for disability *page* 25
2.1 Massachusetts suicides per 100,000 men, from town clerks' reports, 1860–1900; Massachusetts suicides per 100,000 men, from medical examiners' reports, 1885–1900 38
2.2 Massachusetts death register for 1898, recording former Pvt. Richard G. Lillie's suicide by gunshot on April 25 42
2.3 Modified Massachusetts suicides per 100,000 white men 42
2.4 Former Sgt. Alfred Leeper of the 115th Illinois Infantry, about 1900 44
4.1 Page from the Massachusetts state census of 1865, listing some of the residents of the Discharged Soldiers Home in Boston 92

List of Figures

4.2 The State Lunatic Hospital at Taunton, Massachusetts, whose superintendent insisted that only a few Union veterans suffered from war-connected mental illness 95
5.1 Two physicians who treated soldiers and veterans 122
5.2 Two physicians who attempted to publicize Civil War veterans' anxiety disorders 125
5.3 Newspapers occasionally connected suicides with Civil War service; former Pvt. Harrison Horr's death, however, illustrates news reports' more common practice of overlooking veterans' service and connections with their suicides 130
5.4 Images from the Central Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, Dayton, Ohio 141
5.5 Surgeon's certificate from pension examination of Charles Cole, describing his suicide attempt in 1907 144
6.1 (a) The main building of the Government Hospital for the Insane (later known as St. Elizabeths), Washington, DC. The Hospital was the main care facility for active-duty service members and soldiers' home residents with mental illnesses. (House Doc. 5, 55th Cong., 3rd sess.). (b) The Hospital for the Insane segregated patients by race, reserving

the West Lodge for African-American men. (RG 418-G331, National Archives) 162

6.2 Edmund Delaney was among thousands of black soldiers assigned to postwar occupation duty in the South 166

6.3 Claimant's statement recorded on the Surgeon's certificate for the pension examination of Francis Buxton 177

6.4 Page from the federal veterans' census of 1890, Joseph Shipley of the 9th US Colored Infantry listed as the fourth entry and remarks below 187

7.1 Photograph of Andersonville Prison by A. J. Riddle, August 1864 202

Tables

1.1 Selected characteristics of veterans sampled from 1865 New York census *page* 15
1.2 Dependent relatives with blank occupation listings, veterans and nonveterans sampled from 1865 New York census 17
1.3 Average personal property in 1870, EI samples of veterans and IPUMS sample of men age 20–59 21
1.4 Average personal property in 1860, EI samples of men who enlisted and IPUMS sample of white men age 15–59 23
1.5 Deaths after reaching selected ages per 1,000 veterans in EI samples compared to estimates for US population, 1870–1879 and 1890–1899 28

List of Tables

2.1 Massachusetts suicides reported by town clerks and medical examiners, and difference, 1885–1900 38
3.1 Suicides of Massachusetts men age 20 and older, 1860–1865 55
3.2 Suicides of Massachusetts men age 20 and older, 1856–1859 56
3.3 Suicides of Massachusetts women, 1856–1865 58
3.4 Marital status and recorded parents, Massachusetts male suicides age 40 and older 61
3.5 Overall death and suicide rates for Massachusetts men age 40 and older, 1861–1862 and 1863–1864 64
3.6 Overall death and suicide rates for Massachusetts men age 40 and older in three regions, 1861–1862 and 1863–1864 65
4.1 Deaths from 1866 to 1870 per 1,000 veterans, EI sample members 89
4.2 Suicide rates of Union army veterans and civilian men age 20–50 in Massachusetts, 1865–1870 99
4.3 Motives reported in the press for suicides, Massachusetts veterans and civilians age 20 to 50, 1865–1870 100
5.1 Rates of "insanity" in the 1890 federal census, Union veterans and civilian men age 40–79 114

5.2 Suicide rates for Massachusetts veterans and civilian men in state and federal census years, 1870–1900 127
5.3 Suicide rates for pensioners and nonpensioned Union veterans in Massachusetts, 1875, 1880, 1885, 1890 133
5.4 Suicide motives reported in the press, Massachusetts veterans and civilians of comparable ages, 1875, 1880, 1885, 1890, 1895, 1900 134
6.1 Diagnosed disorders of African American Civil War volunteers and a sample of white soldiers sent to the Government Hospital for the Insane 168
7.1 Suicide rates among veterans, Massachusetts quinquennial aggregate, 1870–1900, and National Violent Death Registration System states, 2014 214
A.1 Census identification of Union veterans 226

Foreword

"I have a major mental illness . . . If you are a person with mental illness, the challenge is to find the life that's right for you. But in truth, isn't that the challenge for all of us, mentally ill or not?" In my 2007 memoir, *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey through Madness*, I wrote these words. Although I have been fortunate to receive for my work on mental illness numerous honors, including a 2009 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship (the so-called Genius Grant), in many ways, the memoir was my "coming out" as a person with schizophrenia.

Yet, despite the voluminous writings on the medicalization of mental illness, it is still difficult to grasp the very personal nature of the mind's operation. Fixing a line beyond which lies psychosis is difficult. How do we distinguish difference, or eccentricity, from frank medical illness?

Foreword

The study of suicide is similarly contested: the act is easier to define, but its inducements remain persistently elusive. If this is the case today, what is to be gained from investigating the US Civil War era, when masturbation was considered a major cause of mental illness and overcivilization was blamed for suicides?

Heavy Laden offers a compelling answer. The book takes its place in the lively debate about the fate of military veterans past and present. Mental illness and suicide among veterans are grave concerns in our own time; some historians have pointed to parallel symptoms among Civil War soldiers and veterans, while others contend that reading present issues into the past misrepresents ex-soldiers' readjustment. Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck take a fresh approach to the debate. They use data from Union army veterans to explore tendencies toward mental illness and suicide, complementing this information with testimony from veterans themselves.

Logue and Blanck's approach then weaves individual case examples into a more systematic narrative of Civil War suicides. The approach, that is, provides both individual stories that grab the reader and more extensive, quantitative data comparing different groups around suicide, which put the individual stories into a richer context.

The authors recognize the need to consider the past on its own terms. Designations such as insanity, melancholia, and irritable heart have changed or disappeared since the

nineteenth century. Translation of past diagnoses can be frustrating, but Logue and Blanck adopt a different tack. They make comparisons with civilians, as in the increased concealment of veterans' "insanity" from census-takers. The authors also compare the races, as in African Americans' greater reluctance to claim insanity in medical examinations for pensions.

Though the past was its own world, it retains links to our time. Logue and Blanck present a telling comparison between Union veterans' suicide rate in Massachusetts and that of ex-soldiers in 2014. Surprisingly, given the likely greater stigma against suicide then, the nineteenth-century rate was higher; perhaps treatment is better now. The authors thoroughly explore the implications of this finding, which brings the relationship between past and present into sharper focus. This book opens new scholarly dimensions and unique benchmarks for considering earlier veterans' so-called nervous afflictions.

Logue and Blanck's work here also builds upon and extends their 2010 book *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: Veterans and Benefits in Post–Civil War America*, which was another seminal investigation of discrimination in the Civil War pension system as experienced by Union army veterans with differing disabilities and ethnicities, and by African Americans. Once again, Logue and Blanck offer groundbreaking analyses and insights of how veterans across the spectrum of humanity perceived and coped with warfare's consequences. Logue and Blanck brilliantly open up new

historical vistas, reminding me of the promise by which I closed *The Center Cannot Hold*: "the humanity we all share is more important than the mental illness we may not."

Elyn Saks

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