



Trauma, Death, and Mourning

How many died?

- Why is this question so hard to answer?
 - Inadequate records
- For years, scholars quoted the figure of 620,000
 - 360,000 Union; 258,000 Confederate (about 2.5% of pop.)
- Historian J. David Hacker now claims the number is between 750,000 and 850,000
 - Used census data from 1850-1880 to estimate the number of “excess” male deaths from 1860-1870
 - 20% higher than earlier estimate
 - 1/10 white men of military age died (as opposed to 1/13)
 - The majority of “missing” deaths were Confederates

J. David Hacker's study

- His estimate would account for guerilla deaths
 - Because using census, includes non-soldiers
- But he had to assume there were no war-related deaths of white women
- AND he had to accept the War Department's figure of 36,000 Black war dead. Why?
 - Because Black female mortality was so high during the war that he couldn't use Black women as a "control" group to determine the excess number of male deaths
- Raises question: What is a "war death"?
 - Whose deaths get counted?

Numbers in contemporary perspective

- New estimates show that more soldiers died in the Civil War than all other US wars combined
- Proportional population loss today would be more than *7 million* dead
 - Like suffering a loss on the magnitude of 9/11 every day ... *for more than six years*
- But is this a helpful way for us to think about Civil War losses?
 - Or is it presentist?
 - Projecting present-day views/assumptions onto the past
 - Since we live in an era of much lower mortality

Historian Nicholas Marshall

- “*While factually correct, the statistics work to exaggerate the war’s impact.*”
- Must consider the historical context
 - Death was omnipresent; not just deaths of the aged
 - Chances of living to age 1: 77%; to age 9: 69%; to age 24: 62%, to age 49: 42%
- In 1870, fewer than 10% of Americans reached age 15 without losing a parent or a sibling
 - “*Americans had developed social and psychological means of coping with these losses, though they still felt them with tremendous force.*”

Marshall, cont.

- Must not just fixate on numbers
 - “...*the big question is not how many died but what meaning we associate with the deaths.*”
- War **added** to a pre-existing demographic problem
 - “...*rather than trying to draw analogies by calculating what a similar death rated would look like in our own time, the deaths in the Civil War should be put into their contemporary context. . . . the additional deaths in the Civil War could be seen as part of a regular pattern of high and highly variable losses.*”
- Americans did not view war-related deaths as apart from other deaths
 - Points to the lists of deaths that people kept in their diaries
 - Fact that 2/3rd of soldiers died of disease

Salmon P. Chase (1808-73)

- Secretary of the Treasury
- **Father died** when he was 9
- Married at age 26; after 2 years, his **wife died**
 - Then their only **child died** at age 4
- Married again four years later; after six years, his **second wife died**
 - **Two of their three children also died**
- Married a third time; after six years, his **third wife died**
 - **One of their two children died**
- By age 44, he had lost his father, three wives, and four children

Edwin M. Stanton (1814 – 1868)

- Secretary of War
- **Father died** when he was 13
 - Supported his younger siblings
- Married at age 22 and had two children
 - **Second child died** at age 15 months
 - **Wife died** when he was 30
- Married again at age 42 and had four children
 - **One died as an infant**
- By age 44, he had lost his father, a wife, two children (also a brother by suicide)

Lincoln's 4th annual message to Congress (December 6, 1864)

“...we do not approach exhaustion in the most important branch of national resources, that of living men. While it is melancholy to reflect that the war has filled so many graves and carried mourning to so many hearts, it is some relief to know that, compared with the surviving, the fallen have been so few.... The important fact remains demonstrated that we have more men now than we had when the war began; that we are not exhausted nor in process of exhaustion; that we are gaining strength and may if need be maintain the contest indefinitely.”

Historian Mark Schantz

*“...Americans came to fight the Civil War in the midst of a wider cultural world that sent them messages about death that made it easier to kill and to be killed. They understood that death awaited all who were born and prized the ability to face death with a spirit of calm resignation. They believed that a heavenly eternity of transcendent beauty awaited them beyond the grave.... They saw how notions of full citizenship were predicated on the willingness of men to lay down their lives. And they produced works of art that captured the moment of death in highly idealistic ways. **Americans thus approached the Civil War carrying a cluster of assumptions about death that...facilitated its unprecedented destructiveness.**”*

Importance of Religion

- America was a profoundly religious culture
 - 2/3rds of Americans regularly attended a church
 - Most Americans were Protestant
 - They strongly believed in **providentialism**
 - Notion that God's will was at work, even when it was hard to discern
 - This shows up constantly in soldiers' letters
- No widespread disillusionment following the Civil War, as there was after WWI

Richard R. Crowe, 32nd Wisconsin, to his mother, May 1864

"You must not worry at all about your boys, for if there is a Supreme protecting power over us, it can certainly protect us as well here as in Wisconsin, and if . . . the hair of our heads are all numbered and not a sparrow falls to the ground without knowledge and will of this overruling power, why it is certainly wrong to think Providence will ordain any thing but what is right and just; then why complain or worry for fear something will happen to our friends when even if our worst fears were realized it might be the best thing that could happen after all."

A painting by William Morris Hunt titled "The Wounded Drummer Boy". It depicts a young boy, shirtless and wearing dark breeches, lying face down in a field of tall grass. He is holding a small drum in his left hand. His right arm is extended behind him, and his head is turned to the left, looking over his shoulder. The background shows a hilly landscape with a cloudy sky.

William Morris
Hunt, “The
Wounded
Drummer
Boy,” 1862



Issued from Bufford's Print Publishing House 35 Washington, D.C. Berlin.

THE LAST CALL.

16.

A Union drummer rallies the troops who appear behind him, oblivious to the cannonball that will shortly land at his feet and take his life. "The Last Call" (Boston: J.H. Bufford & Co., publisher, 1861), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Post-World War I



Otto Dix, *Shock Troops Advance under a Gas Attack*, 1924



George Grosz,
“The Hero (Der Held),”
from “The American
Scene,” 1933

Matthew Brady's studio

- Considered a founder of photo-journalism
- Set out to document the war at his own expense
- Hired assistants and followed the troops
- October 1862: Exhibited photographs of Antietam
 - Images received enormous media attention
 - *“Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along the streets, he has done something very like it...”*
- Some, including Oliver Wendell Holmes, strongly criticized the exhibit



Why did people tolerate mass casualties?

- Did Americans' familiarity with death contribute to their tolerance for high casualty rates?
 - Were they simply fatalistic?
- Did their religious beliefs allow them to accept mass casualties?
 - Because they trusted in God's will?
 - Because they believed they would see their loved ones again?
- Was it a “death embracing” culture?
 - Did it romanticize death?
 - Allow for the celebration of the dead as heroic “martyrs”?



Antebellum death traditions

- Prolonged mourning and mourning dress
 - Mourning stationary
- *Memento mori*
 - Jewelry, etc.
- Post-mortem photography



- Mourning photographs



New cemeteries

- By the early 19th century, the old churchyard cemeteries from the colonial era were overcrowded
- Rise of new kinds of cemeteries in park-like settings
 - Belief that the ideal resting place was in a peaceful, natural spot
- Designers included paths; landscaping
- People encouraged to walk, reflect in cemeteries



1861 engraving
showing a plan
for a rural
cemetery by N.
B. Schubarth of
Rhode Island,
United States

Drew Faust, *Republic of Suffering*

- Acknowledges pre-war death rates were high, but believes the war marked a break
- “*...the United States embarked on a new relationship with death....Death's significance for the Civil War generation arose...from its violation of prevailing assumptions about life's proper end—about who should die, when and where, and under what circumstances.*”
- “*The Civil War represented a dramatic shift in both incidence and experience.*”

Faust, cont.

- Says most of those who reached young adulthood were expected to survive at least to middle age
- Horror of anonymous death, alone among strangers
 - Before the war, most people (85%) died at home
 - Women prepared the bodies
- Suddenness and violence of death also alien
 - No time to prepare one's soul
- Enormous number of bodies
 - Dehumanizing; like slaughtered animals
- Anxiety over severed limbs; missing bodies

Ars moriendi

- Tradition dating back to the late Middle Ages
- Laid out a protocol for how to die well
 - Giving up one's soul gladly and willingly
 - Patterning one's death like that of Christ on the Cross
 - Meeting the temptations of disbelief, despair, impatience, worldly attachments
- Jeremy Taylor wrote a Protestant version, *The Rules and Exercise of Holy Dying* (1650)
- By the 18th century, a growing emphasis on “last words”
 - Death as a moment of truth
 - Legal tradition of “dying declarations”

The Victorian “Good Death”

- War completely violated notions of a “good death”
- To die at home
- To die surrounded by loved ones
- To show patience in the face of suffering and hence be an example to others
- To demonstrate calm resignation and a readiness and willingness to die
- All this assured your loved ones that you were going to heaven



Little Eva's Death in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

“The Death of Stonewall Jackson” Currier & Ives (1862)





Civil War
gave rise
to
embalming



Early in the Civil War

- Soldiers usually detailed to perform burials during or after battles
- Voluntary organizations played a big role in handling the dead and overseeing burials
- Army chaplains kept lists of dead and wounded, as did volunteer nurses or those working in private hospitals
- Soldiers' comrades or maybe their commanders wrote to family members

Later in the war

- Gettysburg
 - So many bodies to bury, the government decided to make a cemetery right there
 - Gravestones weren't personalized, aside from names
 - Layout and symbolism of the cemetery suggested that all the dead were equally honoured
- July 1864: Government established new guidelines for handling dead

The State and the War Dead

- War altered the government's role in commemorating soldiers' deaths.
Prior to the war, there were:
 - No national cemeteries
 - No federal provisions for burying the dead
 - No dog tags or official identification
 - No official policy for notifying next of kin or provisions for transporting bodies home
 - Or for providing aid to surviving dependents
 - No Memorial Day