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‘Arches of Fire’:
The Civil War and its Aftermath in The Minds of White Southern Children

By
Ben Davidson

Professor Charles Dew, Advisor

A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors
in
History

WILLIAMS COLLEGE

Williamstown, Massachusetts

May 24, 2010

To
my family

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My thanks go as well to my friends who have provided unwavering support through this process. Particular thanks go to David Blitzer, Rhian Roberts, Margot Bernstein, Emma Bene, Ellen Song, the entire tennis team, and coach Dan Greenberg.

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Editorial Note

In reading manuscript materials, one often comes across errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Although not all manuscripts used in this thesis were produced by children, this is especially true for such sources. In the interest of remaining as true as possible to the original materials, I have retained all errors whenever I thought possible. When I thought it absolutely necessary for the sake of meaning and ease of reading, I inserted corrected grammar within brackets inside the quotation.

Introduction

"His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth. He was a barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward."[1] Quentin Compson, the subject of this quote, is the central character in William Faulkner's novel about race and family in the American South, *Absalom, Absalom.* Faulkner was a southern literary icon, and dealing with the South's difficult racial past could be described as the central concern of his novels. His character, Quentin Compson, is supposedly born in Jefferson, Mississippi, in 1891. By the time he has become a "barracks filled with stubborn back-looking ghosts," the novel's setting shifts to 1909, and Quentin is a young adult attempting to come to terms with the strange past that lingers all around him in the society of rural gentility in which he lives. Faulkner's description of the haunting of Quentin's life by ghosts of the past, and the veritable occupation of his body by memories that are not really his own, reveals much about the impact of the Civil War and its aftermath on young people in the South.

My thesis attempts to gain understanding of this powerful impact by examining the lives of white southern children during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the memories of those who grew up during this time.[2] It is my contention that this seminal experience in the lives of a generation of children shaped conceptions of race, regional identity, and national identity that continue to reverberate in this country even today.

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[1] William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom* (New York: Random House, 1986), 7.

[2] I have generally defined children as those who were under eighteen and who did not fight in the war. For a discussion of defining childhood, see Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), vii.

Faulkner's repetitive exploration throughout his career of the ambiguity and confusion surrounding the loss of fundamental structures of existence and expectation for this generation give literary voice to the internal conflicts that resulted when white southerners, young and old, experienced the trauma of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Although Quentin's birth in 1891 would set him outside the particular lens of this study, there are striking similarities between his relationship to the past and those established by white southern children who actually lived through the war. These similarities demonstrate how far-reaching the effects of this tumultuous period were on southern society, and, in fact, on our country as a whole. From the perspective of literary exploration, Faulkner constructs and disassembles conceptual frameworks for the understanding of those times. More concretely immersed in the experience of war, children who grew up between 1861 and 1876 also had to attach themselves to structures of understanding – notions of southern and racial identity that allowed them to make sense of the ambiguities that arose from their experiences of trauma during and after the war, and the associated loss of control over their everyday lives.

I came to the subject of white southern childhood during the Civil War and Reconstruction in a relatively synthetic way. Through work on slave childhood, I began to think about how childhood, and therefore adulthood, is shaped by moments of realization, and in the case of the 19th century South, particularly by realizations of racial identity. Through research on the election of 1876, I began to reflect on the peculiarities of Reconstruction. Reconstruction was a period in which one part of the United States occupied another. At the same time, after hundreds of years of race-based chattel slavery, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments were passed in quick succession,

allowing for, respectively, the freeing of the slaves, equal protection for black men under the law, and the right of black men to vote. I wondered how these changes occurred so quickly, and about how easily they were brushed away. Following the gradual withdrawal of northern troops from the South, black voters were generally disfranchised, and segregation became not simply a fact of life, but a general tenet of southern law codes. In light of my thinking about children and about Reconstruction, I began to consider how white southern children, the eventual leaders in government and business, and the eventual artists, writers, teachers, and citizens of the decades to come, must have been affected by the tumult and eventual restoration that wracked southern society during the Civil War and in the chaotic period of Reconstruction that followed.

I began my research on the subject this past summer, scouring archives throughout the South. This research proved fruitful, and I discovered a variety of useful sources. Before I began to delve into this material in depth, however, I surveyed the historical literature on American childhood. The existing historiography on white southern childhood during the Civil War and Reconstruction is thin, although the works that do exist have been useful in shaping my thinking. There have been a limited number of studies on Civil War childhood, including, in particular, works by James Marten, Anya Jabour, and Edmund Drago, which have provided me with a base of knowledge about how children experienced the war and with a sense of how scholars have traditionally analyzed children's experiences during this time.[3] The work of these scholars tends to focus on certain typical aspects of daily life: play, interactions with Union and

[3] See James Alan Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Edmund L. Drago, *Confederate Phoenix: Rebel Children and Their Families in South Carolina* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009) and Anya Jabour, *Topsy-Turvy: How the Civil War Turned the World Upside Down For Southern Children* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010).

Confederate Soldiers, traumatic experiences, deprivation of resources, and premature politicization. Almost nothing has been written about white southern childhood during Reconstruction, although certain scholars have begun to shift the chronological focus of studies on childhood to include Reconstruction as well.[4] While it is important to understand the Civil War as an experience in and of itself, this thesis looks at the war and Reconstruction together in order to make an important point about the period as a whole. Children, especially in their memories, often understood their experiences of the two periods with regard to each other. It is therefore valuable to think about how the time frame 1861-1876 as a whole influenced this generation of white southern children. My investigation has also been informed by studying the history of American childhood more broadly, and I have benefited tremendously from works on the history of childhood by Steven Mintz, Ray Hiner, and Joseph Hawes, as well as Anya Jabour.[5] Many of these studies discuss how, despite the fact that they often simply cannot escape the adult world, children attempt, sometimes successfully, to remain within their own separate sphere of existence. This tension between the world of adults and the world of children was fraught with particular difficulties during the Civil War and Reconstruction period in the South, and in my thesis I hope to determine what sorts of attitudes this struggle created.

Although only a modest amount has been written about white southern childhood during this time period, an enormous amount has been written about the Civil War and Reconstruction in general, and recently much of this work has been undertaken in very

[4] See, for example, Catherine Jones, "Intimate Reconstructions: Children in Post-Emancipation Virginia." PhD Dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 2007.
[5] See Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*; N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds., *Growing Up In America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985); and Anya Jabour, ed., *Major Problems in the History of America Families and Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005).

creative ways. These innovative methods have influenced how I have approached my own work on childhood, a subject whose tenuousness requires the historian to draw on a variety of different approaches to effectively tell a cohesive story with the somewhat limited resources that are available. Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* has helped me to think about the human toll of the war, and about how those who survived never could escape the lingering ghosts of the past.[6] Her book has also helped me to consider the overwhelming presence of death during this time period, and the traumatic effect this certainly had on young children. Works on memory, such as David Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, have allowed me to begin to consider how exactly the war was remembered, a consideration that flows throughout my chapters, since much of my source material is composed of memoirs.[7] When working with the experiences of children, the historian must cast broad nets in order to find source material, for most children do not leave written materials such as diaries and letters in the volume that adults do. Memoirs become very important, then, in the study of childhood because memoirists, in their efforts to tell their life stories, inevitably present a picture of their childhood experiences. In order to understand how these memories might have been shaped by intervening factors, it has been important to think carefully about the role that memory plays in creating and affecting history, and about how these children (or the adults they became) were constructing a narrative into which they could insert the views

[6] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).
[7] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). For work on southern memory see also Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007) and W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

of racial and Confederate identity that they had learned. In thinking about the formative effects of trauma and about the ways in which children learn through play, my research has also been informed by reading the work of psychologists such as Erik Erikson and Lev Vygotsky.[8]

Beyond memoirs, my sources have been extremely varied, each type of source presenting its own sort of methodological problem. I have looked at diaries, textbooks, children's magazines, letters, Freedmen's Bureau records, accounts of journalists who visited the South after the War, and novels. While working with these materials, one main methodological distinction that needs to be delineated is between sources that directly *describe* children's experiences (diaries and letters primarily, and memoirs in their own way) and those that give us a hint as to what these experiences *might* have been (schoolbooks and novels, for example). Even if not all of the sources give us a direct window into children's experiences, it is useful to place these experiences into the context of what children might have read and learned. We must not, therefore, discount sources just because they are difficult to use; we must simply remain attuned to their relative merits and disadvantages.

While a number of the letters and diaries that I looked at mention children and children's experiences from the perspective of adults, I have chosen instead to focus on the sources in which I can actually interpret the words of those who were children during this time or those who remembered this childhood later. This approach has necessarily limited me to a smaller group of sources, and following from this, the same characters crop up in many of my chapters. They sometimes fade in and out, and occasionally a

[8] See Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963) and L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

new voice shows up only briefly to add something valuable to the story. Rather than introduce the main characters here, however, I think that it will be best for the reader to be introduced to them gradually, as their personalities and personal histories are fleshed out through the arc of this thesis.

Another issue with this approach is the difficulty of making generalizations about white southern children as a whole based on children of relatively homogeneous class. While there has been some valuable work done on welfare and orphanages in the South after the war, actual writings from those children who were from lower socioeconomic groups are scant.[9] This is certainly troubling, since one of my central interests in the history of childhood in general is the idea that in studying these children I can uncover gaps, or what we might call silences, in our knowledge of the past. I do believe that speaking about the experiences and memories of those who were children during this time gives us access to a silenced aspect of history. And, in light of my goals of understanding southern nationalism and racism, it is indeed useful to study those who came from the slave-holding class, as they had a particular vested interest in the version of southern identity that became memorialized after the war. But there are silences still to be uncovered. For example, in searching through the Freedman's Bureau records this past summer, I found that many freedmen's schools had at least one white pupil enrolled.[10] What were the experiences of these white children? What might have been

[9] For work on poverty in the postwar South see, for example, Elna C. Green, ed., *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1999). Another issue involves defining exactly what is meant by "the South." While I have material from Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana, other states such as Florida or Texas are not represented. This must simply point us towards the fact that the experiences of those in the South were not uniform, and as long as we keep the limitations of the sample size in mind, we can still gain valuable insight about both small and large trends in the region.

[10] Records of the Superintendent of Education for the State of North Carolina Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865-1870. M844, Roll 13, National Archives.

their views on race? While we can certainly speculate about the answers to these questions, such conjecture necessarily falls outside the scope of this thesis. Still, I might even consider assessing the extent to which we can gain access to the experiences of children in the past an extremely important part of this project. As shown by the above dilemma, and by some of the fascinating children's voices I did discover, the answer to this question is not simple, and in fact poses many of the same difficulties as studying the history of adults. This only serves, however, to reinforce the point that children are important historical actors who must be studied with all the precision we can muster and with the same critical eye we bring to the study of any such actor in the past.

Among the white southern children whose experiences and memories I have examined, a certain style of processing the war has become apparent. Through the trauma of war, and of northern intrusion, these children often lost almost all sense of control and certainty. In order to fight against this loss of control, they grasped at ideas and concepts that would provide structure to their newly chaotic worlds. Unfortunately, what they had to grasp onto were the newly strengthened and radicalized ideas of the northerner as enemy and of whites as superior, ideas that their parents provided to them. These ordering principles, in turn, established the basis for a concept of southern or Confederate identity that developed during the war and remained afterwards. Understanding this process of children's loss and regaining of certainty, and the effects that the process had on their conceptions of race and southern identity, is the central aim of this work.

The particular frames of reference created and imposed by the Civil War and Reconstruction—trauma, race relations, regional identity—simultaneously made white

southern children politically and ideologically literate and politically and ideologically confined. Children, however, are not empty vessels: they shape ideas just as they are shaped by them. It is valuable to examine childhood during this time period in southern history not only because it had such a profound effect on these children, but also because it presented an unparalleled opportunity for children's flexible minds to mold the ideas and experiences of the time. Why were these flexible minds not able to internalize the new possibilities for southern race relations that arose from emancipation and Reconstruction? How can children's general failure to break from previous ideologies of race help us to understand the fleeting nature of reform in the Reconstruction period? By shifting the chronological focus of traditional studies of childhood during this time to include more material about Reconstruction, I hope to re-examine southern resistance to the Reconstruction policies of the still-present North.

Much of the material written about children during the Civil War and Reconstruction presents them as simply passive recipients of ideology. I argue that children did deal actively with ideology both in their play and in the ways that they talked about their experiences. In thinking about memory as well, we see that ideology and identity are not simply passed from parent to child, but that various forces shape them over time.

Although children certainly worked in incredibly adaptive and creative ways within the circumstances that confronted them during these years, this experience unfortunately generally restricted them to a worldview in which power was achieved through white supremacy, and regional identity was determinative of both personal identity and interpersonal relations. Although northern victory in the Civil War and the

initial policies of Reconstruction presented an opportunity for progressive movement towards racial equality, the southern push against these forces allowed a peculiarly southern, racialized identity to be preserved. This thesis will, I hope, help us understand how children experienced this struggle to preserve the values of white southern society and how this experience helped mold the attitudes they eventually held as adults.

Chapter One

Growing Up With Ghosts:
White Southern Children Respond to the Suffering of War

The Civil War rippled through southern society as a wave of disruption, destruction, and trauma, and white southern children were by no means exempt from this turmoil. They had to experience the additional difficulty of the adult world infringing on their spheres of existence in ways very particular to wartime, and in many cases they had to encounter the full brunt of death in ways that most young children do not. In order to understand better the effect that the war had on young white southerners, we must examine closely their responses to these experiences. It was inevitable that the war would shape their lives, as it did for all who lived through it, but in what ways did it affect children in particular? As time progressed, how did these southerners look back on their childhood experiences, and what might this say about how such experiences shaped the future of their society? The war intruded into the homes of southern families in ways that it did not in the North, and, both at the time and in their memories, white children had to find ways to protect their threatened families and identities.

The trauma of the Civil War was felt most strongly, in some ways, by those who did not experience it most viscerally in the moment, but by those who could remember it the longest. Children could not fight or defend their homes and their families, the most central aspects of their identities, but they still had to deal with the aftermath of the losses that their families and communities sustained. As Drew Gilpin Faust puts it in her book *This Republic of Suffering,* "Civil War fatalities belonged ultimately to the survivors; it was they who had to undertake the work not just of burial but also of consolation and

mourning."[11] White southern children who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction grew up in a society populated by ghosts. They lived in a world where their lack of control over life and death became oppressively obvious, and where they had to struggle to give meaning to the sacrifices made by citizens of a failed nation. This lack of control inevitably provoked not only a sense of loss, but also an inclination to value, or at least pay attention to, the past. It also led children to push against the intrusion of this adult world in an attempt to maintain their separate, and perhaps more innocent, sphere of existence.

Emma Hendren Gwathmey, a young Virginia girl, described the effects of grief in her own home: "Home early ceased to have its usual attractions, in an atmosphere of constant grief, and gradually the children of the household developed into street arabs, running away when the opportunity was presented."[12] The Civil War continually threatened the abstract idea of "home," and for southern children, this threat was often felt directly, both because of northern intrusion and simply because they were at a point in their lives when that notion of home was more concrete. War conspicuously changed the atmosphere in which they lived their everyday lives. As children, they already had little control over the structure of this atmosphere, and the areas in which they did have some control or sense of routine (home, family, community) were deeply disrupted. Home, for children, is often conceived of as a safe zone where they can retreat in moments of uncertainty. When defined broadly, home includes the family, the actual

[11][11] Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopp, 2008), 143.
[12] Emmy Hendren Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True: Glimpses of a Child's Experience During the Civil War* (Norfolk, VA: The Nusbaum Book and News Company, 1899), 15.

physical home, and the South as a whole, and all of these aspects of white southern children's lives lost stability during the war due to their traumatic experiences.

Life on the southern home front became one in which the threat of death and destruction was always imminent, and in which families struggled to deal with the many assaults on their physical and psychological well being.[13] Carrie Berry, a ten-year-old diarist in Atlanta, began or ended many of her entries with a simple assertion about whether or not there had been shelling on that particular day. On August 5, 1864, she described how "in the evening we had to run to Auntie's and get in the cellar. We did not feel safe in the cellar, they fell so thick and fast."[14] Home was no longer a safe space that represented protection and comfort. Instead, it, and all aspects of children's lives, became corrupted and shaped by the traumatic experience of the war.

Young children trapped in Vicksburg during the siege of 1863 also experienced the threat of bombardment. This siege was one of the most terrible of the war, lasting from May 1863 to the final surrender on July 4th of the same year, at which point both Confederate soldiers and civilians were near starvation.[15] A number of Vicksburg families sought refuge from the constant shelling in caves around the city, and many accounts of this time mention children. Mrs. W.W. Lord kept a diary during the siege in which she recorded information about her children's reactions, describing in loving tones

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[13] Jeffrey W. McClurken, in his book *Take Care of The Living: Reconstructing Confederate Veteran Families in Virginia*, describes some of the central struggles of families in the South: "Soldiers and their families were affected psychologically by their physical separation during the war, by physical weakening or disabilities, by the Confederate loss of the war, by the end of slavery, by the postwar economic chaos, and perhaps most seriously, by the deaths of so many for whom they cared so deeply. At the same time, the common struggle to survive and the numerous letters between couples or among family members may have brought some veteran families closer together." Jeffrey W. McClurken, *Take Care of the Living: Reconstructing Confederate Veteran Families in Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 49.

[14] Carrie Berry Diary, Carrie Berry Papers, Atlanta Historical Society.

[15] For an account of the Vicksburg Campaign and surrender see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 626-637.

how her children "bear themselves like little heroes. At night when the balls begin to fly like pigeons over our tent and I call them to run to the cave, they spring up…like soldiers, slip on their shoes without a word and run up the hill to the cave."[16] Obviously the war was not restricted to the martial combat on the battlefields. Mrs. Lord depicted this simply, but powerfully, when she described the children as "little heroes" and as behaving "like soldiers." It is particularly telling that in a battle as devastating to the southern cause as Vicksburg, it was the children who were left to take on the role of successful "soldier" that many of their fathers and brothers had failed to carry out. Cast in the roles that the adults needed them to assume, these children were required to follow routines dictated almost entirely by the adult world of war, and that were far removed from the security of predictable domestic life.

One Confederate mother, Mrs. James M. Loughborough, later published a memoir about this time entitled *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*. In it she describes the reactions of children to the Union bombardment in evocative terms. She tells how when the shells began to fall, her daughter "ran to me breathless, hiding her head in my dress without a word; then cautiously looking out, with her anxious face questioning."[17] The turmoil of war provoked uncertainty and a need for protection from Mrs. Loughborough's young daughter. Looking up, the girl asked, "Oh! mamma, was it a mortar shell?"[18] While her mother could certainly explain to her that it was indeed a mortar shell, she could do little

[16] Mrs. W.W. Lord Diary, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
[17] Mrs. James M. Loughborough, *My Cave Life in Vicksburg*, quoted in John D. Fowler, ed., *The Confederate Experience Reader: Selected Documents and Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 254.
[18] Ibid.

more to ease her child's suffering than say, as she would years later, "poor children, that their little hearts should suffer and quail amid these daily horrors of war!"[19]

Another description from Mrs. Loughborough's memoirs that displays just how out of place children can seem in the landscape of war deals with a child who was not her own. Even more so than adults, children are not meant to be confined in caves, hiding from relentless shelling. It was inevitable, then, that some children would become restless and perhaps less vigilant about avoiding the shells. As Mrs. Loughborough describes:

> A young girl, becoming weary in the confinement of the cave, hastily ran to the house in the interval that elapsed between the slowly falling shells. On returning, an explosion sounded near her—one wild scream and she ran into her mother's presence, sinking like a wounded dove, the life blood flowing over the light summer dress in crimson ripples from a death-wound in her side caused by the shell fragment.[20]

The suffering of children in war provided the material for such paradoxically beautiful descriptions. Both adults and children struggled to fit these difficult images and experiences of battle into neat ideologies. It was inevitable that there would be many "wounded doves" in this conflict that touched the lives of almost everyone who lived in the South. "Crimson ripples" spread throughout the region, and it was images such as this that southerners would never forget. Memories of parents and peers meeting such fates became an inextricable part of the southern psyche. These memories provided a particular visual language with which to construct conceptions of the war as an affront to the society white southern children had been born into, and which their parents described to them.

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

Young children in Virginia also remembered shelling as a central aspect of their wartime experience. Anne Banister, a young Virginia girl whose family was close to Robert E. Lee, described the shelling during the siege of Petersburg in terms that strikingly present the clash of a child's world with the harsh brutality of war, and the particular ability of a child to find moments of play and wonder in even the most violent incidents. In her memoirs she describes how the children "had been taught how to throw [themselves] flat on the ground if we heard a shell coming."[21] One day when she was playing with her friend Agnes, they suddenly heard a shell, "and instead of falling flat I ran for our porch and Agnes for the raspberry hedge, but the shell was ahead of her, and when she got to the place, the hedge was gone, only a long deep hole remaining."[22] Luckily both girls were unscathed, and Anne writes that, "I shall never forget the amazed look on her face. We both shrieked with laughter and amazement, I on the porch and she in the garden. What little fools we were! After this quite often the old and young would go out at night to watch the mortar shells. They were like arches of fire and very beautiful."[23] War had quickly become an everyday part of these young girls' lives, something to be dealt with through learning about the different types of shells and through laughing in the face of danger as perhaps only children can. Laughter can also be a way of expressing discomfort or releasing tension, particularly in children. There was certainly a fine line between shells as beautiful "arches of fire" and as the symbols of destruction that they were for so many, but it is undoubtedly revealing to see the manner in which a child dealt with the dangers of war. Of course, it is important to note that this behavior was articulated in the memory of an adult. We do not know exactly how

[21] Anne A. Banister Pryor, "Incidents in the Life of a Civil War Child," Virginia Historical Society.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

devastating the experience was for Anne at the time, but it is certainly significant that such powerful childhood memories could be defining albeit malleable through the lens of adult experience.

Like many children, Emmy Gwathmey initially expressed confusion at the unusual levels of fear and sadness that she observed in her parents during the trying years of the war. She also, like Anne, wrote of the war as a time in which her sense of self was defined in relation to her experiences and through the process of remembering, describing the incompatibility of war with a "child's delight in life" and "the joy of extreme youth."[24] As she wrote, though, "Soon therefore there came to a little southern girl, some of wars realities."[25] For one thing, no one could avoid "the central tragedy of the Confederacy: Jackson had fallen, and, sad misfortune, by his own men."[26] Gwathmey described how "In loyal zeal we donned the mourning garb, and badges of grief waved."[27] She remembered this moment as something of a turning point: "The children, happily, thus far, rid of war's real grimness, were not exempt from these badges."[28] Death, though perhaps slower to touch the lives of many young children, eventually marked almost everyone who lived in the South during the war. Emmy also described how death itself could be something of a badge of honor, an affirmation of a particularly southern experience: "Proudly I wore my somber tinted rosette in prominent relief on my heart."[29] Though for many children seeing death opened their eyes to the "wars realities," even after this moment, Emmy still remembered thinking that "these were only the little

[24] Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True: Glimpses of a Child's Experience During the Civil War*, 6.
[25] Ibid., 9.
[26] Ibid., 18. For a detailed description of how the South responded to Jackson's death, see Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 154-156.
[27] Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True*, 18.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

eccentricities of war, and, had I been called on to define war at this period, I should have agreed, in my childishness, that it was an 'altogether pleasant unpleasantness!' For I had not tasted of its worst features."[30] Children often take pride in being able to participate in public displays that allow them to feel included in an adult world. This was especially true during the Civil War, for such public moments of patriotism affirmed childrens' sense of community and southern pride. Emmy obviously felt this way about participating in the mourning for Jackson, but, as she said, she had not yet experienced war's "worst features." Soon, though, Emmy would move much closer to the war itself.

The Gwathmey family had actually been residing behind federal lines in Norfolk, Virginia, and as "long, weary days of strife, had finally lengthened into months," they decided that the family should move closer to Emmy's father's camp.[31] She describes in detail the family's "hurried preparations," and the particularly poignant artifice with which they managed to bring supplies across enemy lines:

> I have a confused idea of wardrobes emptied, bureau drawers ran-sacked, trunks packed, and finally, being taken from a sick-bed, and encased in double blankets. Under no circumstance, was I told, should I murmur at their weight, as they were intended for father, in the Confederacy. That the yankees would never question the use, thinking them necessary to my ill health. The martyrdom I endured on that memorable train ride to Suffolk none may know, nor the regret with which I left for Norfolk, to enter, it is true, my father's presence, but to leave behind me my favorite playmates…and, above all, my beloved home.[32]

Although there certainly was something to be gained from being "a stone's throw, from my father's campground," as Emmy said, this benefit barely outweighed the physical discomfort she went through to bring supplies to her father or the emotional pain of

[30] Ibid, 19.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

leaving home behind.[33] The Civil War uprooted many, both physically, in terms of being forced from their homes, and psychologically, as they were forced to reconsider earlier attachments to loved ones and to their southern homeland. For children in particular, home or regional attachment was something they could no longer feel with the same certainty as before. It is inevitable that those who had experienced such loss would struggle later in life to preserve or to look backwards towards this sense of home that they had lost.

Emmy Gwathmey's experiences while at her father's camp provide another example of how war intruded into all aspects of children's lives, and these experiences also show the particular resilience of that "joy of extreme youth" that Gwathmey earlier described.[34] Emmy became "a pet of the garrison," and she described how "with childish aptitude I soon grew accustomed to the many changes, and the knell of battle became as familiar as the daily role call."[35] It is this "childish aptitude" that makes Emmy's experiences, and those of children in general, so fascinating to study. This aptitude allows children to creatively incorporate the turmoil of war into the way that they process the world. Play is a primary avenue through which children give structure to their ideas, emotions, and experiences. It allows them to use concrete tools to develop conceptual understandings of their world. The conceptual understandings that they learn through play, though, develop largely through their social interactions with others in society. Psychologist Lev Vygotsky, for example, in his theory of social learning, writes that children learn first through interactions with others, particularly adults, before they

[33] Ibid., 20.
[34] Ibid., 6.
[35] Ibid., 20.

process this learning within themselves.[36] The degree and manner in which white southern children during the war could process their experiences would therefore have been delineated by the possibilities for understanding that adults and playmates presented them with. Still, play allowed children to incorporate the war into their everyday lives in ways that helped them process and structure their traumatic experiences.

As with many of the white southern children who lived through the war, one way in which Emmy used play to incorporate the conflict successfully into her everyday life was through games, which, as she says, "were tempered by circumstances."[37] She described how

> Dolls, the child's natural playthings, were banished for the mighty affairs of the nation, and, gaily tinted ten-pins represented all the problems of the universe. These 'men' were, every day, drawn in long stiff rows, portraying the opposing armies…Then followed alternate showers of pebbles…On the eve of a battle, there was, invariably, a stormy discussion for precedence, each aspiring to represent the Confederacy.[38]

Although pebbles replaced bullets, and ten-pins replaced men, the sentiments of war still flared strongly in these children's games. Looking back from 1899, there probably is a knowing tone of disillusionment in the statement that the "ten-pins represented all the problems in the universe," but for Emmy's younger self, the ten-pins certainly did *represent* very well some of the problems she had to deal with on a day-to-day basis. The barrier between represented problems and real problems was, in fact, relatively thin, and allowed her in some way to control her understanding of what was going on around her. The games children played during the war took on meaning that was tied incredibly

[36] L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
[37] Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True*, 20.
[38] Ibid.

closely to the real conflict, as in the experiences this young girl, who recalled a morning where

> My cousin and I were seated on an abandoned 'breastwork' which was our favorite battle field. It had been assigned to us by father, for defense, and fully persuaded were we, that, as aides-de-campe, we could render valuable assistance in its protection, should an emergency arise. Day upon day, we had strained our eyes, as did the faithful 'Sister Anne' for a glimpse of the clouds of dust which would herald the approach of the yankee's horses. How proud we should be, should the privilege befall us, to drive back the foe, with our pebbles of war![39]

Emmy's father, hoping to encourage her processing of the war through games, had allowed Emmy to think of her role as that of an "aide-de-campe." In this role she envisioned herself using the same pebbles she had used in her play battles with the "ten-pin" soldiers. Again, she may have been projecting her later feelings on her younger self, but the fact remains that the line between play and battle became extremely difficult to decipher. Through play, children were able to conduct their own battles, thus creating, and allowing them to learn, notions of justice that would inform their behavior both during the war and later as adults.

As historian James Marten writes, "the war infiltrated the play of all children. But it also burdened them with greater responsibilities, opened them to greater autonomy and freedom, and politicized them."[40] Everything began to be viewed through the lens of war, to the point that Emmy recollected "contemplating the rich red earth, and reasoning somewhat this way, its color, 'Yes, certainly must be due to the blood with which cruel war had soaked it.'"[41] The blood spilled by the Civil War on southern soil did not wash away easily, and it is telling that Emmy Gwathmey could so quickly return to the lens through which the Civil War had taught her to view the world.

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[39] Ibid., 21.
[40] James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 2.
[41] Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True*, 21.

Although further away from the actual fighting, Richard Walker Duke, Jr., a Virginian born in 1853, remembered also incorporating war into his play. He wrote that "my main sport was to carry on war against the yankees."[42] He played the general and along with his companions, they "rode stick horses & carried stick swords & one old bayonet on the end of a tobacco stick…We exterminated a patch of broomshedge back of the garden in our charges & no doubt the exercise did us lots of good."[43] Although both boys and girls played at war, boys more often spoke of feeling remorse at the fact that they could not join their fathers and brothers on the battlefield. We can attribute this particular sentiment of boys to the fact that, for the most part, the idea of a woman or girl serving in battle was simply unthinkable. Duke, for example, remembered that when a relative went off to war:

> I too was anxious to join the army & was laughingly told I might. Amongst my most cherished possessions was an ancient 'horse pistol' that had belonged to my Grandfather—an immense thing—flint lock—smooth bore—I brought that out—tied it around my waist…Great was my wrath & greater my howls when I was told that I could not go—for they saw I was in dead earnest—and I was finally incarcerated in a dark room & my weapon confiscated.[44]

Playing at war allowed children to feel that they could regain a sense of control. For Richard Duke, his great sadness at not being able to go to war was offset by the great fun he had playing general in his games with friends. Ironically, these war games stuck in the minds of children almost as much as actual war memories were seared into the memories of adults. This world of children's play and games that explored wartime themes from a

[42] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr, Transcribed by Gayle M. Schulman for the Albermarle County Historical Society, Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

relatively safe distance was another form of "scaffolding" upon which their conceptual framework of understanding was beginning to be built.[45]

Although Emmy Gwathmey's powerful allusion to the blood red soil that she observed while playing near the battle field was probably developed later in life, many children showed similarly adept interpretive skills during the war that allowed them to deal with the death and suffering that began to appear all around them. Many responses were certainly very innocent sounding, and yet in some sense, they were often the most insightful because of their simplicity. Carrie Berry, the diarist from Atlanta, described the basic pains and responses to war all civilians of any conflict can relate to: "This was my birthday. I was ten years old, But I did not have a cake times were too hard so I celebrated by ironing. I hope by my next birthday we will have peace in our land so that I can have a nice dinner."[46] Although we can certainly wonder at Carrie Berry's tone when she says that she "celebrated by ironing," this moment from her diary also articulates what many in the South were experiencing and thinking. War had deprived southerners of luxuries as commonplace as birthday cake, and, for many of those left at home, the central goal had become not victory, but peace. Carrie Berry not only articulated well the natural desire for peace of those who experience war, she also described concisely the nature of the divide between home front and battlefield, saying that "I dislike to stay in the cellar but our soldiers have to stay in ditches."[47] Everyone was aware of the immense sacrifice made by those in the Confederate army. This was something that one could not easily forget, particularly when a brother or a father or a

[45] For a discussion of "scaffolding" as an aspect of childrens' social development, see again L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
[46] Carrie Berry Diary, Carrie Berry Papers, Atlanta Historical Society.
[47] Ibid.

cousin perished in battle. Carrie's diary allowed her to express her most private hopes and fears.

Other children besides Carrie Berry also experienced deprivations during birthdays and holidays, as well as during everyday life. Richard Duke, Jr. wrote that "the pinch of war began to make itself severely felt during the winter of 1863-64," and that the family began to use substitutes for coffee and for sugar.[48] Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, born in 1856, wrote a memoir completed in 1937 in which he refers to himself throughout in the third person as "War Boy." This memoir is fascinating both in the way that Wilkins chooses to tell his story and in the detail with which he recounts his experiences during the war and during Reconstruction. In this memoir, we are told that "even with victory, the pinch of war was growing tighter, and supplies and cost of living growing higher every month," and that the blockade was "slowly but surely cutting out many of the luxuries previously enjoyed by the well to do class."[49] Many white southern children obviously suffered even more than these children, who were from varying degrees of slave-owning wealth, but what is most important is that even the wealthiest children could not avoid thinking about the implications of the war, for they observed its effects on their everyday life. War involved thinking about specific suffering at home, and about a more indefinable idea of suffering that was going on away at the front. Children were asked to think in abstract terms about sacrifice and war and justice, and at the same time, their everyday lives were impacted at a very concrete level. They had to mold these abstractions in order to make sense of the effect the war was having on their daily experiences.

[48] Recollections of Richard Walker Duke, Jr., Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[49] Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, *War Boy,* Virginia Historical Society.

For Estelle Ward of Bladensfield, Virginia, the suffering of her brother, far away on the front lines, was a central concern of her wartime correspondence. This concern shows up both in her writings to her brother and in her letters to other members of her family. In a letter written on July 14, 1862, she tells her brother that along with her Aunt, she too "hoped the Lord would make you well soon."[50] She described to him the domestic scene that remained intact at home, how the "dwarf apples are nearly ripe and how she "can milk real well."[51] It seems that Estelle was seeking to reassure her brother by talking about the comfortable home life that survived. It is striking how easily her language can be conceived of as a possible remembrance of their home. Not only in memoir, but also in letters and diaries written at the time, white southern children used writing to create worlds where they worked to retain control. After the war, children were given the burden of remembering, and, even as the war was just beginning, Estelle was already establishing a vocabulary for talking about the home (and the family life it implied), a precious place threatened by the brutal war that would consume the southern landscape. Estelle's letters also allude very concretely to the changes in domestic hierarchies caused by the war. She talks about how her sister "plays Ma right well for 'one so young' she gets up in the morning and you ought to hear her telling the girls to get up."[52] Although we do not know exactly how old Estelle's sister was, she obviously had to take on a role that was beyond her years, something symbolic of what many children experienced during the war. The conflict not only disrupted children's lives by threatening their homes and introducing them to the fragility of life, it also led them to

[50] Letter from Estelle Ward to her brother, July 14, 1862, Ward Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

question their places within their families and in society. These sorts of questions were developed even more fully during Reconstruction, when white southerners, particularly those who had been of the slave-holding class, had to deal with new ideas of labor and of race.

Just as many southerners were fearful of such sweeping changes that the war might catalyze in the South, so Estelle and other children were concerned with the possibilities of change, albeit on a smaller scale. In a letter to her mother she wrote, "Just think it is eight weeks since Bro Willie was wounded when I look at that picture of him and think how much he must be changed it almost makes me cry."[53] It is worth noting that Estelle would describe the source of her tears as the fact that her brother "must be changed" and not the fact that he was far away from her and surely in pain. Although undoubtedly these were also sources of her sorrow, the language that she chose cannot be ignored.

This fear of change can be attributed to many different aspects of wartime and childhood experience. In one way, it may have represented a typical childhood fear of the unknown. Everything that Estelle had experienced before the war was being disrupted, and the fact that she now was uncertain whether she would recognize her own brother represented the physical embodiment of this fear. One of the great difficulties of war is that is destroys previously held certainties. This destruction of certainties, in fact, represented both one of the great triumphs and great tragedies of the Civil War. On the one hand, the war led to the emancipation of the slaves, and to three amendments passed by Congress that pushed towards equal rights for all men. On the other hand, however,

[53] Letter from Estelle Ward to her mother, Aug 24, 1862, Ward Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

this destruction of certainty also allowed for the formation of a counter force: that effort by southerners to preserve as much of the society that had existed before the war as they possibly could. With the freeing of the slaves, preservation of white supremacy became all the more important in their minds, and, tied in with this, so did a desire to retain power through regional and cultural autonomy. The question, then, is how white southern children negotiated these oppositional forces. Unfortunately, it seems that since the language used to discuss these issues was given to them by their parents, and because of the particular trauma that they experienced as threatened southerners, they were provided with both the means and the cause to react against this uncertainty just as their parents did. The seeds of change could, therefore, not take root where the soil could potentially have been most fertile.

Estelle's sense of uncertainty is also reflected in the constant conjecturing and questioning in her letters to her mother. Letter writing provided comfort because at least theoretically there was someone there to write back or to explain her feelings to. In her letters to her brother, it almost seems like Estelle seeks to reassure *him* by taking on a stance of certainty. In her letters to her mother, the figure she might most have imagined would protect her from the evils of war, she lets her curiosity reign freely. She starts out her letter of August 24, 1862 asking, "has Brother Willie's abcess stopped flowing yet[?]"[54] She would not dare ask her brother such open questions about his health, so Estelle reserves this concern for letters to her mother. Estelle's questioning and uncertainty shows up repeatedly in her letters, and not only about the health of Willie. She writes, "I am so sorry for those little children that died. Do you know any of their parents. I feel so sorry for them for I know just how they feel. for I know we could not do

[54] Ibid.

with out Randy or Channie either."[55] She is filled with questions about death, and shifts easily to thinking about how death might affect her own life. In a letter written to her mother on May 7, 1863, virtually the entire letter takes on a questioning tone:

> Have you heard anything of the 55th?....it will be dreadful if Packson dies from his wound and D H Hill too won't it?…I wonder if the Wright and Gordon boys were hurt. have you heard any thing about them since the battle? Oh don't you hope Charley will escape unhurt?…Did you hear whether Col Mallory was killed outright or lived a few hours?…isn't it bad about all the gentlemen we knew in Rappahannock?…we heard that four thousand of our soldiers were killed & wounded. is it so?…have you heard whether cousins Harring & Phillip were hurt or not?[56]

It is this sense of uncertainty, and the potential for devastating answers to such questions, along with the child's powerlessness to remedy the situation, that made life on the home front so psychologically traumatizing. While we do not have the letters that Estelle's mother may have written back to her, we can imagine how short-lived the satisfaction she received from them might have been. There was always the possibility of another battle, and the looming specter of death and loss that had the potential to reshape a young child's whole worldview always lurked just around the corner.

One of the most memorable and affecting experiences for many white southern children was certainly their first direct encounter with death. These experiences shaped how they would interpret the war, for, as David Blight argues, the first postwar task for all American's "was to find meaning in the war's grisly scale of death." [57] Discussions of death appear in almost all memoirs written by those who had been children during the war, and it is obvious that southerners were still coming to terms with the war's human

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Letter from Estelle Ward to her Mother, Bladensfield, May 7, 1863, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
[57] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 19.

toll well into the 20th century. George Sipe, born in 1850, remembered vividly such an experience. During the battle of Port Republic in 1862, an ambulance stopped near his home, and "the driver…hastily seized something like a leather bucket, ran to the well in the yard, hurriedly filled the bucket at the pump, ran back and jerked open a side door of the ambulance, exposing in full face, the pale, stark features of the first dead soldier I had seen."[58] Although he was at most twelve years old, George remembered this exact sequence of events many years later. In his memoir, he described how this moment stuck in his memory: "though I saw many afterward, that first impression was so horrible I have never been able to get rid of it."[59] Sipe even remembered the small detail of how the ambulance driver reacted to this death: "with a glance at the face, [the driver] called out with heartless indifference, as he splashed water from his bucket in the dusty road, 'He don't want any water,' and off he went."[60] This outward callousness towards death that many adults manifested in response to the carnage would have been internalized by children, in some ways, as a model of dealing with the uncertainty provoked by their first experiences with death. Death was shocking, but it became incredibly difficult to mourn properly each individual death when men died in such large numbers.

Although mourning certainly became a difficult practice to teach to children in light of the constant presence of death, many children did experience the overwhelming grief of their mothers at the loss of a son or husband. Anne Banister wrote about the day that her father's body returned home, saying "I can never forget that day. My mother, my sister and I were…calling to each one that passed for news from the fight, when my uncle, Robert Bolling, drove up in a wagon with my father's lifeless body shot through

[58] Memoirs of George Sipe, Sipe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

the head, his grey hair dabbled in blood. My precious mother stood like one dazed, but in a few seconds she was kneeling by my father in such grief as I never saw before."[61] "Never forget," "never saw before": For white southern children, the Civil War was filled with events that shocked with their newness and forever stuck in their memories.

Fathers and brothers were brought home dead and wounded, and northern soldiers tramped through their fields and took food from their homes. In general, these children could not understand their identities as separate from their experiences during the war, and rather than destroying the southern nationalism that pervaded southern culture, the war preserved it. After losing so many fathers and brothers who perished valiantly away at the front, the children were left with little to hold onto. Patriotism, southern nationalism, and white supremacy provided something to grasp firmly, something to give their traumatic experiences meaning, to block out the more negative aspects of their war experiences. The upheaval of violent conflict provides tremendous opportunity for rethinking how a particular society is constructed, but, paradoxically and tragically, war's violence, and the relief at its conclusion, often obscures these opportunities for progressive change.[62]

Beyond deaths of family members, one of the main places in which children encountered death for the first time was in hospitals. Benjamin Wilkins remembered going to the hospital with his mother and seeing "heart rending, and sickening sights…women working side by side with Doctors, tearing their petticoats into bandages

[61] Anne A. Banister, *Incidents in the Life*, Virginia Historical Society.
[62] David Blight discusses this tragic aspect of war in terms of the ideas of reconciliation that the war provoked: "The traumatic impact of the war bred a language of personal and national regeneration, and of malleable rebirth metaphors that served the ends of rapid reunion, lenient reconstruction, and resistance to revolutions in race relations." Blight, *Race and Reunion,* 32.

to dress bleeding wounds."[63] The sacrifices and the physical, tangible realities of the suffering of war were readily accessible for many white southern children. According to Wilkins, "this is part of the home side of war, shared by women, and children left at home to divide their meager living, with sick wounded and dying men, and boys, whose glorious dreams of war, had been shattered by long months of exposure to hunger, wounds, nakedness and death."[64] Children were left with the bloody pieces of war. Rebuilding community and society with such meager resources was inevitably difficult. When war remains far away, ideas of the glory of war can remain intact, but when war approaches as close as it did for many southerners, these ideas are "rudely, and quickly shattered by visions of thousands of bloody + wounded, dead + dying."[65] Under these conditions, the concrete realities of loss and pain initiated a search for meaning that began with efforts to recover senses of control, home, and identity.

Richard Duke, Jr. also remembered going to hospitals with his mother, and wrote about his memory of "seeing her wipe the death sweat from" a wounded soldier "who murmured 'Mother' & gazed at her with dim eyes as he died."[66] Like George Sipe's encounter with the callous ambulance driver, Duke was also shocked by how inured adults had become to death:

> I recall car-loads of wounded unloaded & figures of men desperately wounded carried on stretchers into the wards from the cars. I remember seeing a great heap of arms & legs outside of a ward soon after 2nd Manassas & was fearfully shocked at the indifferent way in which a severed leg or arm was tossed on the heap by the surgeon.[67]

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[63] Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr., Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[67] Ibid.

The sanctity of the human body and of human life was threatened by the brutality of this war, and Duke certainly would have had to rethink his developing understanding of how human life was valued.

In conjunction with regular exposure to death and the loss of the security of home and family life, another key element of trauma for these children involved the prospect of being on the losing side of a conflict in which they had invested so much feeling. White southern children became exceptionally attached to the cause of the South, and their patriotism knew few bounds. The idea that the South might lose the war, then, was a crushing blow to these newly developed worldviews. Anne Banister, the Virginia girl whose family was close to Robert E. Lee, and who had described the shells as "arches of fire," later remembered a poignant scene in which she realized that Lee, her idol and the implacable symbol of Confederate pride, might not be as hopeful about the cause as even she was. James Marten writes that "Children idealize their political leaders in the process of acquiring the values of the political system under which they live and affiliate themselves with political parties or causes in order to demonstrate family solidarity and loyalty."[68] This was certainly true of Anne's relationship with Lee, and many children's demonstrations of southern patriotism can been seen as shows of "family loyalty." As loyalty to family became conflated with loyalty to country, this enlarged the realm in which white southern children felt safe. A wider sense of family could potentially soften the blow of individual family loss. With the defeat of the South, however, both avenues of comfort, family and country, were profoundly threatened. The idea of the South could no longer substitute for one's family in the same way, and after the war family took on a new importance as the Confederate nation faded away. Rebuilding the family was

[68] Marten, *The Children's Civil War*, 25.

difficult, however, and Confederate pride subsequently persisted in more subtle forms after the war as a means to sustain white children's still uncertain sense of identity and familial belonging.

In the scene where Anne realizes Lee has lost much hope, Anne describes her realization that the survival of this new southern "family" might be threatened. Lee had taken her on an excursion to his headquarters so that she could play safely, and on the way back to her home, she was "riding beside the driver and was cutting the mules to make them go faster."[69] Lee admonished her for this, saying " 'Don't do that, my little child,' but she forgot quickly and cut the mules again, receiving further chastisement: "'Anne, you must not do that again,' sternly but very sadly, he said 'my conscience is not entirely at ease about using these animals for this extra service, for they are on half feed as are we all.'"[70] Life in the Civil War South may have, in fact, seemed more normal to children than it did to adults, for the deprivations of war might not have seemed as bad for those who had little with which to compare it. Still, children knew that there was something large at stake in the contest against the North. In response to Lee's melancholic statement about the situation in the South, Anne wrote that "I was ashamed of myself and very quiet for the rest of the ride" and that "to my young mind was born a sudden belief that he had lost hope."[71] The idea that Lee had given up was devastating, and upon returning home, Anne "rushed to [her] mother telling her the incident, and crying: 'Mother, I don't believe General Lee thinks we are going to win the war.'" To this her mother responded sadly, "'Of course, we cannot win, we are all starving.'"[72]

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[69] Anne Banister, *Incidents in the Life of Civil War Child*, Virginia Historical Society.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

The state of affairs on the southern home front was indeed desperate, and historian Drew Faust, in her book *Mothers of Invention*, makes the argument that this loss of belief in the southern cause on the part of white southern women played an important role in quickening the South's defeat.[73] It was inevitable that this loss of hope would have spread to children too, and that hopelessness began to pervade not just adult society, but the world of children as well. This loss of hope and fractured sense of security in the southern identity of mothers and their children had repercussions both at the time and for generations to come. As children felt less secure due to threats to their identity, their homes, and their families, they had to grasp onto available ideologies in order to recover a sense of certainty and in order to develop their conceptions of personal and national identity.

[73] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Chapter Two

Encounters With the Enemy

"One day while we were all resting there a big army wagon drove up, and after looking over their maps, about six big yanks piled out with picks and shovels, and began digging all around the tree; presently they gathered up the bones of about twelve men and carried them up to Richmond where they were re-interred with the long list of unknown dead.

We boys found us another tree to rest under at lunch time, and when one of us were late getting back from the grist mill, we could see yankee ghosts floating around under that tree and we left all the persimmons, for the "possums" to eat on that tree ever after." –Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, b. 1856[74]

America's Civil War was, in many ways, a war of contradictions, uncertainties, and paradoxes. Even if the veneer of gentlemanly warfare quickly fell away, this was still a war between those who had very recently been countrymen, and those who, in many instances, were blood relatives. The Civil War represented a new type of war that no one really knew how to deal with. As has already been discussed in Chapter One, the death toll was unprecedented, and it remains unmatched to this day in terms of American casualties in a single conflict. The Civil War was modern warfare in unprecedented form, the most striking and commonly cited example being Union General William Sherman's burning of Atlanta and his subsequent March to the Sea.[75]

All of these aspects of the war were clear breaks from how Americans had conceived of war prior to secession. In addition, during Reconstruction, one region of the United States occupied another region of the same nation. This was another state of

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[74] Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.

[75] For a detailed description of Sherman's actions, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 808-11.

affairs that was difficult for citizens to understand, and all of these experiences taken together led to a very particular, and oftentimes contradictory, time during which children and adults alike searched for certainties within the general mood of uncertainty. In this context of ambiguity, one particular conviction that young white southerners were able to grasp onto was the idea of the northern soldier as enemy. Some children certainly might have sensed that the enemy designation was perhaps not as clear cut as they would have thought, but particularly due to the trauma of war, it was difficult for the very young to sort through the shades of grey of the situation. They desired a structure of understanding that provided answers for questions of right and wrong, friend or foe. Obviously the idea of the northerner as enemy had not existed in its fully developed form prior to the war, so, in a way, it is remarkable simply to observe how quickly attitudes of hatred towards the North developed. It is particularly useful to examine the experiences and memories of children, then, for they truly had to learn this hatred in its most newborn state. By examining these children's attitudes towards the North and interactions with northern soldiers, we will be able to gain a better understanding of how this hatred developed and how, in turn, it shaped children's senses of control and identity.

The most common moment in which white southern children expressed attitudes towards the North was when they came in contact with northern soldiers. Carrie Berry, the young diarist writing in Atlanta during the war, confided on August 11, 1864 that she wished "the federals would quit shelling us so that we could get out and get some fresh air."[76] For Carrie, the northern soldiers were clearly the enemy and prevented southerners from enjoying things as simple as fresh air. The situation became even worse once Union troops began pouring into the city, sometimes burning as they went. Carrie

[76] Carrie Berry Diary, Carrie Berry Papers, Atlanta Historical Society.

wrote on November 13, 1864, that "the federal soldiers have [been] coming to day and burning houses and I have [been] looking at them come in nearly all day," and on November 14 that "they came burning Atlanta to day. We all dread it because they say that they will burn the last house before they stop. We will dread it."[77] Especially for those children who experienced the trauma of total war during Sherman's capture of Atlanta, northerners were the source of their suffering and pain. It seems inevitable that an enmity towards the North would have developed from such experiences. In the spring of 1865, after the end of the war, Carrie spoke about how "when we went to school the hole town was full of yankees, and it did make us mad to see the yankees here again."[78] Her dread of northern soldiers during the war turned to anger after the fighting ceased.

Occupation was quite different than war. Many, like Carrie, acknowledged southern defeat and simply wanted to be left alone to rebuild their destroyed homeland, both in terms of infrastructure and in terms of family. Instead, they often had to contend with the continued presence of northern soldiers, a situation that allowed the burgeoning Confederate nationalism begun during the war to continue to intensify in opposition to this northern presence. Paradoxically, the occupation of the South by northern troops was both too short and too long. The occupation, as argued above, allowed Confederate nationalism to continue to ferment, and as Radical Reconstruction lost support in Congress, this period of postwar southern nationalism was followed by a withdrawal of the northern military from the former Confederate states. This in turn allowed the South to regain power and to return to state sanctioned policies of white supremacy. Once again, the experiences of white southern children point us towards the paradoxes inherent

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

in this period. Occupation and defeat provided possibilities for new ways of thinking about identity in the postwar years, but unfortunately white southern children instead mainly processed these experiences as affirmation of the regional and racial ideologies that they had learned during and after the war.

White southern children encountered or nearly encountered northern soldiers not only during occupation but during actual fighting as well. Some female children away at boarding schools wrote letters home describing what had happened when northern soldiers passed near to their schools. Bettie Dobson, writing from school in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, wrote to her sister Mary that "I will tell you about the yankees coming hear they came hear last Sunday knight and plundered a good many peoples houses…I was very much fritend & expected they would destroy everything."[79] Just as was the case in letters between soldiers and family members at home, letters provided a space where uncertainties and concerns could be shared with a specifically chosen audience. In public discourse, perhaps, the attitude towards northerners could be anger, but in a letter fear could be more easily expressed. Northern soldiers probably frightened many southern children who were away from home, including Nellie, a young girl at the Edge Hill School in Virginia. Nellie wrote home on April 10, 1864, responding to a question about whether she was frightened when the Yankees came. She replied that "they came within a mile of us the fight was only too or three miles from here we could hear the cannon very distinctly I was not frightened much not half as much as I expected there happened to be an artillery camp in the neighborhood who bravely defended us."[80] Although Nellie

[79] Letter from Bettie to Mary Dobson, April 6, 1865, Dobson Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
[80] Letter from Nellie to Bettie, Edgehill School, Albermarle County, Virginia, April 10, 1864, Letters from the Edgehill School for Girls, 1864, Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

could hear the cannon nearby, the Yankees never came close enough for her to see them, and her central emotion was one of thanks towards the Confederate soldiers who had prevented a closer encounter. In contrast to fear of the unknown Yankee, Nellie's experience was characterized in the end by the known and knowable presence of the Confederate soldiers.

Many white southern children, however, did meet Union troops face to face. These interactions were wide ranging. As with many examinations of war and of the past in general, divisions between friend and foe are not always as straightforward as they had appeared upon first inspection. Some white southern children recounted terribly traumatic encounters with northern soldiers, but others found that the Yankees were in fact quite friendly. Most accounts of actual meetings come in memoirs, and therefore it is important to read them with an eye to the passage of time and the particular tropes of southern memory that developed as the actual experiences of war moved further and further into the past. Emmy Gwathmey of Virginia, in her *Unto Two Flags True: Glimpses of a Child's Experiences During the Civil War*, wrote vividly of her multiple encounters with northern troops. In one particularly entertaining postwar memory, she describes how a soldier comforted her after a classmate, who was the daughter of a Union officer, had attempted to take her lunch. When Emmy refused to give the classmate a peach, the northern girl cried " 'Little Secesh!' I say – give – me – that – peach!'" and Emmy replied "'If I am a secesh…you're an old yankee, with horns, and I believe I see them sproutin' on your head this very minute!'"[81] It is intriguing to wonder where Emmy acquired the image of an enemy sprouting horns on her head (an idiom often found in

[81] Emmy Hendren Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True: Glimpses of a Child's Experience During the Civil War* (Norfolk, VA: The Nusbaum Book and News Company, 1899), 9.

anti-Semitic literature), but, no matter the origin, Emmy's statement can clearly be read as making the enemy distinctly "other" in order to protect herself from a perceived northern threat. Even if she could not protect herself physically, Emmy could separate herself from northerners by characterizing them as monsters. While we cannot know if this was the exact language she used at the time, she certainly recalled her instinct to attribute the misbehavior of the Yankees to a distinction between them and her. While this type of attitude is important for understanding the process of reconciliation that occurred or failed to occur after the war, such thinking is complicated by actual encounters with northern troops such as the ones mentioned above, and the one described below, where a solider comforted Emmy after this traumatic interaction with her northern playmate.

This soldier, meeting young Emmy, asked her name, and got the response: " 'My name! O little secesh, the yankees call me.'"[82] The soldier then replied, " 'how unkind...to call you such names.'"[83] No matter the enmity between North and South, even enemy combatants might attempt to shelter children from the brutal aspects of the war. In the mind of this Yankee soldier, children did not deserve to be called names as a result of the conflict, and this attitude, even if isolated, had a profound affect on Emmy: "This second, personal encounter, with the much dreaded yankees set me to philosophizing. 'After all they're very good devils.'"[84] The war was a complex time for everyone, and contradictions such as "very good devils" are often expressed best in memory, even if they are still not understood. Emmy soon had a number of experiences that only served to deepen the contradictions in her memory.

[82] Ibid., 16.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 17.

Writing about what occurred after her encounter with this kind soldier, Emmy described the sky as reflecting the turmoil of war, just as we had seen her discuss the blood staining the soil red in Chapter One: "On every hand, were these strangers to our soil; even the sky seemed to have borrowed a perpetual blue, and our southern hearts were deep-dyed in the all prevalent color."[85] Emmy's motif of the landscape, and even her own heart, taking on colors symbolic of the war, is in fact an excellent analogy to how the war was preserved in memory for many of these children. Southern nationalism had existed before the war in a less conscious form as a particular regional identity, and it only existed in "official form" for the years of the war. But nations do not simply disappear. Memories of the nation, of the sacrifices it made, and of the particular racial ideology that existed as its base, were preserved in the minds of white southern children just as "the sky seemed to have borrowed a perpetual blue." The "strangers" to southern soil who existed in the memoirs written by those who had been children during the war and during Reconstruction served as reminders of the southern identity that had been defeated but not lost. This has obviously been articulated in the Lost Cause mythology that arose after the war, but the Confederacy that existed in the minds of white southerners who had grown up during the war was not simply something that had been fought for and whose ideals should be upheld still; it was something deep-dyed, something that formed the basis for their identities and against which almost everything else they remembered was defined.[86] The fighting had to have meaning in order for their

[85] Ibid., 18.
[86] The "Lost Cause" was simply the idea that fighting for the Confederacy had been noble and that maintaining the memory of this southern nation was an important undertaking after the war. For more information, see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980) and Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds., *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000).

identities to remain intact, particularly identities that were based on the tenuous Confederate nation.

As described in Chapter One, Emmy recalled the collective mourning over the death of Stonewall Jackson as central to the definition of her southern identity. Still proudly wearing her "somber tinted rosette in prominent relief on [her] heart," after Union troops entered her town, she recalled that "one day its streamers seemed to kindle a soldier's ire."[87] In dramatic prose, she then remembered how

> With rudeness, he pushed me aside, and in imperative tones, demanded, at the bayonet's point, that I should remove 'that Jackson badge.' The steel of his bayonet glistened, (an icy reflection of himself), but remove my badge, never, nor would I die for it. There was only one resource left, not noble but safe, to run, and run I did, the black ribbons waving behind me, an ample defiance.[88]

Here we can plainly see how Emmy remembered her Confederate identity as strongly linked to her childhood self. The drama of her experience gives way to the drama of language, and this is a strong indication of the importance of such memories. Emmy clearly remembered how the adult world infringed on her childhood. We can also see how, while the threat seemed real, much of the drama of it only comes out in theatrical language: "the steel of his bayonet glistened," "there was only one resource left," "the black ribbons waving behind me." History is not a process that unfolds in an instant, it is given meaning as time passes. War, for the white southern children who survived, was about just that: surviving and giving meaning to their experiences. Encounters with northern soldiers were one potential source of memories from which to draw conclusions about the implications of the war. While these encounters were dramatized, they were also tempered with time, placed within a sealed box of idiomatic language. As we will

[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

see in the next chapters, memories of race on the other hand, while also shaped into particular idioms over time, were inflamed.

The dramatizing of interactions with northern soldiers took similar, albeit varied, forms in many of the memoirs of those who had grown up during the war and Reconstruction. Richard Duke, Jr. remembered confronting a group of Yankees after they had stolen items from his home. They offered him a drink, but he "pushed the canteen away, & told them [he] wouldn't drink with them. This of course raised another shout and [he] felt perfectly at ease & began to talk with them as boldly" as if he were a man.[89] One soldier asked him what he wanted, and Duke replied that he wanted a guard, as "your men have insulted my mother, robbed our home and they say [they] are going to burn it tonight."[90] Although he was no more than eleven years old at the time of this incident, Duke recalled standing up for his family and believing that they deserved retribution for the acts which had been perpetrated against them. With fathers away, boys had to become men, or at least act like men at younger ages. The presence of an enemy both precipitated and aided in this process of maturation. With their early entry into adulthood, children may not have been able to understand the nuances of nationalism, but it was easier to absorb a Confederate identity that existed in opposition to the identity presented in the form of northern soldiers. This allowed them to control aspects of an otherwise overwhelming experience.

The absence of fathers—a vital fact in the lives of many southern children—was reflected in the next question Duke remembered being posed by the soldiers. A man asked him where his father was, and Duke replied that he was a Colonel in the

[89] Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr. Recollections, Duke Family Papers, Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.
[90] Ibid.

Confederate Army. This information changed the dynamics of their interaction, or, as the soldier said, "'That's quite a different matter.'"[91] The Duke family was given their military guard. The insecurity of a family being left alone, at the mercy of northern troops, was a common sentiment expressed by white southern children. For example, George Sipe, another young Virginian, wrote in his memoirs about how, when a troop of northern cavalry passed, "our fences are soon blazing on their camp fires. They destroy the garden, tramp through the house as if it belonged to them and consume nearly all the food on the premises."[92] Sipe remembered his encounter with northern soldiers as primarily threatening. His mother eventually appealed to an officer "to protect her family and premises from such indignities."[93] The officer responded that "'You shall have full protection, Madam.' And in a few minutes, the house garden and yard were cleared of every intruder, sentinels standing on guard till the departure of the regiment next morning."[94] These examples of respect between the elites of the South and the officers of the Union army, seen especially in the case of Richard Duke and his Colonel father, point towards the tenuousness of the "enemy" characterization.

As we see in this and in other remembrances recounted by Duke, memory presents a complex portrait of the past, and we can certainly learn something from the way this past is remembered and recorded years later. Duke chose to tell a story in which he had a certain degree of power and in which the possibility of cordial relations between North and South existed. His childhood was not one in which the intrusion of the North destroyed his innocence, but one in which this intrusion successfully challenged him to

[91] Ibid.
[92] George Sipe Memoirs, Sipe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

form his identity as a man. In memory, experiences of defeat and sorrow can be shaped to fit a narrative that contains assertions of power and success.

In contrast to the moment when he confronted the northern soldiers, however, Duke also recalled times during the war and during Reconstruction where he felt more helpless. Writing about Philip H. Sheridan's raid of Trevilian Station, Virginia in June 1863, he says that

> I never shall forget the horror & rage and indignation with which I looked upon these dreadful invaders. Disgust, fear anger, sorrow, all struggled in my boyish bosom as I saw the hated Yankee coming as a conqueror on our "sacred soil". We stood watching the long—seemingly—endless—column—move along, like a great blue snake: No one spoke.[95]

In this instance, his childhood, and therefore his memory, had been tainted by the experiences of the war. He "shall never forget the horror," but writing out his memoir in this way also allowed Duke to think of the "hated Yankee" in the abstract and to reluctantly accept the history of postwar reconciliation. Similar to Emmy Gwathmey's memory of insulting her playmate by implying that Yankees have horns, Duke casts the Yankee's "otherness" in terms of monstrosity: the Yankee column takes the form of a "great blue snake." The Yankee snake passed through and occupied the "sacred soil" of the South and therefore had to be thrown out. Both the image of the northerner as a snake and the idea of the South's "sacred soil" being invaded can also be seen as invested with religious significance. As in the Biblical book of Genesis, the evil snake (here the northerner) corrupts Eden (in this case the South). The snaking lines of northern troops were constant reminders of this act of corruption.

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[95] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr., Transcribed by Gayle M. Schulman for the Albermarle County Historical Society, Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. For a discussion of Sheridan's Raid see James M. McPherson. *Battle Cry of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 735-739.

Duke remembered how "evidences of our conquered condition soon forced itself upon us."[96] During Reconstruction this condition was even more obvious, for "We were then District 1 & our Ruler was General [Edward R.S.] Camby."[97] During Reconstruction, the South did experience a period of military occupation. Through the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the South was split up in to five military districts, each one under the power of a military commander,[98] but certainly no one who organized military Reconstruction thought of the generals as "Rulers." That Duke remembered it this way, or at least chose to characterize the general as such in his memoir, can tell us much about how such policies were perceived in the South and about how children observed and made such perceptions for themselves.

Benjamin Wilkins, known as War Boy in the memoir he wrote in 1937, also made much of his childhood encounters with northern soldiers towards the end of the war and into Reconstruction. Writing about the burning of Richmond in April 1865, Wilkins described how "the yankee armies had reached the outskirts of the city, fires were raging in many places, and the city was being ransacked by slaves and poor white people."[99] This city was full of chaos, and it is striking that Wilkins passes off much of this chaos onto the shoulders of "slaves and poor white people." He remembers a Yankee major general taking possession of their home as headquarters and that this Yankee was "very polite, and gentlemanly about it all, and [his mother] now felt safe for the time being under federal protection."[100] For the Wilkins' family, the northern army actually

[96] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr., Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[97] Ibid.
[98] For a discussion of military Reconstruction see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), especially 273-278.
[99] Benjamin Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.
[100] Ibid.

protected them from the "lower orders" - meaning lower classes of southerners and Union troops, as well as recently freed slaves. This fits well into the postwar narrative of reconciliation. For Wilkins, the Yankees were not unequivocally "hated" since they were at least potential protectors from the ills wrought by the devastating war. The Yankees' power, both grand and awesome, could not be masked even by Wilkins' anger towards the North or his desire to preserve southern society:

> War Boy stood at the foot of the hill below our home on Franklin St. and watched the Yankees marching in for two days, witnessing the greatest military parade of his lifetime—Yankees by thousands seemed to rise out of the ground, and he wondered why this great host of fat and well armed men had waited so long to come and take a few ragged and hungry soldiers armed with "pop guns," and long sabers and no ammunition.[101]

Even in memory there was no obscuring the material differences between the northern and southern armies. Undoubtedly, though, Wilkins inserts a subtle dig at the bravery of northerners: why if they were so much more well supplied "had [they] waited so long to come"? We often use our childhood to determine and understand who we become as adults. For those who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction, the determining of adult identity mirrored the ways in which the South as a whole regrouped after the loss of the war to form the New South.

After the war had been lost and the "military parades" had long since ceased, some Yankee soldiers were still roaming the southern landscape, either attempting to account for the many Union troops still missing or keeping watch on those southern states still under the auspices of the U.S. military. Benjamin Wilkins, for example, wrote about how "after the war for several years the federal government sent out squads of men to look over the old camping grounds and battle fields to gather up the bones of the yankee

[101] Ibid.

dead, and bury them in great central cemeteries where their remains are guarded to this day."[102] Wilkins (as seen in the epigraph to this chapter) remembers encountering these "squads" sent to look for northern dead, and he remembers how this haunted him with images of Yankee ghosts. In his reminiscences, we also see unmistakably how his adult prejudices shape his memories of childhood. This is particularly evident when he says that "out in some old forgotten woodland, or road side the bones of many a forgotten 'Johnny Reb' has long since turned to dust, and only the stars watch over the spot where many an unsung hero fell."[103] As a child, Wilkins might not have even had knowledge that there was a disparity in the resources for finding missing Confederate and Union dead, but he was able to fit his childhood memories into a narrative that emphasized the injustice perpetrated against the South. Encounters with northern soldiers, even in the context of memories considered many years later, helped to shape young white southerners' sense of personal identity.

Martha Brent, born in 1849, also described in great detail memories of encounters with northern soldiers both before and after the war. Like Benjamin Wilkins, she was in Richmond when it was burned. Describing the experience of this climactic event of the war, she wrote that

> On Monday morning between 10 and 11...the first Union Soldiers entered Richmond…I saw them riding up Governor street from Main towards the Capitol and I watched at the windows, a girl of fifteen, to see what would happen…There was no 'Stars and Bars' waving, but the 'Sic Semper Tyrannis' of Virginia. It was immediately lowered and replaced by the 'Stars and Stripes', a veritable instrument of <u>stripes</u> in this case. In an hour or two the Union Army marched into Richmond by the thousands. Everything was in good order, people were treated courteously, but the great shock came when a brigade of <u>negro soldiers</u> came marching up Broad Street.[104]

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Martha Buxton Porter Brent Memoirs, Virginia Historical Society.

Memoir again provided a format with which a Confederate child could later fit her experiences into a dramatic, but tightly ordered, narrative. The raising of the "Stars and Stripes" was like a whipping to the southerners, leaving "stripes" on the memories of those who watched the Union Army march through Richmond. Fittingly, Martha shifts the focus of discomfort to the presence of black northern soldiers and not simply Union troops: "everything was in good order until [the] brigade of negro solidiers" arrived. This demonstrates that there were two narratives around which memory and experience could be shaped: that of the North as enemy, and that of the racial enemy. Again and again, we see, particularly in memoirs, that the idea of the North as enemy was thought of as reaching its peak at, or at least being centered around, one specific point in time, and was superceded eventually by an abiding racism.

In addition to the somewhat nuanced experiences of those children discussed above, some white southern children had interactions with Yankee troops that were either explicitly positive or negative. Isham Randolph, born in 1848, wrote in his *Gleanings Made From a Harvest of Memories* about a violent encounter with a Yankee Colonel:

> I was in Millwood when the first party of Yankee cavalry rode in. I was standing on Cousin William Nelson's store porch when the Colonel of this command came up to me, and taking one of my Virginia buttons between his thumb and forefinger he read 'Sic Semper Tyrannis', and said, 'that is the way we are going to put the Rebels down'. I retorted I hope all tyrants will be put down, but not the Rebels. He seized me by the collar and gave me a kick which sent me off the porch and yelled 'tell your dam'd daddy to come here and I will do him so too.' Nobody knows the intensity of impotent rage that swelled within me then.[105]

Even if white southern children were not fighting on the battlefield, we can see that in their encounters with death, and here in their interactions with Union soldiers, they were

[105] Isham Randolph, "Gleanings Made From a Harvest of Memories," Virginia Historical Society.

not exempt from either the sight of or the experience of violence. On the one hand, this violence was easily pinned on a visible enemy, which made the idea of the abstract "northerner" much more easy to conceptualize. On the other hand, however, a more common memory was that of realizing that northern soldiers were generally not, in fact, violent monsters. Edmund Drago, for instance, in his book about rebel children in South Carolina, writes that, "The very young were not always aware that the incoming soldiers were Yankees; some embraced them as playmates."[106] Some young children performed songs for the Union troops, while others who had soldiers staying in their homes shared meals and leisure time with these northern "enemies."[107] These more pleasant encounters foreshadowed the instability of the characterization of northerners as an enemy "other." Violent memories remained, nonetheless, reminding us that affronts to home and identity are not simply forgotten with time.

Beyond encounters with Northern soldiers when troops invaded southern soil, some white southern children saw Union men in a more vulnerable state. Many Union troops were captured during the war and spent varying amounts of time in Confederate prisons, often in terrible conditions. Richard Duke, Jr. remembered how "the whole Court House yards front and back were filled with these poor fellows, who were a tired and hungry lot."[108] With the enemy confined in an observable space, Duke "examined them from a distance, at first, for the hated 'Yankee' was to me a terrible creature even tho' a prisoner: After [a] while my curiosity led me closer & I began to talk to one of

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[106] Edmund L. Drago, *Confederate Phoenix: Rebel Children and Their Families in South Carolina* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 96.
[107] See James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 141-142.
[108] Richard Duke, Jr. Recollections, Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

them over the railing."[109] This Union soldier "looked to [Duke] very tired & hungry & by and by a great pity for him & the other prisoners swelled up in my boyish heart."[110] Duke gave this northern soldier food, and, ironically, he remembered how he was able to realize the northerners' humanity most fully in his moment of captivity.

In order to get a fuller picture of children's attitudes towards the "the enemy," it is also illuminating to read through works that intended to teach these children how to think about the North. In Confederate publications, a central tenet was the inferiority of northern soldiers. This can be seen in a math textbook that included such questions as, "A Confederate soldier captured 8 Yankees each day for 9 successive days; how many Yankees did he capture in all?" and "If one Confederate soldier kills 90 yankees, how many yankees can 10 confederates kill?"[111] In addition to these mathematical divisions set up between Yankee and Confederate soldiers, a spelling textbook carefully defined northerners as enemies: "An enemy is one who hates us. The Yankees are enemies to the Southern people."[112] In this formulation it was the *Yankees'* hate that led to the split between North and South. The formation of Confederate identity in general required a divide between enemy and self. Children certainly remembered this gulf even looking back many years later. Literary publications such as *Boys and Girls Stories of the War*, a pamphlet for children, wrote, as many did, of "the bad Yankees."[113] These "bad Yankees" burned houses and "took away all the horses, cows, pigs and chickens of poor

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[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] L. Johnson, *A.M. Johnson's Common School Arithmetic (An Elementary Arithmetic Designed For Beginners Embracing The First Principles Of The Science)* (Raleigh, NC: 1864) in Ashley Mays, "Confederate school textbooks," *North & South* Vol. 10 No.3 (October 2007): 68-69.
[112] M.B. Moore, *The Dixie Elementary Spelling Book: For The Use of Common Schools* (Raleigh, NC: Branson & Farrar, 1864) in Chapin Library, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.
[113] *Boys and Girls Stories of the War,* (Richmond, VA: West & Johnston), Virginia Historical Society.

people as well as rich people."[114] When the battle was over, however, "*their* dead and wounded lay on the field of battle ghastly to see."[115] The southern dead were hidden from sight, and the enemy received the punishment they deserved. The North was depersonalized so that it could be made an enemy, but as children learned and remembered, depersonalization is shaky ground on which to build ideas of identity.

Illustrative of many of these attitudes towards the North were opinions in the South concerning or about Abraham Lincoln. While many of the white southern children who wrote about their experiences did not comment on the war president, Richard Duke, Jr., for example, wrote that "Lincoln to us was a bug bear—a clownish ape, who had brought on the war—who had stolen our slaves—incited them to insurrection."[116] Clearly some white southern children did learn and carry forward as a memory the rhetorical description of Lincoln as the central cause of the war and the embodiment of all that was wrong with the North. This image was presented, for example, in *For the Little Ones*, a Confederate educational publication in a section entitled 'Willie's Political Alphabet': "And L stands for Lincoln, oh woe to his crown!"[117] Lincoln the despot represented the Northern enemy, but despots can be overthrown or forgotten, and their power can be lessened through the shaping of memory in the passage of time. The unacknowledged despot of race, however, took a much stronger hold over white southern children's experiences and memories and allowed them something much more solid to hold onto in terms of defining their developing identities. A white supremacist vision of race allowed these children to carry their experiences of the war and of Reconstruction

[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., emphasis added.
[116] Richard Duke, Jr. Recollections, Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[117] *For the Little Ones* (Savannah, GA: John M. Cooper & Co., 1861(?)), Virginia Historical Society.

into the future as proud, if defeated, Confederates and eventually as residents of an America failing to deal with the issues of race that had seemed to reach a head with the fighting of the Civil War. As Edmund Drago again writes, one "Northern soldier wondered 'How can we expect to restore the Union when even the children hate us so?'"[118] This restoration did, in fact, occur, and it did so through the shifting of hate as a means to regain control in the processes of memory from being directed at northern enemies to being directed at racial others.[119]

[118] Charleston *Daily Courier*, June 26, 1863, quoted in Edmund L. Drago, *Confederate Phoenix*, 11.
[119] My arguments about reconciliation and the shifting of Civil War memories from being centered on sectional animosity to being shaped by ideas of white supremacy have been influenced by David Blight's argument in *Race and Reunion.* In this work, he argues that agreement between northerners and southerners on the idea of white superiority served to help the regions reconcile and to obscure the emancipationist legacy of the war. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

Chapter Three

Defeated, but Still White:
Slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and the Acquisition of Racial Ideology

Clearly race was a dominant aspect of white southern children's experiences and memories of the war and the postwar years, and indeed any discussion of the Civil War and Reconstruction cannot be undertaken without an examination of issues of race and slavery. White southern children, before the war, grew up in a very particular racial society. Many played with the young black slaves on their farms and plantations, and they often spent just as much time, if not more, with their "mammies" than with their mothers. Their young playmates, who were slaves, were sometimes designated as gifts to these young masters, meant to stay with them as personal servants throughout their lives. This sort of distorted relationship was inevitably traumatic for the slave children. There came a time when they had to call their playmates masters, and although some slaves fought back, this only led them to be reminded more brutally of their slave status. Robert Ellett, a former slave from Virginia, remembered just such a moment:

> One day the old master carried me into the barn and tied me up and whipped me cause I wouldn't call my young masters, 'masters.' He beat me till the blood run down and I wouldn't say a squeak. Not one word of promise did I give to call either of those two boys I was raised, 'master.' He kept yelling, 'Call him master! Say master.' I ain't said that first word till yet, so finally he untied me an' turned me loose, and before we could git out of the barn, we, the young master and me, was fighting like dogs. They had to part us again and take me off him.[120]

Slavery was a violent regime based on coercion, and it was a central issue over which the Civil War was fought. During the war and Reconstruction years, therefore, debates about the meaning of race for the nation and for southerners reached a fevered pitch. White

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[120] Charles L Perdue, Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils In The Wheat* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1976), 85.

southern children had to deal with this newly heated conversation about the importance of race, for they recognized that they no longer lived in a society where their role as masters was so easily defined. Examining the children's experiences of race during this time period is illuminating because one of the fascinating aspects of Reconstruction, and especially of Radical Reconstruction, was its progressive racial policies and the reactions to this change in policy in the South. Understanding how easily these policies were discarded is an important undertaking in the study of this period. Looking at race through the eyes of those who grew up at the time can be especially helpful because, while children are often more open to new ideas, they are also more likely to be influenced by their parents, who commonly hold tight to the status quo. These white southern children were also the ones who continued the South's violent racial regime on into Jim Crow and beyond.

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One of the central concerns of Confederate soldiers during the war was that the women and children left at home were in danger because of the slaves who remained on the farms and plantations. Even if they could not necessarily understand the causes or the implications of such tension, children were able to observe and sometimes unwittingly feed into it. Estelle Ward, the young girl left at home with her older siblings in Bladensfield, Virginia while her mother tended to her brother in a Confederate hospital, wrote about the behavior of the family's slaves in a letter to her brother. Writing on July 14, 1862, before Lincoln's initial emancipation proclamation given on September 22,

which stated that the slaves in any state still in rebellion would be freed on January 1, 1863, Estelle told her brother to "tell Ma the little black children are getting mighty frisky since she has been gone."[121] The general fear of men off fighting at the front was that there would be violent slave uprisings and that the women and children left at home would be threatened by adult male slaves, and this "friskiness" of younger slave children could have been symbolic of such a threat. Estelle plainly associated the misbehavior of the slave children with the absence of white, adult authority figures. White southern children, at least at first, could only understand the changes in the racial order of the South as a deviation from the norm. Children may not have understood the misbehavior of the slaves in quite the same light as their parents, but they were able to see it as a small sign of the larger changes and possibilities for change that were threatening the South as they knew it.

Some who grew up during the war had positive memories of how their slaves behaved then. George Sipe, born in 1850, wrote that "our slaves well repaid the kindness of their owners. Their loyalty to mother and us children, when we were overrun by federal armies, is here mentioned in the hope that it will go down as a lasting tradition in our family."[122] Rather than the nightmare of slave revolt imagined by many, the Sipe family slaves, for whatever reason, be it the "kindness of their owners" or not, helped the family get through the war. Isham Randolph, who turned thirteen in the year the war broke out, described how one of his family's slaves, "Phil Slaughter…who was a musician, took his little band, rushed to Braggs Hill, and played as loudly as possible 'Dixie', 'The Girl I left Behind' and other bright songs to make the Yankees think

[121] Estelle Ward to Brother, Bladensfield, July 14, 1862, Ward Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
[122] Memoirs of George Sipe, Sipe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

reinforcements were coming to the few that met them, this showing their masters that they loved them more than freedom."[123] For much of the war, slaves such as Phil Slaughter, as well as those owned by the Sipe family, may not have known exactly what the war might bring and whether the Yankee invaders were friends or foes. It makes a certain amount of sense, then, that slaves of families who treated them reasonably well might have chosen the known over the unknown. What is remarkable, though, is how easily a childhood memory like that of Isham Randolph could fit into a particular model of thinking about southern slavery. After the war, a common narrative that arose among white southerners, particularly those who had been members of the slaveholding class, was that the freedmen and women had been better off during slavery and that their masters had protected and cared for them. While Isham Ranolph's and George Sipe's recollections of the behavior of their former slaves are obviously memories of racial learning, the significance of these memories to them as adults may not have taken shape until they were filtered through particular models of remembering slavery.

Some children later remembered how well their families had reacted to emancipation. Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr., wrote about how "Mother called all the negroes up as soon as the news reached us that the Federal troops had taken charge of the town. She told them that they were free to go—that if they chose they could stay & work the place & get what food they could, but she had no money to pay them wages."[124] Negotiating the nature of a new system of labor was one of the most important aspects of the post emancipation world. While the attitude of Richard Duke's mother was more accommodating than that of many in the South, her solution was far from viable in the

[123] Isham Randolph,"Gleanings Made From a Harvest of Memories," Virginia Historical Society.
[124] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr. Transcribed by Gayle M. Schulman for the Albermarle County Historical Society, From the Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

long term. In fact, such a system represented almost as much of a coercive power dynamic as that of slavery. While Mrs. Duke essentially had no other possible solution to propose, as Confederate money had become worthless, the problem lies in the fact that her solution was remarkably similar to the one that ended up being adopted throughout the South. Although some black southerners did achieve financial success during the Jim Crow period, many were trapped in a system of sharecropping which basically boiled down to "if they chose they could stay & work the place & get what food they could, but she had no money to pay them wages," the difference being that during the Jim Crow era the whites often actually *did* have money to pay wages. It is not a difficult leap to make to imagine how white children might have learned such a system from the immediate post-emancipation labor agreements, and it is even more interesting to wonder how they learned to justify continuing such a system once they had the means to change it.

One potential origin for this justification might be seen in southerners' dim views of the Reconstruction period. As most of the views we are discussing here are adult accounts of childhood memories from this period, it is important to consider how these memories were shaped over time. David Blight writes, "The image of Reconstruction as black domination, radical ideology taken too far, would become one of the deepest strains of American historical consciousness in the next generation."[125] Historian Bruce Baker elaborates on this point, writing in his book specifically on historical memory of the Reconstruction period that "the depictions of Reconstruction by its opponents would become the dominant social memory of the period," and that "for southerners in the twentieth century, no set of memories was more important to establishing identity than

[125] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 20.

memories of Reconstruction."[126] For many white children who lived through the period, memories of experiences with freedmen and women, or at least of their parents' attitudes towards the freed slaves, informed their opinions of Reconstruction and attitudes towards race. Benjamin Wilkins wrote about Selma, Alabama, where he moved in his mid-teens, saying that

> Selma was practically under Nigger control fastened upon the town by political trickery, and still had a few yankee soldiers to hold her citizens in subjection. There were about fifty niggers in the Alabama legislature at that time, and many of them could not read or write, and were entirely subject to the…carpet baggers who were robbing the state at will.[127]

It is easy enough to see the negative view that Wilkins held of the period with his use of pejorative terms like "control," "trickery," "subjection," and "nigger." While there may have been some corruption within Alabama's state government, the ideas that "many" of the black legislators could not read or write and that supporters of the North were "robbing the state at will" are simply not true. Through the processes of memory, and through the genre of memoir, Wilkins was able to construct a narrative in which the loss of control was blamed on freedmen and northerners, and therefore this control had to be reclaimed through white supremacy and the formation of a southern identity.

One group that sought to regain control in the South during Reconstruction was the Ku Klux Klan, groups of hooded men who terrorized those who they thought threatened their way of life. Wilkins writes that Klan members "began to roam at night, silent, and harmless never a word spoken, only signs and symbols to play upon the superstition of the Niggers."[128] Again, the idea that the KKK was a "harmless"

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[126] Bruce E. Baker, *What Reconstruction Meant: Historical Memory in the American South* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 13, 76.
[127] Benjamin Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.
[128] Ibid.

organization is gross distortion of historical fact, and as much as he might like to think otherwise, Wilkins may have been sheltered from the more violent aspects of the Klan's practices. He also writes about how in elections "a little manipulation of ballots by young men willing to risk their liberty for white supremacy turned the tide."[129] White supremacy was the learned racial ideology of white children in the South during the war and during Reconstruction, and ultimately, in their minds, the blame for violence fell on dissolute whites who were not loyal to the race: "the troubles that grew out of reconstruction could all be traced to the lowest element of Army stragglers…scallawags, and carpet baggers who exploited the negro vote in order to rob the states counties and towns through political offices."[130] This particular racial ideology provided a hierarchy of understanding and a community for southern children to rely on, theoretically providing refuge from the turmoil of Reconstruction.

While southern nationalism and white supremacy provided a public community, white children were also supported within families, and for those who had grown up in the South during this period, who had seen their homes and families threatened by the North, memories were easily manipulated to support this alliance between racial ideology and familial loyalty. As Joel Williamson theorizes about the whites of South Carolina during Reconstruction:

> [They] lost their sense of self and ideals became blurred, the cement that held their society together seemed to melt. They tended to fall away from one another, to turn their loyalties to local and sometimes isolated institutions—to the local church, the lodge, the family…This fragmentation in life that came to the South during Reconstruction probably had much to do with the generation of a modern Southern culture that remains distinctly different from that of the nation…It might also have to do with why the South is a region where family identity remains remarkably strong. The clannishness as well as the Klannishness of

[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

> Reconstruction ought to be understood in the context of this vast societal disintegration.[131]

Widespread belief in white supremacy reinforced a sense of community both within families and within the South as a whole. In the memories of those who were children at the time, such as Wilkins, we see that it was easy and desirable to feel a part of these communities, large and small, by subscribing to normative racial views. Thinking abut race in terms of white supremacy stabilized both their personal identities and their sense of belonging to a family or community, and the lessons taught to them during the war led to this ideology being deeply ingrained.

Other important aspects of the racial upheaval of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods that many white southern children remembered later were the interactions during Reconstruction between freedmen and whites who had hired the former slaves to work for them. Richard Duke, Jr. recalled an incident where "Mr. J. Woods Garth—a large planter and one of my father's warmest friends—had hired a lot of negro men to worm tobacco."[132] One of the freedmen apparently was not working as hard as Mr. Garth would have liked, and "on being rebuked for it became very saucy—Thereupon Mr Garth, who hadn't gotten used to the new order of things had two of the other hands take the offending darkey & tie him to a tree whilst he proceeded to give him a good sound flogging."[133] Mr. Garth actually did end up going to trial, where the judge told him that "These people are free, now…you ain't got no business thrashing 'em like you used to do," and that if he beat one of his workers like that again he would have him

[131] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 81.
[132] Recollections of Richard Duke, Jr., Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[133] Ibid.

shot.[134] The young Duke, just over ten years old at the time of this incident, must have taken away a complex understanding of race from an event like this. On the one hand, he would have seen that, at least in the minds of some, blacks were entitled to the equal protection under the law, promised to them in the Fourteenth amendment. On the other hand, he would have seen that race was still at the center of violent conflicts in the South. While he does not make a pronouncement about his views on the ruling handed out by the judge, Duke does later express very clearly his views on the Republican Party: "I have hated the party with an inexpressible hatred ever since it attempted to perpetually disenfranchise my father & men like him & want my children & their children never to forget this monstrous attempted inequity."[135] The South having been defeated, Duke's loyalty lay with the men who had sacrificed for his sake, and especially with his father. He felt, therefore, that it was an absolute travesty that men like his father were being punished for what he saw as a noble sacrifice. From his point of view, what was particularly horrific about this time in southern history was that the former slaves became involved in government and that "my father's negroes—poor ignorant creatures—voted for" the Republican Party.[136] A common thread in Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction white southern thought was that it was not the freedmen's fault that they voted in 'incompetent' legislators, it was the fault of Radical Republicans who had mistakenly give the vote to the "poor ignorant creatures" in the first place. Duke obviously internalized this type of thinking about the role of freedmen in Reconstruction, and while we cannot know whether he learned this as a child or as an adult, he clearly found nothing in his childhood memories to contradict this view. Violence between

[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

blacks and whites was an unavoidable aspect of Reconstruction for many in the South, and the white southern children who did view such violence seem to have viewed it much as adults did: as an affirmation that it was imperative to preserve white supremacy at all costs.

Benjamin Wilkins also remembered a conflict between whites and blacks during Reconstruction, albeit one that did not begin over work and ended with far less justice for the abused blacks. This conflict began when a group of freedmen " 'got litup' with some yankee whisky, and met up with the patroll guard, took up the whole side walk and pushed the 'yanks' in the gutter, a fight followed, and one of the coons stabbed a soldier, they were all promptly overpowered."[137] Wilkins attributed the misbehavior of the blacks to "sudden freedom" and "thinking they were as good as the Yankee white boys."[138] It is worth noting that Wilkins says "as good as the Yankee white boys" and not "as good as the whites." This might imply that it was taken for granted that the blacks could never be as good as the southern whites. After the freedmen involved with this scuffle were caught, they were punished in an exceptionally malicious manner:

> Two of the nigs who did the knife work were stripped down to the waist, and nailed up in coffins with the head piece left open, they were stood up against the wall, and their heads + breasts smeared with molasses, it was a hot day, and the flies swarmed over them for several hours, while many idle coons looked on and wondered if that was freedom and cried out 'Gimme back my old Massa, and my own white folks.'[139]

Even if some of the freedmen did cry out for a return to slavery, it was probably because this was what they thought the whites watching wished to hear. As has been discussed, viewing slavery as a happier place and time was a common motif in white culture after

[137] Benjamin Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.

the war, and anything that could support such a view was probably eagerly appropriated. It is also striking that Wilkins writes that the black observers in the crowd "wondered if that was freedom." Wilkins obviously could not have known what the blacks thought or wondered, but, again, his particular framing of the memory relates to the idea that the freedmen had been better off during slavery. Many white southerners writing during and about Reconstruction described the travails of former slaves during the period and wrote bitterly that the freedmen had asked for freedom, and freedom was what they got, along with all its trials and tribulations. In the case of Benjamin Wilkins' remembrances, it is almost as if he resented the blacks for tainting his childhood with violent images, while at the same time pitying them for being the "child-like" victims of a disruption of social order that was not truly their fault.

During Reconstruction, many former slaves either continued working for or eventually returned to their old masters. White children often described their relationships with these freedmen and women who had previously been their families' property. One particularly striking aspect of these descriptions is the language that they used. As we have seen, the descriptive terms used to categorize blacks ranged from the restrained "negro" used by Richard Duke, Jr. to the vitriolic "coon" and "nigger" of Benjamin Wilkins. This is most likely more a product of adult experiences than of learned racial ideologies from their youth. One aspect of the language used by Wilkins, though, is particularly telling. He wrote about a "good ex slave named Robert who ran away from his family because they beat him unmercifully," and whom the Wilkins' family hired as a servant.[140] Wilkins describes Robert as "our new nigger." He also refers to formers slaves held by the family as "our slave boy Ned" and "our old

[140] Ibid.

Mammy." While it is possible to dismiss the possessive "our" in the description of Robert as simply the easiest turn of phrase to use, the similarities between the language used to describe a servant and former slaves makes it hard to ignore the idea that the possessive term carried slightly more meaning. Whites still exercised tremendous coercive power over blacks, and it is important to consider the extent to which a child would have absorbed such lessons about relations between the races, and how easily Wilkins is able to return to using the language of possession.

We can also learn much by looking at Wilkins' description of the post-war experiences of his former "Mammy" in more detail. He writes that after the war

> Dad drove up to Richmond, and called to see Mammy again. The old lady was a changed being, two years of freedom, and hard work for her son Tom to support his family was more than she could stand; Dad asked her again if she wanted to go back with him, and she cried for joy—promising to do all the cooking and washing for the family just to get back with her own folks.[141]

Life during Reconstruction was an intense struggle for many former slaves, so it is not particularly surprising that she would wish to return to a family that would provide steady employment. We also cannot know the exact nature of her relationship to the son she was leaving behind in Richmond. According Wilkins, "she lived with us about two years, and her son came and took her away. We never saw her again, but learned that she died in Richmond about 1870."[142] While we can certainly wonder about what exactly the nature and circumstances of Mammy's son taking her away were, the most telling aspect of this particular memory was Wilkins' speculation on Mammy's heavenly fate: "If our 'sins can be washed white as snow' I know that Mammy's black skin has been changed,

[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.

and she shines in bright array among those who are saved."[143] Wilkins ties whiteness with eternal salvation, and his fond memories of a Mammy loyal to ideals of slavery even after the war support this theory of race. Memories of childhood after the war were later easily manipulated to hold up attitudes of white supremacy that only became stronger as these white southern children entered adulthood.

Others who grew up during Reconstruction also wrote about interactions with former slaves who returned home. Harry Lee Ragland, born in 1864, and writing in 1931, remembered that "after the war closed many of the former slaves would come and visit us when we were living at the old home, to find out how old they were."[144] Like those who grew up during slavery, Harry wrote of playing with the black servants, "two boys Silas and William, who were about Sam's and my ages and were fine playfellows for us."[145] For some whites, Reconstruction was a period of new separation, one in which they had fewer interactions with blacks than they had had during slavery, but for others, life went on pretty much the same. Harry's life during Reconstruction sounds much like what a white child might have experienced during slavery. The black servants lived in their own separate quarters and did the family's labor, the only difference being that instead of just working for food and clothes they "worked for $8 or $10 a month."[146] Violence as a form of discipline remained as well, for although Harry's father "was greatly liked" and "was good to the Negroes, he could be very rough when the occasion required. He had no hesitation in lashing them with his riding whip if they 'talked' back

[143] Ibid.
[144] Recollections of Harry Lee Ragland, Ragland Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.

at him."[147] The divisions between blacks and whites remained, and race remained the justification for a master/servant division of power.

Another type of racial thinking crops up particularly in the memories of white southern children about what had been the causes of the war. Wilkins, for example, wrote about the time immediately preceding the war, saying that "the hated abolitionists were fast stirring up strife between the North, and South to free the slaves, their fathers had sold to the southern farmers because the African slaves could not live in bleak snow, and ice cold New England."[148] The idea that the North was just as much if not more to blame for the conflict over slavery because they had sold all their slaves to the South was a common argument in southern rhetoric during and after the war. Wilkins' reiteration of this argument more than seventy years later demonstrates how easily such a line of thinking might have entered into a southern child's mind. Even if Wilkins learned this version of history after the war, we can still see the extent to which mainstream articulations of the war's causes shaped thinking among future generations. Wilkins also discussed where his views stood on the value of the racial results of the Civil War, writing that, all of a sudden, American brothers, North and South, had been "ready to cut the throats of each other because a few crazy politicians in Washington could not, or would not come to a peaceful agreement about freeing a lot of African slaves, sold to the South during the previous hundred years. The whole African nation was not worth the blood sacrifice about to be made."[149] Clearly, Wilkins in 1937 still had no real moral objections to the institution of slavery and devalued the lives of those of African descent. These racial views would inevitably have been shaped by the intervening years between

[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Benjamin Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.

the war and the time in which he was writing, but he clearly situates the origins of his thinking in the sacrifice of the war. Interestingly enough, Wilkins obviously attributes slavery as the central cause for the war or at least for the argument that led to the conflict. In fact, historian Anya Jabour argues that

> Children of all backgrounds agreed that the central issue of the Civil War was slavery. White children occasionally referred to abstract notions of states' rights, Southern independence, or divine favor, but the concrete issue of slavery—and the day-to-day hierarchies and personal interactions it underlay—meant much more to them. Both family membership and social identity inclined white children to support the Confederacy and the continuation of slavery.[150]

While slavery as the central cause of the Civil War is certainly the most common view held by modern 21st century historians, many southerners chose to ignore this understanding of the war, as it emphasized the war's emancipationist legacy.[151] It is striking, therefore, to see the perceptiveness of white children in this instance. While children do often absorb the views of their parents, one way in which studying the history of childhood is particularly useful is that children sometimes distill the thinking of adults into a more comprehensible or revealing form. Without a doubt, the importance ascribed to experiences of slavery and race by white southern children gives further credence to the importance of these issues concerning the ways in which the war and Reconstruction unfolded. Race was a central organizing principle in the minds of white southern children, as the ideology of white supremacy allowed them to understand both the coming of the war and the events that took place during the postwar years.

While the memories of those who lived through this time period as children can tell us much about how race was learned and experienced, we must also think carefully

[150] Anya Jabour, *Topsy-Turvy: How the Civil War Turned the World Upside Down For Southern Children* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010), 44.
[151] For a discussion of the different legacies of the war see Blight, *Race and Reunion.*

about the conscious efforts adults made to shape how these children thought about race. Although Confederate publishing was generally limited by the resources available, a number of Confederate textbooks, and even a few children's magazines, were published during the war.[152] These publications expound on the virtues of southern nationalism, and the textbooks make no effort at objectivity. Racial ideology shows up prominently in these texts produced during the war. Some wrote about the inherent inferiority of blacks. For example, a math text included a problem which asked: "If 5 white men can do as much as 7 negroes, how many days of 10hr. each will be required for 25 negroes to do a piece of work which 30 white men can do in 10 days of 9 hr. each?"[153] A geography text wrote about how northerners' misunderstanding of this racial inferiority was the basis for their misguided attempts at abolition. According to the author of the geography text, northerners foolishly "told the Slaves they were free, and even formed regiments of them to fight against their masters. But the negro is too cowardly for a soldier, and so he is but little service to his Northern friends."[154] In the minds of Confederate leaders and intellectuals, southern children had to learn about the inferiority of blacks so that they would not repeat the mistakes that led to war.

Thinking about how the post-war conception of slavery developed as a better time that was destroyed by northern intrusion, the same geography text mentioned above presents a perfect distillation of this view:

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[152] According to James Marten, almost three quarters of all Confederate publications were children's textbooks. James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 32.

[153] S. Lander, A.M, *Our Own School Arithmetic* (Greensboro, NC: 1863) in Ashley Mays, "Confederate school textbooks," *North & South* Vol. 10 No. 3 (October 2007): 68-69.

[154] Marianne B. Moore, *Geographical Reader For The Dixie Children* (Raleigh, NC: Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863) in Chapin Library, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.

> Much of the field work is done by slaves. These are generally used [well] and often have as much pocket money as their mistresses. They are contented and happy, and many of them are christians. The sin of the South lies not in holding slaves, but they are sometimes mistreated. Let all the little boys and girls remember that slaves are human, and that God will hold them to account for treating them with injustice.[155]

According to these publications, slavery was something that, if executed properly, was the best system for all in the South. Confederate textbooks not only educated white southern children about math and geography, they educated them about their place within southern society. The racial aspect of this identity was obviously important, and in the minds of these textbook authors, in order to sustain the Confederacy, white supremacy had to be sustained as well. White supremacy was inseparable from national and personal identity, and this was reinforced for these children in varying degrees of subtlety during the war and during Reconstruction. In a world where many things became uncertain and disordered, white supremacy provided an easy method with which to access a feeling of stability. For both children and adults, "Radical Reconstruction was…a concerted effort to put things out of place."[156] White supremacy put race relations back to "what they had been—or more accurately, what controlling whites assumed they had been—in the years before the Civil War."[157] For white southern children race was something to be learned, and in their memories, racial upheaval was representative of threats to their country, to their homes, to their families, and to the stabilities of their individual identities. Jennifer Ritterhouse, in her book on how children learned race during Jim Crow, writes about how modern psychologists have realized that children must be observed interacting in their own social worlds in order to understand

[155] Ibid.
[156] Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 79.
[157] Ibid.

how they begin to think in racial terms.[158] This is again intriguing to consider in terms of the thinking of psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who as we saw in Chapter One, writes that learning is achieved first through social interactions.[159] I am clearly not physically able to observe these children's actual interactions here. However, in order to gain a better understanding of the racial world that they lived in and created, I have tried to focus very specifically on what they experienced during this time in their interactions with the worlds in which they lived, and on what they carried with them in their memories. As I have said above, the racial world of white southern children was central to the establishment of their identities, and it was manipulated over time to fit a particular conception of their place in society and to allow them to regain some sense of control.

[158] Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 13.
[159] L.S. Vygotsky. *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

Chapter Four

Are We a Nation?:
The Experiences and Memories of White Southern Children as Affirmation and Continuation of Confederate Nationalism

The experiences and memories of the white southerners who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction not only led to their acquisition of racial ideology, it also helped to affirm the particular Confederate national identity that arose out of the more nebulous southern culture that had existed before the war. This Confederate identity persisted well into the 20th century as a felt ruin, very real, but difficult to rebuild or sustain in light of the loss of the war. The memories and experiences of this identity were like Faulkner's "back looking ghosts" – crucial, yet difficult to grasp, aspects of white southern children's formation of identity. Just as white southern children observed, participated in, and remembered the racial world of the Confederate South, they also had to negotiate their identities as members of this nation within a nation. White southerners born during or immediately preceding the Civil War are of a unique generation in American history: children born on American soil who spent a significant portion of their formative years considering themselves part of another nation altogether. How did children interpret this strange phenomenon, again one of the many paradoxes and contradictions inherent in experiences of the Civil War and Reconstruction?

In certain ways, children had few choices about how they would consider themselves as Confederates. Inculcating southern nationalism was a central aim of many southern adults. The president of Newberry College in South Carolina, for example, wrote in October 1861 that "'It is important that the education of the rising generation be

attended to at this time. The youth of the Confederacy will soon be called upon to discharge the grave and responsible duties that now devolve upon men of mature years.'"[160] White children had to be prepared to eventually defend the Confederacy if need be, both intellectually or militarily, and in either case, they had to believe in the cause they were defending. As historian James Marten writes, the traditional Victorian virtues taught to children, "piety and humility, a strict work ethic, and all the other treasured values…were now joined by an aggressive patriotism."[161] The manner in which children might have learned this patriotism can be seen in particularly striking ways in the publications produced for children in the Confederacy.

In one of the few children's magazines published in the South during the conflict, *Boys and Girls Stories of the War*, much of one issue focused on General Stonewall Jackson. Beginning with the introduction to this story, its instructive purpose was clear. According to the author, the story was "beautifully illustrated, and well written…calculated to create a desire in the youthful mind for further information of this illustrious and lamented general."[162] The "illustriousness" of Stonewall Jackson was meant to encourage loyalty to particular southern ideals. According to the author of this magazine article, Stonewall "was a brave, good and great man. When he went to fight the Yankees, he always prayed that he might have help from God. I knew that God would punish the bad men who burnt our house." The goodness of Jackson allowed him to

[160] Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, 1861-1865, Record Group 109, Microcopy No. 437, 151 Reels, National Archives, Reel No. 13, No. 6828 and No. 7070 quoted in Edmund L. Drago, *Confederate Phoenix: Rebel Children and Their Families in South Carolina* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 53.
[161] James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 50.
[162] *Boys and Girls Stories of the War*: *Contents: General Stonewall Jackson Commodore Foot and Colonel Small, etc. etc.* (Richmond, VA: West & Johnston), Virginia Historical Society.

become symbolic of the protection of God. It allowed young southerners to believe that their painful experiences had meaning, that redemption followed suffering. Possibly the most intriguing term, though, in the introductory remarks to the story is the word "calculated." While not having the negative connotation that we often associate with the word today, it is clear that Southern adults deliberately tried to have their children think in particular ways about their identities, and that these efforts were couched in the entertaining and exciting terms of magazine stories. This can teach us much about the connections between culture and identity.

As evidenced by the resilience of Confederate identity after the war, we can see that nationalism and culture serve to reinforce one another. Cultural objects such as these magazines intended to maintain and foster ideas of national identity, and following the growth of this nationalism, literature and art continued to be produced to maintain such ideas. This can be seen after the war, for example, in the novels of Thomas Dixon, Jr. about the Ku Klux Klan and others such as Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* that celebrated a particular version of the South. It can also be seen in sentimental paintings, perhaps most famously in William D. Washington's 1864 painting *The Burial of Latané* (Figure One).[163] This painting depicts mainly women and children, as well as at least one former slave, mourning the loss of a Confederate soldier. The painting demonstrates the piety of the southern people, the honor of the southern cause, and the myth of the loyal slave. Art and literature were useful tools for displaying images and narratives that affirmed the existence of the Confederate nation. This connection between culture and national identity, in turn, can help us better understand the constructed nature of

[163] A reproduction of this painting can also be found in Drew Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 1988), 69.

nationalism. The South during the Civil War is a fascinating example of this phenomenon because while the South truly had possessed a particular regional identity preceding the war, it was only in response to the threat of violence and the perceived ideological threat posed by the election of Abraham Lincoln that a concerted effort was made to conceive of this regional identity as the basis for a national identity. Obviously nationalism does not necessarily arise out of thin air, but rather it is shaped consciously and unconsciously in response to perceived threats. For those white southerners who came of age during the war and during Reconstruction, this identity, as constructed as it may have been, was all that they knew, and therefore it inevitably shaped, in some form, conceptions of national identity that they maintained in the future.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Figure One
William D. Washington. "The Burial of Latané." 1864. *Private Collection.*[164]

[164] From George and Ann Richards Civil War Center at Pennsylvania State University, www.richardscenter.psu.edu, accessed April 15, 2010.

In addition to reading the limited number of publications produced during the war and absorbing the greater proliferation of culture in the postwar years, children learned ideas of southern identity through their schoolbooks and lessons. One such lesson was entitled *Willie's Political Alphabet*. According to this text, "Q is so twisted, so twisted and twirled, that Q's for the traitors, all over the world, and R is for the Rebels, the Rebels shall stand."[165] In this context, it was not the Confederates who were the traitors; instead, they were the ones who would "stand" after all was said and done. Rebellion was the truest act of patriotism, and the most explicit form of establishing a nation. Indeed, Confederate textbooks produced during the war expounded on the connection between the American Revolution and southern secession. In *The Southern Confederacy Arithmetic*, the author included a subtraction exercise which asked, "The battle of Fort Moultrie was fought in 1776: what number of years have elapsed between that memorable contest and the investment and capture of Fort Sumter in 1861?"[166] Southern children were meant to see a clear connection between the establishment of America and the establishment of the Confederacy, and both events were to be thought of as legitimate nations rebelling against a tyrannical oppressor. Such sentiments and comparisons would clearly become problematic with southern defeat.

Willie's Political Alphabet also included the instruction that "U's for the Union, a *wreck on the sea!*" Just as it was helpful to make sense of the war by defining the Northern soldiers as "other," so it was useful to understand the necessity of southern separatism in the context of the fate of the North. If the Union was "a wreck" then why

[165] *For the Little Ones* (Savannah, GA: John M. Cooper & Co., 1861(?)), Virginia Historical Society.
[166] Rev. Charles E. Leverett, A.M. *The Southern Confederacy Arithmetic* (August, GA: 1864) in Ashley Mays, "Confederate school textbooks," *North & South* Vol. 10 No.3 (October 2007):68-69.

would southerners wish to be a part of it at all? Of course it would make sense to have a separate nation, one that by implication (although not in actuality) represented the stability that so many children sought. Marianne B. Moore wrote that the South was absolutely its own stable country in her *Geographical Reader for the Dixie Children*: "This is a great country! The Yankees though[t] to starve us out when they sent their ships to guard our seaport towns. But we have learned to make many things; to make do without many others; and above all to trust in the smiles of the God of battles."[167] Not only was the South a great country, it was a great country in contrast to and in spite of the Yankee invaders and because of the unique southern people who lived there. Moore specifically wrote that "The Southern people are noted for being high minded and courteous. A stranger seldom lacks friends in this country."[168] Certainly these southern textbooks were meant to teach and reinforce very particular types of southern national and personal identity. With regard to the idea that "a stranger seldom lacks" friends in the South, it is ironic that in other ways white southern children's entire worldviews were shaped by the presence of strangers within their midst. Be it northern soldiers or free or enslaved blacks, white southern children learned that there were some strangers with whom they should not become friends. In many ways, southern nationalism was only possible in opposition to Union identity, just as an identity based on ideas of white power had to exist alongside ideas of black subjugation. Although opposition to northern identity eventually weakened, ideas of white supremacy remained strong. This, ironically, ended up strengthening southern regional identity into the mid-20th century as

[167] M. B. Moore, *Geographical Reader For The Dixie Children* (Raleigh, NC: Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863), in Chapin Library, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.
[168] Ibid.

with the waxing of Jim Crow racism in the South and its waning in the North, the two regions again found each other at odds.

After the war, the South continued to be concerned with the education of its youth, particularly as a reaction to the rise of freedmen's schools.[169] It is hard to know the extent to which southern states continued to use Confederate textbooks, but if North Carolina can be used as an indicator, they all but disappeared. North Carolina's Board of Education was first convened in July 1868.[170] Over the next year, this board worked to create a well-structured system of public education that would exist throughout the state. Included in the record are subjects and textbooks that were officially adopted by the board. It is most useful for the purposes of this study to look at the history and geography texts chosen by the state officials, and, ironically, but perhaps out of necessity, they were northern publications. The history textbook adopted, *Monteith's Youth History of the United States*, contained no mention of the Civil War in editions published as late as 1866.[171] Perhaps this was what, in fact, made such texts acceptable to southern educators. American history before the war belonged to all Americans, while the contested history of the war was to be dealt with on a more private level until dissenting narratives had sufficiently merged or been suppressed by those in power to make a national narrative possible.

The idea that an agreed upon history of the Civil War was not yet established, and that southern states struggled after the war to create a well supported system of public

[169] For a discussion of the effect freedmen's schools had on white public education in the South, see Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 174-200.
[170] Board of Education Records, *Minutes, etc. 1868-1900*, North Carolina State Archives.
[171] James Monteith, *Monteith's Youth History of the United States: Designed for Intermediate Classes in Public and Private Schools* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1866). Accessed through Google Books.

education, is emphasized by an unintentionally pithy remark by Carrie Berry, the diarist from Atlanta. Writing on November 18, 1868, Carrie noted that "Last night I studied my French and the rest of my studies except the History of the United States as we have not got one yet."[172] While she almost certainly meant that her school was yet to acquire either a teacher or a textbook for this subject, it is thought provoking to wonder about whether a "History of the United States" had been established in the abstract sense, and what exactly young, white, southern children perceived this history to be. While Carrie Berry did not yet have her U.S. History textbook, she certainly had at least a semi-conscious sense of her own place in history. According to her, "Papa has wanted me to keep a journal ever since I kept the one while the Yankees were in here and of the shelling; so he bought me a book yesterday, and I think I will write in it every day."[173] Her own sense of personal narrative was still cast in terms of the Yankee invaders, but try as she might to invest meaning in her experiences during Reconstruction, her entries during the postwar years simply do not have the excitement of her wartime recordings. Experiences and memories of the Civil War had to be dealt with in terms of trauma, while Reconstruction had to be dealt with more in terms of order. A sustained patriotism could provide order to the disorder that resulted from the loss of the war.

Particularly in memoirs, those who had grown up during the Civil War and Reconstruction remembered very clearly the patriotism they felt as children. This feeling is especially difficult to examine because we cannot be certain whether these southern adults writing in the first quarter of the 20th century learned how to talk about this patriotism as children or as adults. The fact remains, however, that they attributed the

[172] Carrie Berry Diary, Carrie Berry Papers, Atlanta Historical Society.
[173] Ibid.

formation of this sentiment to their childhoods, and that they remembered feeling patriotic in the past. It is important that this nationalism existed at least in memory, and that its pinnacle was attributed to wartime childhood. Emmy Gwathmey recalled the celebration that occurred in 1862 when the *Merrimac*, the iconic ironclad southern ship, left port and how she failed to realize the patriotic import of the festivities. As discussed in Chapter Two, however, we saw how when confronted by a hostile northern playmate, Gwathmey remembered quickly acquiring a strong sense of Confederate pride. In many memoirs, though, patriotism was discussed most often not in the abstract, but with regard to particular symbols or experiences.

Patriotism and national identity are often most easily constructed around such symbols. One way that this could be true for southerners was in their reverence for particular southern leaders. As in Chapter Two, where Emmy Gwathmey remembered mourning Stonewall Jackson as a means of defiance towards northern soldiers, and where Jackson was used as an instructive model in children's magazines, we see how leaders become invested with meaning. This was also true, of course, for Robert E. Lee, the most lasting human symbol of southern gentility and Confederate honor. Benjamin Harrison Wilkins wrote in 1937, for example, that Lee was "greatest soldier of ancient, or modern history."[174] Anne Banister, the young girl who Lee had admonished for whipping the poorly fed horses, remembered a very specific encounter with Lee when he asked to accompany her to a wedding, and this remembering in turn sparked declarations of Lee's symbolic goodness:

> I was so happy I literally danced all around him in delight. That night I was the proudest sixteen-year old girl in the whole Southland, when I went in to supper on the arm of General R.E. Lee, my warmest, dearest friend, and Mr. J.B. Robertson,

[174] Benjamin Harrison Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.

> of Baltimore, my escort, was quite as happy to wait upon and be with us…I always felt that Gen. Lee loved me as a daughter and he was to me all greatness and loving kindness—my idol.[175]

Close association with such a symbol of the South was something to be proud of, and even Anne's actual escort was proud to be connected in some way to the venerable Lee. The descriptions of Lee moved beyond typical human characterizations: he is not simply a good and loving man, he is "all greatness and loving kindness," he embodies all that is good in the world and particularly in the South, and therefore he becomes an "idol." Studying the experiences and memories of children can help us to understand how such idol worship occurs, for young people are often most susceptible to such feelings. What is also striking, though, is that such reverence does not dissipate with adulthood; the idols we raise as children remain invested with deep meaning even as we reach maturity. The memories of children can teach us that childhood not only shapes individual personal identities, but also shapes conceptions of the past as well, since the symbolic language learned in childhood is used to discuss and give meaning to this past.

Beyond celebrated leaders, another Confederate symbol that was much discussed in memoirs was the "Stars and Bars," the first flag created for the new Confederate nation. Emmy Gwathmey remembered this flag as central to the difference between residing in Union territory and moving across Confederate lines: "How strange it all was, as by magic, transplanted from blue-land to gray-land…another flag unfurled to the world; the sacred Stars and Bars of the Confederacy."[176] Just as Stonewall Jackson's goodness was invested with religious significance, and just as religious symbols such as horns and snakes were used to characterize northern invaders, so this symbol of the South

[175] Anne Bannister, *Incidents in the Life of a Civil War Child,* Virginia Historical Society.
[176] Emmy Hendren Gwathmey, *Unto Two Flags True: Glimpses of a Child's Experience During the Civil War* (Norfolk, VA: The Nusbaum Book and News Company, 1899), 20.

became "sacred." The bonds of nationalism were mythic and were remembered as such. Much has been made of the "Lost Cause" as operating like a religion, but in many of these memories it is not the fact that the cause was lost that gave it religious significance; it was simply an inherent aspect of the southern nationalism that had been created and that never completely disappeared. While the loss of the war may have ironically strengthened certain aspects of Confederate patriotism, this loss itself did not create the spiritual aspect of the bonds that tied southerners together.

In addition to being a patriotic symbol with mythic significance, the "Stars and Bars" was often also a symbol of defiance. This continued to be true after the war. Martha Brent remembered an exciting story from the postwar occupation that demonstrates the importance and meaning of the Confederate flag:

> Once some "Yanks" spread out a Confederate flag on the High Street pavement so that no one could pass without walking on it. A Miss Maggie Outten…came to the edge of the flag and stood still, and the soldiers waited to see what she would do. She did something unexpected. She was a fleet runner, and she stopped and snatched up the flag and started full tilt for home, with several soldiers in flying pursuit. She outran them (maybe they did not try very hard). Anyway, she reached her home in time to send the flag next door before they overtook her. They searched the house well, shook out the lady's lingerie from the bureau drawers. 'My God!' exclaimed one man, 'It rains Rebel Flags', but they were tiny bright silk ones, with which the girls had strewn their clothes to express their loyalty to the South. The big one was never found and the girl was never punished.[177]

This is a fascinating memory that can tell us much about the dynamics of the post war South and about how such dynamics might have affected an adolescent like Martha Brent. The northern soldiers attempted to have Maggie Outten publicly and physically violate a symbol of Confederate nationalism, and because of her refusal to do so they invaded her private home, even going through her lingerie. This, in turn, only served to

[177] Martha Buxton Porter Brent Memoirs, Virginia Historical Society.

reveal greater loyalty to the South: the rebel pride felt by Maggie and other young southern women was so great that they sewed the symbol of the Confederacy inside their clothes, where it would only be meaningful to them. Confederate identity certainly existed in the public sphere in terms of inculcations and large flags and military demonstrations, but it also existed on a private, personal level. Young Martha Brent may well have learned from such incidents that the best way to preserve her Confederate pride was to keep it private, to believe in it for herself, while at the same time being unafraid to display it in public when called upon. This incident demonstrates that Confederate pride certainly did not disappear after the war: it was merely threatened, and often therefore grew stronger.

Those who grew up during the war and Reconstruction also remembered attitudes towards the northern flag, the Stars and Stripes. For some this flag was a symbol of occupation. Emmy Gwathmey remembered when her home was made the headquarters of a northern general, and "the 'Stars and Stripes' were proudly proclaiming his impudence from the roof top."[178] For Emmy, the Union flag was not a symbol of defeat necessarily; it was a symbol of northern imposition on southern identity. Richard Duke, Jr., recalled the role this flag played in an early military demonstration. He described how, as the men first prepared to go off to fight, "they had brought with them the United States flag & I heard their Captain order the colour bearer to 'Case those colours', I saw what he meant when the men put a black oil cloth cover over the flag after he rolled it around the staff."[179] White southern children were aware that their new nation existed in opposition to the Union. In some senses this was problematic, and in others it was

[178] Gwathmey, *Upon Two Flags True,* 31.
[179] The Recollections of Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr. Transcribed by Gayle M. Schulman for the Albermarle County Historical Society, From the Duke Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

beneficial. Of course it would be problematic for one to define one's identity solely in opposition, for once this opposition fades, what happens to the identity? At the same time, this omnipresent opposition allowed for a strong southern identity to form quickly. As we have seen, the brunt of the opposition that southerners felt towards the North could easily be shifted into antagonism towards a racial "other."

That Confederate identity had the resilience it did makes perfect sense when considered in light of the connections made between the fate of the South and the individual fates of southern childhoods. This is seen most clearly in the memoirs of Benjamin Wilkins. Wilkins writes of how "his happy childhood days could not last always" for "the hated abolitionists were fast stirring up strife between the North, and South to free the slaves."[180] The "hated abolitionists" not only threatened to destroy the South, but they destroyed his happy childhood in particular. In his memory, Wilkins also tied the fluctuating fate of the Confederate troops to the relative well-being of his childhood. He remembered that "Everything worked along smoothly for War Boy, during the first year of glorious victories for the Southern Armies."[181] Again, Wilkins' childhood happiness was tied explicitly to the situation of the South as a whole. Memories of particularly southern experiences during Reconstruction also were invested with identity-forming power. According to Wilkins, the situation was so tense during one "National election" that "the scalawags, and carpetbaggers…had about twenty of our best young men arrested," presumably to prevent them from influencing the results of the election.[182] When these young boys were brought to court, however, a Confederate General Edmund Pettus told the judge that "the court and court house would be destroyed

[180] Wilkins, *War Boy*, Virginia Historical Society.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

if these boys were convicted."[183] Being a southerner was not just about being a citizen of the former Confederacy, it was about having a particularly southern experience. For white southern children, there was a certain privilege involved in being part of the generation that lived through the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Historian Peter Carmichael, in his book on the generation of southerners who came of age immediately before the war, writes that "a generational approach should remind us that the experience of each group has a unique historical context specifically rooted in the political and material conditions of a particular time period."[184] This was certainly true for those who grew up during the war and during Reconstruction. As Wilkins wrote, "Under this atmosphere of a new generation, War Boy was fast growing into Manhood. The many hardships of his boyhood, had matured him beyond his years. Cut out from all boys sports and walking side by side with grown men had trained him for the commercial and industrial life toward which he was drifting."[185] Explicitly stating that he was part of a "new generation," Wilkins remembered this time as something that deprived him of his childhood and that made him a man before his time. Clearly, earlier introduction to adult matters was a common experience of many white southern children during and after the war, and while not all would have described their memories of the time in the same terms as Wilkins, this was a common aspect to the experiences of this generation of white southerners. White supremacy was taken for granted, and particularly in memory, it was considered to be one of the greatest principles of the South. Beyond all else, though, these children thought of themselves as southerners.

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[183] Ibid.
[184] Peter S. Carmichael, *The Last Generation: Young Virginians in Peace, War, and Reunion* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 5.
[185] Wilkins, *War Boy*, VHS.

Even those who celebrated a return to the Union, either as children or looking back as adults, felt proud to have been a part of the Confederacy. Almost nowhere was shame expressed at having been a loyal citizen of the new, and short lived, nation.

Many white southern children would have agreed, it seems, with Martha Brent's feeling that "The whole South was ruined."[186] Still, "people soon stopped grieving" and "the end of the War was a relief, though it was disastrous to us."[187] Radical political leaders such as "Stevens and Sumner no longer had their way and after a while they stopped installing ex-slaves in our legislative halls with their feet on the desks." The South could be restored to the Union because white supremacy was restored as well, in perhaps even more explicit form than before. There was a reason that Martha Brent remembered fondly a moment when she "stood at the window watching the train bearing [the Confederate soldiers] in, in their shabby grey uniforms, listening to the cheering and feeling that no harm could happen now."[188] These images were preserved because any harm that did occur only served to intensify such salient memories and powerful nationalistic associations. This situation inevitably became extremely problematic, because the preservation of Confederate nationalism, though not always described as such, led to continued conflicts over race, civil rights, government, and essentially over American identity well into the 20th century. These conflicts were engendered, at least in part, by the experiences of white southern children during the war and during Reconstruction, and by the ways in which they chose and were taught to remember their youth. Understanding this particular generation of children is key to understanding the vicissitudes of 20th century racial politics. We are able to see how white supremacy was

[186] Martha Buxton Porter Brent Memoirs, Virginia Historical Society.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid.

a central aspect of their learned worldview, and how the northern enemy was affiliated with the racial "other." When the North gave way as enemy, it is apparent that a central means through which their traumatic experiences could be given meaning was through holding onto the conceptual structures of white supremacy and Confederate nationalism. The strong preservation of white supremacist attitudes, in fact, further demonstrates the impact that Confederate nationalism had, since this view of race was central to Confederate identity.[189]

If we were to assess the indoctrination project undertaken by Southern textbook and magazine publishers, we would deem it something of a success, because so many who wrote about their memories of childhood during and after the war described themselves as proud members of the Confederate nation. With the threats of war and invasion, and with the uncertain racial possibilities indicated by emancipation, the Confederate nation provided a refuge which children could look to both for support and meaning in light of the loss of many fathers and brothers, the loss of the security of traditional expectations of home, and the ambiguity of the times. The importance of the family to historical study is therefore more firmly established by this examination of young white southerners. Children like Benjamin Wilkins remembered the fate of their childhoods as clearly linked to that of the Confederacy. Similarly, both the family and the Confederate nation were unstable during wartime, and each provided the other with support: the family providing a site for nationalistic indoctrination and the Confederate nation providing meaning and explanation for the disruption of normal family life. For those who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction, it was almost as if the

[189] The centrality of slavery in the formation of Confederate identity is discussed by Drew Faust in *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 1988), 61-63.

Confederacy had always existed. Therefore, even though the South went back to being simply a region, the idea of the Confederate nation, although not described with that specific term, continued to exist in the minds of those who had been its citizens. This idea, then, provided support for continued affection for the times of slavery and for white supremacist beliefs that ultimately gained strength throughout the nation. This is the strangeness and the paradox of the experiences of these white southern children: the Confederacy quickly became a country that only existed in the imagination and in which they were perpetually fictive citizens. Yet this world, made up solely of ideas, memories, and conceptions of the past, served to distinctly shape the course of American racial thinking and regional and national identity, even up to the present day.

Conclusion

"I was soon in that happy sleep of childhood & the Yankees & and the robberies & the anxieties & troubles of the day faded into nothingness."-R. T. W. Duke, Jr.[190]

Attitudes of white supremacy and conceptions of Confederate identity were psychic adaptations that occurred within the population of white southern children as a response to the particular conditions of the Civil War and Reconstruction. With an understanding of culture that was ravaged by the experiences of war, the survivors of that time clung to a narrative that allowed them to form an internal structure of identity.

There were many layers of trauma experienced by these children during and after wartime. The security of home and family was severely disrupted, and daily life was transformed by loss, fear, and a pervasive sense of danger. The adults who generally provided a structure of support and comfort for the children were either away, in threat of danger themselves, grieving, or occupied with the business of surviving wartime conditions. The entire basis for everyday life was upended for most living in the South during these times. The plantation system, with family servants and a clear hierarchy of identity within the family, no longer provided an understandable structure for children, as it was being challenged by the Yankee invaders and by the war itself. This would have been true not only on large plantations, but in slaveholding yeoman households as well. The wartime ambiguities of right and wrong, good versus bad, brother fighting against brother, victory and defeat, life and death, that were implicit in this particular conflict were particularly difficult to manage from the perspective of children. Unable to actively take part in the war, they had minimal control over many aspects of their lives. Under

[190] Richard Thomas Walker Duke, Jr. Recollections, Duke Family Papers, UVA.

these circumstances, the defeat of the South was particularly tragic and defining for white southern children. In order to make sense of their experiences of the war and of the resulting societal changes set in place by Reconstruction, many of these children created scripts for their lives that identified strongly with Confederate pride and with racial models of white supremacy that endured long after the northern invaders had gone away.

Unfortunately, "the happy sleep of childhood" could not erase the imprint of these traumatic experiences for white southerners who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Either as adults or as children, they had to take stock of the trauma of war as well as the swirling currents of national and racial ideology that they experienced and remembered, incorporating them into their own personal identities and worldviews. Two prominent southern men, born just before and during the war respectively, were Ben Tillman and Thomas Dixon, Jr.

Ben Tillman was born in 1847 and eventually became the governor of South Carolina and a senator from the same state. His support for the disfranchisement of black voters did much to shape the course of racial politics in the South during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Thomas Dixon, Jr. was born in 1864, during the war. After an itinerant career path that included stints as an academic, an actor, a lawyer, a legislator, and a preacher, he became a tremendously popular author of racist novels such as *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Klansman* (on which the screenplay for D.W. Griffith's infamous film *The Birth of a Nation* was based).

The lives and work of both men exemplify the profound impact that resulted when white southern children experienced the traumatic loss of control and stability

during and after the Civil War and grasped onto the racial and regional ideologies at hand.

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Benjamin Ryan Tillman was born on August 11, 1847, in South Carolina's notoriously violent Edgefield district. His youth during and immediately following the Civil War reflects the desire for control felt by those who grew up during this tumultuous time. Thirteen years old at the start of the war, Tillman luckily or unluckily missed out on joining the army. In fact, plans had already been made for him to head off to war in 1863, but a "cranial tumor struck him down with fever and convulsions. An army surgeon removed the tumor, but the operation destroyed Tillman's left eye and left him gravely ill."[191] Most likely compensating for his sense of powerlessness during the war, Tillman would spend the rest of his life seeking power and endeavoring to protect those in southern society who had, in his eyes, gone unprotected during and after the war.

While the Civil War raged on, Ben Tillman was, in some ways, living a relatively normal life. In the early years of the conflict, Tillman "split his time between living on the family plantation and attending a nearby school."[192] Still, he could not escape the impact of the war on his daily life. He read about the war in just about any publication he saw, while at the same time he had to learn how to take care of the plantation, since all the other males in his family were away at the front.[193] As we have seen with a number

[191] Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman & the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 39.
[192] Ibid., 3.
[193] Ibid., 3, 36.

of children who grew up during this time, Tillman had to become comfortable performing traditionally adult tasks. He exhibited many of the typical behaviors we have attributed to white southern children during the war. According to his biographer, Stephen Kantrowitz, "from the beginning of the war, Ben Tillman had expressed a blustery Confederate patriotism."[194] He learned to value the Confederacy as one would value a nation. He also learned to define this nation in contrast to the northern Union. After making a trip to Georgia to visit his brother, who had been wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga, "on the way back home he encountered a line of Union prisoners on their way to the prison at Andersonville and felt a surge of 'hatred and intense feeling of animosity toward these invaders of our homes and destroyers of our liberty.'"[195] The Civil War was a conflict in which the Northern invaders of southern homes and the residents of those homes had to eventually become fellow citizens of a newly reconciled United States. This reconciliation process certainly must have been difficult for children and young adults such as Ben Tillman, for they had learned to hate the Yankees so profoundly.

As Tillman grew into an adult, the behaviors and attitudes he learned as a young man during the war manifested themselves in new and more potent ways. For example, "as planters like the Tillmans struggled to salvage their 1865 season, they seemed not to acknowledge that they had lost legal control of black people's bodies."[196] Tillman, like Harry Ragland's father, who continued to beat his black servants after the war, and like many in the South, still saw race as a means for justifying a relationship based on violent coercion. These ideas stayed with Tillman as he rose within South Carolina politics,

[194] Ibid., 37.
[195] Ibid, 37-38.
[196] Ibid., 43.

from his participation in the 'Redshirt' campaign of 1876 to his time as governor from 1890 to 1894 and his time as a senator after that. Taking "the lead in disfranchising black men," Tillman demonstrated what he had learned about race and what he had learned about being a white man in southern society.[197] According to Joel Williamson, "Ben Tillman…had been reared in a family and in a community where a mark of manhood was a readiness for violence."[198] Unable to serve in the Confederate army, Tillman easily found his outlet for violence by both physically and psychologically abusing the black population of the South after the war. Williamson writes that

> Tillman, then, might easily have associated the immediate presence of the savage black, invasion by the alien Yankee and the exposure of women to violation and outrage with these terrifying years before and during the Civil War. At the very time when he was coming into maturity he had every inducement, and a clear opportunity, to identify his role as one of extravagant manliness in the protection of white women.[199]

This point about Tillman's associations with the Civil War period make perfect sense, and I would push Williamson's argument about the protection of white women to a somewhat more theoretical level. Tillman's role as a protector of white women that he took on after the war was about reclaiming certainty with regard to home, family, security, and personal identity. There was certainty to his carefully defined role as a man. If he did his protecting properly, there was racial certainty because no 'miscegenation' would occur. And there was certainty that the Yankee invaders were no longer a threat. The post Civil War years for white southerners were about reclaiming and redefining ideas of control that had been threatened by the conflict.

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[197] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 132.
[198] Ibid., 137.
[199] Ibid., 138.

While Ben Tillman was growing into and solidifying his identity as a white southern man during and immediately following the war, Thomas Dixon, Jr., was just entering the world. Born in 1864, Dixon was a man of many careers. He was a successful student at Wake Forest College and the Johns Hopkins University before deciding to become an actor. After failing at this venture, he returned home to work in the state legislature and as a lawyer. Following this, Dixon became an immensely popular preacher and lecturer who eventually also turned to writing. It was through his novels, particularly *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, that Dixon probably reached his largest audience. Joel Williamson's *The Crucible of Race* contains an authoritative biographical sketch of Dixon. Williamson argues that "Dixon himself is worthy of study because he offers some understanding of how the deeply personal and largely secret psychic needs of an individual might impel that person to extreme racism."[200] According to Williamson, Dixon's central psychological issue was his belief "that his mother had been sexually violated as a child."[201] Perhaps somewhat ironically, the loss of the Civil War provided him with the material to deal with that psychological difficulty. The experience of the Civil War and particularly of Reconstruction was intensely personal for Dixon, and therefore

> writing *The Leopard's Spots* was a sort of attenuated ink blot test. The image held up was the South in the nation after the Civil War. Into his interpretation of that image, Dixon poured a lifetime of emotion. Through it all, the characters are rearranged and moved to suit Dixon's own psychic needs. It was his fantasy life, his dream life, the life he felt he should have been living all along. The actual writing was a way of reliving his life as in retrospect he would have it.[202]

[200] Ibid., 151.
[201] Ibid., 158.
[202] Ibid., 165.

The idea that the novel is written to suit "Dixon's own psychic needs" makes much sense, for as Williamson explicitly states, the central character in *The Leopard's Spots* is a thinly veiled representation of Dixon himself.[203]

The novel certainly does correspond with the events of Dixon's own life, and race is absolutely its organizing principle. In fact, the novel begins with a "Historical Note" in which Dixon tells us "that all the incidents used in Book I., which is properly the prologue of my story, were selected from authentic records, or came within my own personal knowledge…The village of 'Hambright' is my birthplace…It will be a century yet before people outside the South can be made to believe a literal statement of the history of those times."[204] For Dixon, the Southern past, and his own past, had to be made into fiction in order for it to be properly dealt with. The novel begins with southern soldiers dispirited at the loss of the war, and we see clearly that the Civil War has explicitly transformed blacks into monsters: "In every one of these soldiers' hearts, and over all the earth, hung the shadow of the freed Negro, transformed by the exigency of the war from a Chattel, to be bought and sold, into a possible Beast to be feared and guarded."[205] The loss of the Civil War provided Dixon with figures onto whom he could easily map his fears and desires for control.

In this way, Dixon's portrayal of his experiences in novel form is similar to other southerners' portrayals of their childhoods during the war and Reconstruction in memoirs. By placing their memories in narrative form, these former Confederates were able to solidify their identities and clarify their views on race and on the past. Narrative was particularly important to those who grew up during the Civil War, and demonstrated

[203] Ibid., 151.
[204] Thomas Dixon, *The Leopards Spots* (New York: A. Wessels Company, 1906)., x.
[205] Ibid., 5.

the difficulties that these children had in dealing with their experiences along with the currents of ideology that were circulating in society. One Dixon scholar argues that the author "does not so much *represent* whiteness as a stable, fixed essence, but *tells* it as a story of traumatic origins, heroic defense, and grandiose recovery."[206] White supremacy was an invented structure where the experiences and memories of the Civil War and Reconstruction provided white children with the conceptual space within which to construct narratives of racial identity. One literary critic contemporary with Dixon wrote that he "creates monsters that he may make war upon them."[207] In the Civil War, as we have seen, children needed to think of the enemy in monstrous terms in order to make sense of their experiences. The "monster" of the racial other was, in many ways, a remnant of this Civil War and Reconstruction experience, and Dixon, among others, was able to amplify and use this "monster" in order to deal with his own psychological issues. Through this process, Dixon helped racism and white supremacy become more firmly embedded in southern and in American culture.

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Thomas Dixon and Ben Tillman attempted to maintain or establish control over their own identities and lives after the war and on into the 20th century, exploiting racial

[206] Scott Romine, "Thomas Dixon and the Literary Production of Whiteness," in Gillespie, Michele K. and Randal L. Hall, eds., *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 125.
[207] "Mr. Dixon's 'The Leopard's Spots,'" *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art*, April 5, 1902, p. 234, Quoted in John David Smith, " 'My Books Are Hard Reading for a Negro': Tom Dixon and His African American Critics, 1905-1939," in Gillespie, Michele K. and Randal L. Hall, eds., *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 47.

prejudices and fears in the process. One of the central paradoxes and tragedies of the Civil War and Reconstruction period, as historian Eric Foner writes, is that

> If racism contributed to the undoing of Reconstruction, by the same token Reconstruction's demise and the emergence of blacks as a disenfranchised class of dependent laborers greatly facilitated racism's further spread, until by the early twentieth century it had become more deeply embedded in the nation's culture and politics than at any time since the beginning of the anti-slavery crusade and perhaps in our entire history.[208]

Many of the subjects in this study either wrote their memoirs at the turn of the century or were alive at the time, capturing this complex proliferation of racism. Thomas Dixon, for example, exploited and contributed to this racism with his popular novels. The legacy of white southern children's experiences during the war and during Reconstruction clearly manifested itself in a deeply entrenched ideology of white supremacy.

The importance of children to conversations about racial and national identity reverberated beyond the turn of the century and on into the Civil Rights period. Before the Civil War, white and black children in the South played together under the shadow of slavery. At times, these interactions resembled the play and companionship of equals. Still, they existed within the system of hierarchy created by slavery and with the expectation that once adulthood occurred, those relationships would necessarily change. During and after the Civil War and Reconstruction, the racial divide and models of racial identity became charged with a new tension due to new forms of hierarchy and a new social separation of blacks and whites. This unresolved conflict over the nation's models of race endured well past the decades following the war. Indeed, one particularly powerful moment in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1963 *I Have a Dream* speech occurs when he cries out, "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former

[208] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 604.

slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." Northern victory in the Civil War presented a new opportunity for brotherhood outside of race and outside of regional identity, but this opportunity was obscured as both adults and children struggled to reorder the chaos that resulted from the war. White southerners who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction experienced a lack of control over their lives and their identities during the war due to trauma, threats to their homes, first encounters with death, and disruptions of their day-to-day routines that threatened the core of their existence as they had previously understood it. They tried to maintain order and to fight against this lack of control by grasping on to preexisting and developing racial ideologies and on to the idea of the northerner as enemy. In doing so, they were able, in their eyes, to reclaim some sense of stability, and, in the process, developed a southern or Confederate identity that intensified archaic racial models.

After the war, the idea of the northerner as enemy mostly faded away, and yet the idea of Confederate nationhood and identity remained. Confederate identity could not exist without an ordering principle. Since children had already learned that by thinking about race in the coercive terms taught to them by their parents, as well as by propagandist tales about slavery, they would regain some semblance of control, white supremacy became key to determining the identities of not only those whites who had been children during the Civil War and Reconstruction, but all who lived in the South for many decades to come. As the North relatively quickly reconciled with the South, white supremacy consequently became inextricably connected to the larger concept of American identity as well. The trauma of the Civil War for white southern children, and

the ensuing pursuit of a system of control that resulted from this trauma, perpetuated and layered the racism that had developed as a result of the system of slavery. Wrapped up in a complex and sometimes hidden southern regional identity, this racism and the experiences of these white southern children would help shape ideas of American identity and the course of American political and social movements well into the 20th century.

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In preparation for my thesis, I spent six weeks this past summer researching and traveling around the South. In my travels, I found myself particularly attuned to evidence of contemporary race relations. Boarding an Amtrak train in Wilmington, Delaware, bound for Richmond, I saw that I was more or less the only white person in the train car, and riding public buses in Richmond and regional rail in Atlanta, I was again in the same situation. Coming from the suburbs of New York City, my experience of race was generally one of more diversity. Riding the commuter trains and subways there, I see people of all colors, all dress styles, and all attitudes in close proximity. While this closeness of course does not indicate racial harmony, I had never experienced anything quite like the stark visual racial separation apparent in my travels. This is, of course, also not meant to imply that the North and South exist as polar opposites in terms of race, or even that an absolute conclusion about the conditions of race in either region, or in the nation as a whole, is possible. It is simply to say that race still exists as a complex and incompletely understood aspect of American society. These issues of race are closely tied to issues of class, gender, and regional identity, and they are also closely tied to

understandings of American history. Returning again to the words of iconic southern novelist William Faulkner, "The past is never dead. It isn't even past."[209] In order for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ideas of brotherhood to come to fruition, we must work harder to understand the large family that we are a part of, and, therefore, work harder as well to understand the heritage of this family. Clearly the experiences of children are central to understanding any family, and we must think carefully about how ideas and experiences are passed from one generation to the next, and how the past flits into and out of our everyday lives. White southern children who grew up during the Civil War and Reconstruction failed to move towards progressive understandings of race and nation, but in studying their experiences and memories, we can better understand how we came to our own notions of these phenomena today.

[209] William Faulkner, *Requiem For a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1950), 92 (Act I, Scene III).

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