

Competing Visions of America: The Fourth of July During the Civil War

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### ABSTRACT

By examining the celebration of the Fourth of July during the Civil War, this thesis will highlight the regional distinctiveness of both sides of the war. This work is divided into two main parts, one focusing on the Fourth of July in the Union, the other on the Fourth of July in the Confederacy. Three separate areas of commemoration are analyzed: in newspaper rhetoric, on the home front, and on the battlefield.

Rather than stating that the Confederacy abandoned the holiday entirely, this thesis shows that the North and the South celebrated different aspects of the holiday, which reflected unique interpretations of America. Drawing on newspaper and diary accounts, these interpretations are tracked over the course of the war. The Southern perspective could not outlast the Confederacy, the reestablishment of the Union cemented the Northern view, and with emancipation a new vision of America emerged.

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## **Fourth of July Celebrations During the Civil War**

This thesis seeks to analyze closely the celebration of the Fourth of July during the American Civil War, in order to give a better understanding of the competing visions of America that formed the respective backbones of Northern and Southern cultures. To highlight the different aspects of this holiday, separate sections of this thesis will focus on commemorations on both sides of the war on the home front, on the battlefield, and in political and editorial rhetoric. This paper will reveal how Civil War America celebrated the day, and will show the progression of the different interpretations of the holiday throughout the course of the struggle. These issues, and the general commemoration of the Fourth of July, fit into the broader study of American public holidays as political rituals.

## **Political Culture and Identity**

In recent years, new perspectives on political culture have emerged as a result of scholars analyzing American public holidays and customs. To illuminate American culture, historians have relied heavily on approaches and methods from cultural anthropology and other fields in examining public holidays. In order to understand the usefulness of this approach, it is necessary to look at the work of a few recent historians.

David Proctor declared that rituals, traditions, and ceremonies formed the basic national symbols behind political culture and provided motivation and identification for the country.<sup>1</sup> In this approach, Proctor borrowed from anthropological theories. The author of one such theory, Clifford Geertz, explained that culture consists of webs of significance; it is both a product and a process.<sup>2</sup> As an aspect of culture, Proctor concluded that political symbols play an integral role in developing identity, and in providing order and reason in communities.<sup>3</sup> Public holidays not only were a result of, but also a guiding force of public culture.

Ellen Litwicky utilized the ideas of another anthropologist, Victor Turner, in her study of *America's Public Holidays*. She highlighted Turner's premise that collective ritual generated culture even as it mirrored it. However, Litwicky went further by calling holidays "invented traditions." She used Jurgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a bourgeois creation to show the primary purpose of public holidays was to unify society.<sup>4</sup> Litwicky concluded that holiday organizers never had complete control over American society; hence, American public holiday celebrations reveal "a process of collaboration, negotiation, and contestation, which produced competing images of America."<sup>5</sup>

Matthew Dennis saw significance in the fact that Americans from all walks of life come together during public celebrations to form a collective national identity.<sup>6</sup> Similar to other historians of public holidays, Dennis asserted that it is the trivial minutiae of

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Proctor, *Enacting Political Culture: Rhetorical Transformations of Liberty Weekend 1986* (New York, 1990), 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ellen M. Litwicky, *America's Public Holidays: 1865-1920* (Washington, 2000), 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Dennis, *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days: An American Calendar* (Ithaca, 2002), 1.

commemorations that reveal the politics and culture of Americans. Dennis further examined political fetes such as the Fourth of July to show how Americans used the day to evaluate the claims of others' citizenships and to critique American society itself. The Fourth provided "an opportunity to define, delimit, or expand – while celebrating – the American nation."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Len Travers focused his study on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century celebrations of Independence Day. He noted the vitality of public rituals in understanding American political society. These rituals have become so pervasive and ubiquitous that historians have taken them for granted.<sup>8</sup> Travers argued against the works of James Andrews and Merle Curti, who used only the rhetoric of Fourth of July orations and newspaper editorials to understand public opinion. Travers felt that while these were important holiday rites, most celebrants participated less didactically. They attended picnics and parties, drank, and watched fireworks, and these behaviors provide a better representation of general political culture in America.<sup>9</sup> He concluded that Independence Day helped form the mythos of nationhood by celebrating a common identity and by providing an outlet for sharing new national ideas.

Despite this recent attention, significant gaps remain in the use of American rituals and holidays. Ellen Litwicki noted in *America's Public Holidays* that historians still have made only a few inquiries into American holidays. While historians have examined celebrations during the early republic, African American celebrations during the nineteenth century, and Cold War and late-twentieth century commemorations, little

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst, MA, 1997), 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

analysis had been done with late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century holidays.<sup>10</sup>

Litwicki's observation should be expanded to include the Civil War era, specifically the celebration of the Fourth of July, as another holiday that has gone largely unexamined.

## **The Fourth of July**

With this emerging interest in American public holidays, it is surprising that historians have written little on the Fourth of July, especially in relation to its celebration during the sectional discord of the nineteenth century. The few texts that cover this holiday have mainly focused on three periods of commemoration. Historians such as Len Travers (*Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic*) have examined the holiday's inception and the rebirth of interest in the holiday around 1820. Richard Gowers ("Contested Celebrations: The Fourth of July and Changing National Identity in the United States") and Stephen E. James ("The Other Fourth of July: The Meanings of Black Identity at African Celebrations of Independence") have written theses on the holiday's celebrations by African-Americans, specifically after the Civil War. Twentieth-century historians such as John Bodnar (*Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*) and David E. Proctor (*Enacting Political Culture: Rhetorical Transformations of Liberty Weekend 1986*) have focused on more recent celebrations. Few historians have studied the holiday's celebration during the Civil War.

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<sup>10</sup> Litwicki, *America's Public Holidays*, 2.

In *Celebrating the Fourth*, Len Travers argued that as the sectional crisis approached, “two of July 4’s most outstanding characteristics – its toleration of new interpretations and its ability to cloak disharmony – worked against” national unity.<sup>11</sup> However, this is where his analysis ended, as the book does not venture into the Civil War years. Matthew Dennis devoted a chapter of *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days* to the Fourth of July, but again, limited discussion of the Civil War to only a paragraph. Dennis stated that as the Civil War approached, Southerners questioned the observance of Independence Day, but in the end had to abandon the holiday with their eventual defeat.<sup>12</sup>

There are two points that most scholars do mention in referring to the Fourth of July and the Civil War. First is that after 1863 the South stopped celebrating the holiday. Confederate losses at Vicksburg, Miss., Gettysburg, Pa., Helena, Ark., and Port Hudson, La., early in July 1863 made it difficult for the South to celebrate the day, however, historians fail to mention that the Confederacy did actively celebrate the holiday during the first few years of the war.<sup>13</sup> The second point is that when Southerners abandoned the holiday, freed African Americans and victorious Republicans claimed the holiday as their own, and celebrated it with enthusiasm.<sup>14</sup> However, without the proper context and understanding of how and why Americans celebrated the Fourth of July during the Civil War, the two facts cannot be fully understood.

During the Civil War, with patriotic and nationalistic passions running high, the Fourth of July was a significant holiday in both North and South. With but a few exceptions, the literature does not discuss in detail the period from 1861 to 1863. In *The*

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<sup>11</sup> Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 224.

<sup>12</sup> Dennis, *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days*, 44-5.

<sup>13</sup> William C. Davis, *A Taste for War: The Culinary History of the Blue and the Gray* (Mechanicsville, PA, 2003), 118.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis, *Red, White, and Blue Letter Days*, 46.



*Glorious Fourth: An American Holiday, an American Tradition*, Diana Applebaum devoted an entire chapter to the commemoration of the holiday in the Civil War. However, her focus was primarily on the Northern celebration. She then erroneously stated that after 1861 “the Fourth of July was not celebrated again by the Confederacy.”<sup>15</sup>

The closest a historian has come to thoroughly addressing the issue of the commemoration of the Fourth of July in the Confederacy was a 1983 thesis by Gregory Inge, “The Light of their Fathers: How Confederate Leaders Justified Secession via the Founding Fathers of America.” Inge relied primarily on newspaper sources to support his conclusion that secessionist rhetoric relied heavily upon comparisons to the actions and writings of the Founding Fathers.<sup>16</sup> Inge recognized and placed importance on the celebration of the Fourth of July in the Confederacy, but did not extend his inquiry beyond newspaper accounts or much past the 1861 celebrations.

## **Other Civil War Holidays**

In 1863, the *Richmond Dispatch* reminisced about a Southern antebellum celebration of the Fourth of July, whose portrayal could have easily described any Northern celebration as well. The day “was saluted with the firing of guns, and was honored by grand parades, orations, dinners, and toasts. The Declaration of Independence was generally read ... The day was one of enthusiasm, bursting patriotism,

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<sup>15</sup> Diana Karter Applebaum, *The Glorious Fourth: An American Holiday, an American History*, (New York, 1989), 92.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory E. Inge, “The Light of their Fathers: How Confederate Leaders Justified Secession Via the Founding Fathers of America,” M.A. Thesis (Indiana, 1983), 64.

and jollification.”<sup>17</sup> With the coming of the Civil War, however, the celebration of the Fourth of July did not end. In fact, it was one of a number of holidays, which were celebrated throughout the war years.

Irish volunteers on both sides of the war often celebrated St. Patrick’s Day.<sup>18</sup> Jewish residents celebrated Passover throughout the Civil War.<sup>19</sup> The Catholic Church honored All Saints’ Day in early November, with processions to cemeteries and fund-collecting for orphans.<sup>20</sup> Christmas was also a favorite holiday during the war. A Tennessee newspaper noted in 1861 the desire to revive the German tradition of tree decorating, and also proposed the creation of a relief fund for soldiers.<sup>21</sup> That year the governors of eighteen states declared that their states would celebrate Thanksgiving on November 28, and two other states would celebrate it on the 21.<sup>22</sup> The North observed Washington’s Birthday on February 22, accompanied by military parades, bands of music, and national salutes.<sup>23</sup> They also celebrated the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution on September 17, in a similar fashion.<sup>24</sup>

Many states and cities also commemorated local anniversaries. In 1862, Utah celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the entrance of pioneers into the Great Salt Lake valley.<sup>25</sup> On June 25, 1862, Portland, Maine celebrated the centennial anniversary of Free Masonry’s introduction to America.<sup>26</sup> Boston commemorated the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker’s Hill on June 17, while Charleston celebrated the anniversary of the

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<sup>17</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>18</sup> “St. Patrick’s Day – The Celebration,” *Macon Telegraph*, Mar. 20, 1861.

<sup>19</sup> “The Passover,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, Apr. 4, 1862.

<sup>20</sup> “All Saints’ Day,” *Daily Delta*, Oct. 28, 1862.

<sup>21</sup> “A Christmas Tree for the Benefit of the Soldiers,” *Macon Telegraph*, Dec. 15, 1861.

<sup>22</sup> “Thanksgiving,” *Farmer’s Cabinet*, Nov. 28, 1861.

<sup>23</sup> “The Twenty-Second of February,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 18, 1861.

<sup>24</sup> “The Music, In the Celebration of the Anniversary,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 16, 1861.

<sup>25</sup> “The Twenty Fourth of July,” *Desert News (Utah)*, July 23, 1862.

<sup>26</sup> “Masonic Celebration,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 1862.

Battle of Fort Moultrie ten days later.<sup>27</sup> Louisiana, and even the city of Indianapolis, observed the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>28</sup>

The Civil War even sparked the addition of several new holidays. Southern states commemorated the date of their departure from the Union. Georgia celebrated the declaration of its independence on January 18, 1861, and continued to commemorate it each year of the war.<sup>29</sup> South Carolina marked the anniversary of its secession on December 20 with orations and the firing of the “secession” gun.<sup>30</sup>

None of these Civil War holidays, however, came anywhere near the level of debate, interest, and fervor that the annual commemoration of the Fourth of July brought. In a time of war and national strife, this holiday stood above the rest in the eyes of Americans. The Fourth of July is a celebration centered on conceptions of American identity and about the core concepts of America. With the celebration of the Fourth of July, both sides of the war sought to preserve their right to observe and honor what they felt was the true vision of America.

## **Competing Visions of America**

The Civil War is one of the most fascinating eras for examining the celebration of American public holidays as political rituals. From the Northern point of view, this was the quintessential time to observe Independence Day. Commemorating the Union, and

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<sup>27</sup> “Anniversary Celebration,” *Macon Telegraph*, July 1, 1861; “Celebration of the Battle of Bunker’s Hill,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 18, 1861.

<sup>28</sup> “Anniversary Celebration in Indianapolis,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 9, 1861.

<sup>29</sup> “Celebration of Georgia’s Independence,” Jan. 19, 1861.

<sup>30</sup> “The First Year of Secession,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, Dec. 21, 1861.

the desire to preserve it, were two fundamental aspects of the Fourth of July. From the Southern point of view, this was the time to stress the principles of the Founding Fathers. Rather than celebrating the Union, Southerners recognized constitutional rights and ideas of independence.

This interpretation of Northern and Southern cultures falls in line with David M. Potter's theory that rather than being divided by separate cultures, there existed a distinctive culture between the two regions.<sup>31</sup> Or, as Emory Thomas explained, "the South in 1860 differed from the rest of the nation only in shade and degree," but the "Southern people believed that a distinctive Southern way of life existed."<sup>32</sup> The different ways in which the North and the South commemorated Independence Day highlight the regional distinctiveness on both sides of the war.

The differing perspectives on the holiday existed in more than just political and editorial rhetoric, for the Fourth of July had special significance throughout Civil War America. Many primary sources exist that detail the commemoration of the Fourth of July during the struggle of the 1860s. Diaries, letters, speeches, and newspaper accounts provide a window into the different types of Fourth of July celebrations. In analyzing these records, three distinct areas of commemoration emerge: in newspaper rhetoric, on the home front, and on the battlefield.

Instead of just looking at why the Confederacy celebrated the founding of the nation it had just left, this thesis will also look at how the public on both sides of the war used the day to define their national identity. In addressing this issue, the commemoration of the Fourth of July reveals the presence of two different visions of

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<sup>31</sup> David M. Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 68-69.

<sup>32</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971), 20-21.

America. As the war drew to its conclusion, these separate perspectives could not be reconciled. In its wake, a new vision of America emerged.

## **PART ONE: The Fourth of July in the Union**

### **Political and Editorial Rhetoric**

In Northern newspaper editorials printed for the Fourth of July, and in the speeches delivered that day by orators, the Civil War provided a unique platform for the advocacy of nationalism and patriotism within the Union. Through the emphasis placed on certain ideas during this holiday, the Northern perspective on the definition and essential attributes of America can be traced over the course of the war.

Newspapers suggested that with the approach of the anniversary of nationality, it was a time for reflection, and a time for hope that many more Fourths of July would dawn for a peaceful United States.<sup>33</sup> The *Daily National Intelligencer* stated: “We have now reached a point in our civil history when it becomes the duty of every patriot to look back upon the path by which the nation has been conducted to the heights of that prosperity in which it lately rejoiced, and from which it has been plunged into the gulf of civil war.”<sup>34</sup>

The *New York Times* wrote that the Fourth of July in 1861 would be a time when the danger threatening the nation would awaken the patriotic hearts of all Americans, including older generations that had previously shown disdain toward the loud and unruly festivities.<sup>35</sup> The newspaper even suggested that though the South had torn down the flag and rejected the Constitution, the celebration of the Fourth of July remained the last

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<sup>33</sup> “The Anniversary of Our Nationality,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>34</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *The Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>35</sup> “Independence Day,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1861.

remaining link of the Union shared between every state, both North and South. That being said, they did marvel: “With the symbol of our nation despised, and the character of our Government overthrown, how is it that the rebels can find reason to celebrate the day to which the Flag and the Constitution date back?”<sup>36</sup> The actions of the Southern multitudes would not change what transpired back in 1776, whose associations are honored by the Fourth of July.<sup>37</sup>

Also in 1861, John R. Warner gave an oration to the citizens of Gettysburg. With the coming of the Civil War, Warner declared, the Declaration of Independence could now be read in a new light, for the spirit of the times in which it was written had been renewed in the nation. Warner declared the duty of Americans was to uphold the values in the Declaration and the Constitution. Americans from all walks of life have heeded this call, “inspired by one impulse, and that among the loftiest impulses which give dignity to human action, or color to human feeling, - the warm and mighty impulse of genuine patriotism.”<sup>38</sup>

With the integrity of the Union at stake, it was a necessity and a duty for Americans to join together in a brotherhood against the rebellion. For the Fourth of July: “Every thing this day reminds us of our duty, not only the present and the future, but also the memories of the past. The shades of Lee, and Rutledge, and Hancock, and Adams, and Jefferson, and all that host whose names form the brightest constellation in our national firmament, all seem to pass before us in solemn review to-day.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “The Day We Celebrate,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> John R. Warner, “Our Times and Our Duty: an oration delivered by request of the Gettysburg Zouaves before the citizens civil and military of Gettysburg and vicinity in Spangler’s Grove, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1861 by Rev, J. R. Warner,” Gettysburg: H.C. Neinstedt, 1861, 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

In a similar sentiment, the Honorable Edward Everett presented an oration titled “The Issues of the Day” at the Academy of Music in New York City in 1861. Everett explained at length how the South’s claim to state sovereignty was absurd. He also showed how the use of coercive methods by the federal government was fully legal. James Monroe had stated that “states must see the rod, perhaps it must be felt by some of them.” The great issues, as Everett saw them, were “nothing less, in a word, than whether the work of our noble fathers of the revolutionary and constitutional age shall perish or endure.”<sup>40</sup>

Orators such as Everett and Warner sought to inspire the people to support the work of the Union army in reuniting the nation. They showed how the Founding Fathers had created a strong foundation for America, and that it was the duty of all Americans to make sure this vision did not die. These speeches were optimistic, for if the spirit of America was strong enough to overcome the British in 1776, then surely victory would be won over the South.

By 1862, however, the absence of the fulfillment of promises of victory led many to wonder about the nation’s prospects. The *New York Herald* wrote: “We are to-day called upon to celebrate our nation’s birth without being fully able to look down into the distant future and realize where and in what direction the ship of State is drifting.” The *Herald* felt it was time for everyone to come together to better the true interests of the country, and orators should not focus on party platforms and instead should focus on bringing the war to a peaceful conclusion.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> “The Oration of Mr. Everett,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>41</sup> “Fourth of July,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1862.



A letter to the editor of *The New Orleans Daily Delta*, which had become a Union paper in the South after the Fall of New Orleans, also suggested that through union and peace on this day, Americans should forget their political squabbles, ending with the suggestion:

“Let Whig and Tory all agree,  
And spend this day in mirth and glee.”<sup>42</sup>

Besides focusing on a need for unity in the North, the *Delta* suggested that the rebels should set afire old rafts and other craft along the Mississippi on the Fourth of July as a peace offering for the nation, to pay “for the violation of the old flag and the desecration of the Constitution given to us by our patriot fathers.”<sup>43</sup>

Another Union man in New Orleans acknowledged that the Fourth of July was an extraordinary day for American patriots. He called upon Southerners who had been misled by deceitful politicians. Surely, Southerners knew of the meaning, intent, and spirit behind the Declaration of Independence. On this Fourth of July, and on every other one, the truths of American history are brought to the forefront. How then, he wondered, could “there be any room left within the chambers of the true Southerner’s heart for rebellion, or the least disloyalty to the American Republic?”<sup>44</sup>

Also in 1862, Capt. George F. Noyes delivered a Fourth of July oration to Gen. Abner Doubleday’s New York brigade at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Noyes claimed that all Northerners were Virginians, by descent of the values of the Founding Fathers that were set forth in Virginia. In this crisis of national destiny, these values sprung to the

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<sup>42</sup> “How Shall We Hail the Glorious Fourth?” *The New Orleans Daily Delta*, July 4, 1862.

<sup>43</sup> “A Good Way to Celebrate,” *The New Orleans Daily Delta*, July 4, 1862.

<sup>44</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *The New Orleans Daily Delta*, July 4, 1862.

forefront, that the democratic principle led to republican institutions that gave birth to the Union. And, he agreed, that through the reverence to the framers of the Declaration of Independence, the Fourth of July had become a holy day for those willing to fight for the Union and the Constitution. Because truly, as Noyes stated, “For all *national* purposes we are not New Yorkers or Virginians, but *American* citizens, - *one country – one flag – one national identity* –

“A union of lakes, a union of lands.  
A union of States none can sever.  
A union of hearts, a union of hands,  
And the Flag of our Union forever.”<sup>45</sup>

Theodore Upson of the 100<sup>th</sup> Indiana observed another camp oration that year by a Mr. Wade from Lagrange, who followed some of the same themes of the duty of Americans to stay true and united. The outcome of the war would determine whether the government founded by our forefathers would stand or fall, Wade stated, and every man’s duty would be to care for the families of those who have fallen in battle and to continue to support the President and his armies.<sup>46</sup>

By 1864 the *Washington Daily National Intelligencer* wrote that the fourth Independence Day celebrated amidst the conflict of civil war, did not truly reflect the spirit and heart of the traditional celebrations. The newspapers hoped that soon the evil across the land would be cast out and that “at the next return of this anniversary of the Natal Day of our country, its inhabitants may be found walking in the light of that wisdom all of whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all of whose paths are of

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<sup>45</sup> George F. Noyes, *Celebration of the national anniversary by Doubleday’s Brigade at camp opposite Fredericksburg, Virginia, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1862* (Philadelphia, 1862), 5-12.

<sup>46</sup> Theodore F. Upson, *With Sherman to the Sea: The Civil War Letters, Diaries Reminiscences of Theodore F. Upson* (Bloomington, IN, 1958), 18.

peace.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the following Fourth of July would take place in a country at peace. Yet in the meantime, the boisterous and confident rhetoric of 1861 had developed a more serious and cautionary tone.

## Home Front Celebrations

Away from the newspaper rhetoric and formal Fourth of July orations, citizens at home decided to make the Fourth of July into a grander celebration in the North than it had been during pre-war times. That for the first time the Union was threatened from within created in the North a patriotic determination to make the Fourth of July one holiday which Americans would never forget.<sup>48</sup> The *New York Herald* wrote in 1861 that the Fourth of July would be a celebration greater than anything since the forming of the nation.<sup>49</sup>

The backdrop of war would magnify the customary city celebrations. The *Herald* wrote: “In almost every city, town and settlement in the country where the Union flag is permitted to wave preparations of some kind were made for the celebration of the glorious Fourth. Among the most prominent features of the day’s enjoyment we may enumerate patriotic orations, reading of the Declaration of Independence, military and civic processions, firemen’s parades, Sunday school celebrations, regattas, horse races, balloon ascensions, political gatherings, railroad and steamboat excursions, picnics, barbecues, clam bakes, public dinners, balls, parties, fairs, festivals, national salutes, and

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<sup>47</sup> “The National Anniversary,” *The Washington Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1864.

<sup>48</sup> “The Eighty-fifth Anniversary of American Freedom,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

a general display of the Stars and Stripes during the day, and in the evening illuminations and fireworks of every descriptions, from penny pinwheels to pyrotechnic pieces costing hundreds of dollars.”<sup>50</sup> In Springfield, Massachusetts in 1861, 1500 soldiers marched in a parade. Cannons, fireworks, and eight full bands added to the merriment.<sup>51</sup>

National salutes of 34 guns were fired, showing that even the states of the Confederacy were still considered members of the Union. In New York City, the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, had a Fourth of July program entitled, “The Union Must and Shall be Preserved.”<sup>52</sup> Edward Everett addressed the Academy of Music on “The Great Issues Now Before Our Country,” and the veteran corps of the War of 1812 marched with the 7th Regiment band.<sup>53</sup> In New York, a ceremony raised the Union flag over one of the surviving forts from the War of 1812.<sup>54</sup> Besides recognizing the veterans of 1812, Fourth of July celebrations also honored the surviving soldiers of the Revolution, of which only 12 remained in the nation by 1864. They were dubbed “The Twelve Apostles of Liberty.”<sup>55</sup>

Newspapers advertised numerous Fourth of July excursions, allowing for citizens to escape the bustling city for a quiet day in the country. In New York City, steamships took people to Coney Island, Fort Hamilton, New Rochelle, Glen Cove, Harlem, Newport, Providence, and West Point, and railroads escorted them further to Camp Scott, Flushing, College Point, and Philadelphia.<sup>56</sup> So while crowds left the city en masse,

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<sup>50</sup> “The Celebration in Other Places,” *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1862.

<sup>51</sup> Henry C. Lind, ed., *The Long Road Home: The Civil War Experience of Four Farmboy Soldiers of the Twenty-seventh Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry as Told by Their Personal Correspondence, 1861-1864* (Rutherford, NJ, 1992), 31.

<sup>52</sup> “The Day in the City,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>53</sup> “Fourth of July,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>54</sup> “Our National Independence,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1862.

<sup>55</sup> “Only Twelve Left,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1864.

<sup>56</sup> “Excursions,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1861.

crowds also came into the city from miles around, leaving the streets as crowded as ever.<sup>57</sup>

In the city, attractions were crowded on the Fourth of July. Barnum's American Museum in New York advertised a special "Grand National Jubilee," providing dramatic performances in the city's center of attraction, as well as the best views of the military parade and fireworks. Theatres, described as being "very patriotic" by one newspaper, remained open to provide performances throughout the day.<sup>58</sup> Cities on the water held their annual Fourth of July regattas. In Boston many spectators lined the Charles River to watch the race.<sup>59</sup>

"Young America was jubilant with fire crackers, pin wheels, Roman candles and torpedoes, while children of a larger growth indulged in the rather noisy and meaningless amusement of firing off guns, pistols, and cannons."<sup>60</sup> These "meaningless amusements" also caused quite a number of casualties each year as pistols discharged accidentally, misaimed shots hit pedestrians, or powder ignited prematurely. In addition, the use of fireworks caused so many fires that alarm bells rang continuously throughout the day. In New York City alone in 1861, there were over 30 fires.<sup>61</sup>

All parts of society participated in the national holiday. Public school students and orphans paraded through the street, and even mental asylums marked the day. As stated by the *New York Times*, "our poor insane have not been forgotten in the arrangements for the general rejoicing, an appropriation having been made expressly for

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<sup>57</sup> "The Celebrations of the Fourth of July," *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1863.

<sup>58</sup> "Amusements," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1861; "The Fourth of July at the Theatres," *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>59</sup> "The Boston Regatta," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>60</sup> "Independence Day in New York," *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>61</sup> "Fires," *The New York Times*, July 6, 1861.

the entertainment of the poor demented creatures.”<sup>62</sup> Street parades included representatives from all professions, including glue factory workers, whose wagon in one city bore the motto “We stick fast to the Union.”<sup>63</sup>

The holiday united the secular, religious, civic, and private institutions. Church bells rang for an hour at sunrise, and then chimed out patriotic melodies throughout the day. All of the buildings in the city, as well as the vessels in the ports, flew the national banner. The day ended with a grand illumination of fireworks.<sup>64</sup> The *New York Times* wrote: “There never has been, probably, within the memory of living citizens, so general a demonstration in the way of flag flying as there was yesterday on the shipping of the harbor, and upon all public and private buildings in the City.”<sup>65</sup>

In 1863 in Springfield, Mass., the 10<sup>th</sup> Regiment was still in town for the holiday. “Each soldier was presented a bouquet after a floral procession of over 800 schoolchildren. Soldiers tucked the blossoms onto the tip of their bayonets and paraded in this fashion. A large picnic under the tent followed after official ceremonies and orations.”<sup>66</sup>

As early as 1862, towns noted the absence of the military but acknowledged that they were serving a better duty elsewhere.<sup>67</sup> While many cities had the usual military celebrations and processions through the city streets, many of the “participants in the anniversaries gone by have almost entirely left the city, summoned away at the nation’s

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<sup>62</sup> “Blackwell’s Island,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>63</sup> “Civil Department,” *San Francisco Daily Morning Call*, July 6, 1864.

<sup>64</sup> “Independence Day in New York,” *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>65</sup> “Patriotic Displays of Flags,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 1861.

<sup>66</sup> Guy A. McLain, Martin Kaufman, Joseph Carvalho, eds., *Springfield Fights the Civil War* (Springfield, MA, 1990), 167.

<sup>67</sup> “Our National Independence,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1862.

call for the preservation of its honor, safety and integrity.”<sup>68</sup> Toward the end of the war, many cities had to do away entirely with the military parades as local units were stationed in another place of the country.<sup>69</sup>

Regardless of the size or qualities of these wartime commemorations, the *New York Herald* wrote that spirit of the Fourth of July confirmed “the people are still sound at heart, faithful to the glorious memories of the past, and animated with an undying love of that Union which traitors and fanatics are endeavoring to dissever.”<sup>70</sup>

However, as in other Fourth of July celebrations during the Civil War, not all citizens felt the day should be spent in jubilant commemoration. Elizabeth Blair Lee, writing in 1862 from Washington, thought that the day should be long “remembered in our Country as a day of mourning for many have learned their losses - & others dread to hear.”<sup>71</sup>

In Newark, James Brooks said in an oration that “bad as the past has been the future may be a still mightier flood of sorrow. This wave of grief may roll over every threshold and deluge every hearthstone in the land.” Whatever the cost, “the Union must and shall be preserved.”<sup>72</sup>

In part as a reaction to these mixed sentiments, and more likely as a protective measure against Southern sympathizers, Maj. Robert Schenck ordered Baltimore citizens in 1863 to display the American flag. “If there be any spot where it does not appear, its absence there will only prove that patriot hearts do not beat beneath that roof.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “Independence Day in New York,” *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>69</sup> “The Fourth in Brooklyn,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1864.

<sup>70</sup> “Independence Day in New York,” *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth B. Lee, *Wartime Washington: The Civil War Letters of Elizabeth Blair Lee* (Chicago, 1991), 160.

<sup>72</sup> “The Observance at Newark,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1862.

<sup>73</sup> “The 4<sup>th</sup> in Baltimore,” *The Lynchburg Virginian*, July 8, 1863.

In Southern cities such as Nashville, Memphis, and New Orleans where the 1862 presence of the Union Army brought the Northern celebration of the Fourth of July, Northern observers expected grand celebrations. The *New York Times* wrote that while Americans still could not celebrate the Fourth of July throughout the South, it was at least comforting to have the day honored in a few more Southern cities than the previous year.<sup>74</sup> Having more cities commemorate the Fourth of July in the Northern fashion meant the nation was closer to securing the Union once again.

The *Daily National Intelligencer* noted that though this birthday of American Independence would occur in cities under circumstances different from prewar times, the day still showed Americans the value and necessity of the Union.<sup>75</sup> This strong support for reuniting the Union brought Americans together in commemoration on the home front. Yet while the day would be marked by bonfires, illuminations, and festivities at home, *The New York Times* reminded readers in 1862 that the Fourth of July would also take place during “the awful baptism of fire and blood. We have, indeed, our wonted festivities; but the real celebration to-day is along the line of battle ... *There* are our hearts and hopes. The rest is all but show.”<sup>76</sup>

## War Front Celebrations

On the battlefield, the Fourth of July had even more significance for Northerners than those at home. Soldiers felt that they were fighting to maintain and preserve the

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<sup>74</sup> “The Fourth of July South,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1862.

<sup>75</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1862.

<sup>76</sup> “The National Natal Day,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1862.



nation as their forefathers had done during the Revolution. Whether in army camp, or out on picket, Union soldiers found ways to commemorate the day. In 1861, many companies paraded through downtown Washington in a formal review in front of President Abraham Lincoln. Samuel Francis Du Pont wrote: “The *New York* troops, in honor of the day, have passed in review just now – the President in a stand with General Scott and the Cabinet – twenty thousand men, nearly, from *one* state!” Every man of the “Garibaldi Regiment” took a sprig of box or cedar from their hats, and “threw them towards the President, making a perfect shower of evergreens, but without in the slightest degree disturbing the ranks of the perfect step of their marching.”<sup>77</sup>

At Camp Hilton, near Hampton, Va., a New York Zouave regiment illuminated the company streets by placing candles in the branches of rows of transplanted trees. The New Yorkers set huge fires in parts of the camp, around which they danced, according to *The New York Times*. “In front of the colorline all manner of fireworks were blazing and whirling, and ascending and bursting, in the red, white and blue light ... It was a scene to remember, and tell one’s grandchildren of when we take them on our knees, next century, and fight the battles of the present o’er again.”<sup>78</sup>

These camp celebrations often included the reading of the Declaration of Independence, prayer services, orations and poems, the firing of a national salute, and a fine dinner.<sup>79</sup> Charles B. Haydon, 2<sup>nd</sup> Michigan, described his night of the Fourth, in which, “cannons were fired at the batteries & at the city & every camp had a bonfire.

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<sup>77</sup> Samuel F. Du Pont, *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection From His Civil War Letters, Volume One The Mission: 1860-1862* (Ithaca, 1969), 93-94.

<sup>78</sup> “The Fourth, and How it was Celebrated,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1861.

<sup>79</sup> Elisha H. Rhodes, *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes* (New York, 1985), 21.

The Potomac was lighted for miles by their blaze. Bands played a few patriotic tunes & each camp gave 3 cheers for the flag & union.”<sup>80</sup>

A chaplain for Daniel Sickles’ Excelsior Brigade wrote a letter to his father discussing the Fourth of July celebration in Camp Scott, which was filled from sunrise to sunset with parades, salutes, music, and thousands of visitors.<sup>81</sup> At these large camp celebrations, the public came for the festivities as well. Theodore Upson noted that in 1862 “we had our celebration; it was a fine one and a fine day, too. I don’t know where all the people came from, they came in wagons, buggies, on horse back and on foot. I never saw such a crowd.”<sup>82</sup>

Even when stationed in the South, crowds still gathered to observe the festivities. At a Union camp along a railroad near Huntsville, Alabama, Samuel T. Smith wrote to his wife describing the thirteen-gun sunrise salute, the patriotic music and speeches, and the firing of a 34-gun national salute at noon. Of the local citizens in attendance in the camp, Smith noted that he thought they took the day pretty hard, but of course would not say anything in the presence of the soldiers. Smith felt sorry for them. “I would hate to be in a fix that I could not express my opinion in any way I please on the Fourth of July.”<sup>83</sup>

Many soldiers spent the day amusing themselves in festivities and merry-making organized within the camp. While exhibitions of tight rope walking were popular, many

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<sup>80</sup> Charles B. Haydon, *For Country, Cause & Leader: The Civil War Journal of Charles B. Haydon* (New York, 1993), 39.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph H. Twitchell, *The Civil War Letters of Joseph Hopkins Twitchell: A Chaplain’s Story* (Athens, 2006), 41.

<sup>82</sup> Upson, *With Sherman to the Sea*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Harry Virgil Smith, *Life and Letters of Pvt. Samuel T. Smith Fifteenth Indiana Regiment Volunteers Civil War* (Bloomington, IN, 1976), 36.

camps organized large-scale races for the soldiers to compete in.<sup>84</sup> In the Iron Brigade, Rufus R. Dawes explained that “Gibbon’s brigade gathered upon a large plain, where there was horse racing, foot racing, and other amusements and athletic exercises. There was a great mule race, a sack race, and a greased pig.”<sup>85</sup>

William Ray, also of the Iron Brigade, was at the same Fourth of July celebration. His account shows the hilarity and amusement that the soldiers put into their Fourth of July celebration even before the start of the races - from having bands “playing without either time or tune,” guards dressing in the most comical way (one corporal had an old haversack for a hat, paper strips attached to his arms, and a large crooked stick for a gun), and arranging their large Newfoundland dog to chase the guards, all before the soldiers properly fell into place for the formal dress parade.<sup>86</sup>

Besides entertainment, soldiers often commented on the dinner that was served to them on the Fourth. It was a marked difference from their usual meals. One soldier detailed the menu of his Fourth of July meal: “I had a part of officers to dine with me today, and we gave what seemed to me, by way of contrast a fine dinner. This was our bill of fare: Stewed oysters (canned), Roast turkey (canned), Bread pudding, Tapioca pudding, Apple pie (made in camp), Lemonade, Cigars. Tomorrow if we march, hard tack and salt pork will be our fare.”<sup>87</sup>

William Ray of the 7<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin added that in 1864 his unit received pickled cucumbers, onions, and four cans of preserved turkey, beef, and tomatoes from the

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<sup>84</sup> Rhodes, *All for the Union*, 21.

<sup>85</sup> Alan Nolan, ed., *A Full Blown Yankee of the Iron Brigade: Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers* (Lincoln, 1999), 51.

<sup>86</sup> William R. Ray, *Four Years with the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journals of William R. Ray, Co. F., Seventh Wisconsin Infantry* (Cambridge, 2002), 112-114.

<sup>87</sup> Rhodes, *All for the Union*, 166-7.

Sanitary Commission.<sup>88</sup> That same year John Chase wrote to his brother from Petersburg. “For the first time in the army I had some Punch. Not quite equal to your manufacture but thanks to the Sanitary Commission and Capt Mac it was very good. The Sanitary furnished the Lemons and Ice and the Commissary the Whiskey.”<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, John Westervelt of the 1<sup>st</sup> New York Engineer Corps spoke highly of the fine rice pudding with raisins and dried peaches they were served, as well as the three servings of whiskey during the day.<sup>90</sup> Colonel Charles Wainwright also described his meal, where the highlight was canned salmon and green peas, and while the sutler brought them champagne, it was too poor a brand for him to consume.<sup>91</sup>

Besides campsite celebrations, similar acknowledgements of the holiday took place at sea. Aboard the USS *Renaudin*, on July 4, 1862 Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont noted: “It was a holiday in the squadron. We hoisted the American ensign at all the mastheads and fired a salute of twenty-one guns at the meridian.” Du Pont also had invited everyone to lunch.<sup>92</sup>

Above Vicksburg that year, David G. Farragut, commanding the West Gulf Blockading Squadron, ordered a display of flags and a salute at noon of twenty-one guns in honor of the anniversary of the nation’s independence.<sup>93</sup> Aboard the ironclad *Monitor*,

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<sup>88</sup> Ray, *Four Years with the Iron Brigade*, 287.

<sup>89</sup> John W. Chase, *Yours for the Union: The Civil War Letters of John W. Chase First Massachusetts Light Infantry* (New York, 2004), 348.

<sup>90</sup> John H. Westervelt, *Diary of a Yankee Engineer: The Civil War Story of John H. Westervelt, Engineer, 1<sup>st</sup> New York Volunteer Engineer Corps* (New York, 1997), 150.

<sup>91</sup> Patricia B. Mitchell, *Civil War Celebrations* (Chatham, VA, 1998), 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> Du Pont, Samuel F., *Samuel Francis Du Pont: A Selection From His Civil War Letters, Volume Two The Blockade: 1862-1863*, (Ithaca, 1969), 151.

<sup>93</sup> United States War Dept. (comp), *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies, ser. I, vol. 18* (Washington, 1904), 624.

also in 1862, William Frederick Keeler told his wife Anna that they had a fine ‘pleasure excursion’ for the Fourth, chasing and sinking a small rebel gunboat.<sup>94</sup>

Henry Gursley, serving on the USS *Clifton*, wrote that “we flew four flags instead of one in honor of the day: we fired a salute of twenty-one guns at noon, and all hands were dressed in white. The blockading fleet outside also fired a salute, the smoke and sound of their guns being very perceptible to us. The rebels, nearly in range of us, did not, of course.”<sup>95</sup>

Even Union soldiers confined within Andersonville prison in Georgia in 1864 took time to acknowledge the Fourth of July. Amos Stearns, of the 25<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, wrote in his journal that on this “Glorious Fourth” he thought of home and loved ones, and wished he were in North to celebrate this day with them.<sup>96</sup> Writing after the war, Robert Sneden of the 40<sup>th</sup> New York described a more patriotic Fourth of July in Andersonville prison. Though their holiday feast consisted of boiled beef and rotten mule meat soiled with great white maggots, the prisoners still managed to commemorate the day. Short speeches were delivered, and three rousing cheers given for “The Old Flag,” while a makeshift banner was waved in the crowd. Sneden also claimed that the hundreds of prisoners joined together to sing patriotic songs to the effect of drowning out Gen. Howell Cobb’s speech to the Rebel forces and inciting panic among the guards.

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<sup>94</sup> William F. Keeler, *Aboard the USS Monitor: 1862 – The Letters of Acting Paymaster William Frederick Keeler, U.S. Navy to his Wife, Anna* (Annapolis, 1964), 182.

<sup>95</sup> Henry O. Gusley, *The Southern Journey of a Civil War Marine: The Illustrated Note-Book of Henry O. Gusley* (Austin, 2006), 164.

<sup>96</sup> Amos E. Stearns, *The Civil War Diary of Amos E. Stearns, a Prisoner at Andersonville* (Rutherford, NJ, 1981), 69.

Sneden's account ended with the prisoners drinking smuggled whiskey, and singing and dancing until nightfall.<sup>97</sup>

However, the Fourth of July did not evoke gaiety among all Union soldiers. The first few years of the war had been extremely difficult on the Northern army, and the war's bleak future created low morale. William Smith, a surgeon in the 85<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry, noted that on the 1862 Independence Day, storm clouds lay on future of the country, with recent rumors indicating "a reverse of our arms and our cause."<sup>98</sup>

The next year, Rufus Kinsey of the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont wrote that he celebrated the "Glorious Fourth" by staying indoors. He wondered how people could be so delighted in the day. "It seems a heartless mockery. I must wait for the close of the war, and for a free country, before I get jubilant over the 'Fourth.'"<sup>99</sup>

Amanda Shelton, a nurse, regretted in 1863 that instead of bringing joy to her heart, the patriotic tunes now brought tears. Even when the country finally achieves victory, "this joy would be overshadowed by the thought of the burned homes and slain thousands which have been the price of peace."<sup>100</sup>

That 1863 Fourth of July marked a turning point for the North. The past few years of struggle and loss were quickly forgotten with a string of significant Union victories. July 4, 1863 heralded the end of the Gettysburg campaign, which saw the Union forces victorious over Lee's army. Elisha Hunt Rhodes recorded in his diary that the nation's birthday could be celebrated as never before with the realization that General

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<sup>97</sup> Charles F. Bryan, Jr. and Nelson D. Lankford, eds., *Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey* (New York, 2000), 238-241.

<sup>98</sup> William Smith, *Swamp Doctor: The Diary of a Union Surgeon in the Virginia and North Carolina Marshes* (Mechanicsville, PA, 2001), 20.

<sup>99</sup> Rufus Kinsley, *Diary of a Christian Soldier: Rufus Kinsley and the Civil War* (Cambridge, 2004), 113.

<sup>100</sup> Amanda Shelton, *Turn Backward, O Time: The Civil War Diary of Amanda Shelton* (Roseville, MN, 2006), 83.

Lee's army had retreated. A national salute was fired over the lines that the rebels used to occupy.<sup>101</sup>

That day the *New York Herald* stated: "Our last Fourth of July was darkened by serious apprehensions of the destruction of our army on the Richmond peninsula...Now with the same army, heavily reinforced, and successfully advancing against the enemy, we may reasonably anticipate the most glorious results."<sup>102</sup> The tide had shifted, and Northerners saw victory on the horizon.

That 1863 Fourth of July also saw the fall of Vicksburg. George A. Remley, of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Iowa remarked to his brother how this glorious Fourth would be remembered always by this army, and how cheers went up from everyone after the city had finally surrendered.<sup>103</sup>

Thomas Davis declared to his wife: "I suppose you will wish to know how I enjoyed the 4<sup>th</sup> yesterday to which I can say that I never enjoyed a fourth so well in my life for yesterday we took possession of Vicksburg and all the Rebel works with between twenty- and thirty-thousand prisoners ... And thus, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July the long sought Rebel stronghold fell into the hands of the Yankees amid loud and prolonged cheering."<sup>104</sup> William Wiley, of the 77<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, added: "We felt that this was about the biggest fourth of July that we had seen. That night we had quite a demonstration over the fall of Vicksburg with fireworks included."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Rhodes, *All for the Union*, 117.

<sup>102</sup> "The Victory Undoubtedly Ours," *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>103</sup> Julie Holcomb, ed., *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22<sup>nd</sup> Iowa Infantry* (Dekalb, IL, 2004), 81.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas P. Nanzig, ed, *The Badax Tigers: From Shiloh to the Surrender with the 18<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers* (Lanham, MD, 2002), 177.

<sup>105</sup> William Wiley, *The Civil War Diary of a Common Soldier: William Wiley of the 77<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry* (Baton Rouge, 2001), 61.

William Clayton of the 19<sup>th</sup> Iowa wished that he could have been home at the Fourth of July celebrations to share the joyful report.<sup>106</sup> James K. Newton, a volunteer in the 14<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin stated: “Vicksburg is ours at last. *The 4<sup>th</sup> of July scared them so that they concluded it was best to give up*, and for my part I think it is the best thing they could have done.”<sup>107</sup>

However, contentment did not exist all around Vicksburg. Some Northern soldiers had been hoping to celebrate the holiday in a different fashion. Henry Kircher, of the 9<sup>th</sup> Illinois, explained that the soldiers were looking forward to “a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration like no other,” in which they would send forth an epic cannonade. Unfortunately, “the accursed fellows had to spoil our fun of shooting them. At 4:30 A.M. they raised the white flag.”<sup>108</sup>

While in Helena, Ark. the 29<sup>th</sup> Iowa’s Charles O. Musser told his father about another desperate and bloody victory achieved that Independence Day. “I have Spent Several fourths of July but never celebrated it with so much fire works before. I would not have missed that day for Six months wages” adding that with this victory and the news from Vicksburg, the “Rebellion is Knocked in a Cocked hat in the west.”<sup>109</sup>

On July 8, John Bennett, a surgeon in the 19<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry, wrote from Guy’s Gap, Tennessee: “I have just this moment received intelligence of the capture of Bragg & his staff. This is almost too good to be true to add to the route & capture of

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<sup>106</sup> William H. Clayton, *A Damned Iowa Greyhound: The Civil War Letters of William Henry Harrison Clayton* (Iowa City, 1998), 78.

<sup>107</sup> James K. Newton, *A Wisconsin Boy in Dixie: The Selected Letters of James K. Newton* (Madison, 1961), 79.

<sup>108</sup> Henry A. Kircher, *A German in the Yankee Fatherland: The Civil War Letters of Henry A. Kircher* (Kent, OH, 1983), 111.

<sup>109</sup> Charles O. Musser, *Soldier Boy: The Civil War Letters of Charles O. Musser, 29<sup>th</sup> Iowa* (Iowa City, 1995), 64-66.



Lee's army - & the fall of Vicksburg. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is indeed made more eventful in giving a death blow to this Stupendous Rebellion.”<sup>110</sup>

Although Bennitt had his facts wrong, and Bragg was only driven out of Tennessee, this event marked another in a long chain of Union victories around July 4, 1863 that boosted Union morale and provided for many a joyous celebration that day.

## Celebrations Gain Momentum

The Fourth of July, 1863, had a significant impact on the morale of the North. While previous Fourth of July celebrations in the Civil War were held in an air of uncertainty, “dampened by the misconduct of the administration,” people now “were able to rejoice at a splendid triumph won by these brave soldiers.”<sup>111</sup> They hoped that the 1863 victories would lead to a swift end to the war, allowing for a greater celebration if the day “is made the anniversary of the beginning of the regeneration as well as of the first establishment of the nation.”<sup>112</sup>

The specter of the horrors of war nevertheless clung to the Fourth of July. Major General Alvin Voris noted in 1864 that he was a thousand miles from home in enemy territory, and years into a war that seemed without end. The holiday had changed so much from prior antebellum celebrations that Voris wrote: “I fear we will never have

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<sup>110</sup> John Bennitt, “*I Hope to Do My Country Service*” *The Civil War Letters of John Bennitt, M.D., Surgeon, 19<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry* (Detroit, 2005), 139.

<sup>111</sup> “The Celebrations of the Fourth of July,” *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1863.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

such 4ths of July again.”<sup>113</sup> That year Cpl. Rufus Kinsley of the 8<sup>th</sup> Vermont also wondered how the country would “celebrate the day, with our soil drenched in the best blood of the nation, mingled with the worst, and still drinking more and more.”<sup>114</sup>

Not all Northerners were able to celebrate the Fourth of July with the ebullience of other places in the Union. Around Petersburg, Va., in 1864, Northern soldiers were weeks into their eventual nine-month-long siege on the city. The *New York Herald* reported: “The great day for which devout Yankees believe other days were made passed by in the most prosaic manner imaginable. It was ushered in by no gaudy pageantry, ringing of bells, or thunder of artillery. The stillness of the morning air was not even broken by the firing of a national salute.”<sup>115</sup>

Surgeon Daniel M. Holt, of the 121<sup>st</sup> New York, noticed that only the siege guns broke the oppressive silence surrounding Petersburg.”<sup>116</sup> Regardless, huge flags still waved along the enemy lines. At noon Captain Henry Burton fired a national salute of thirty-four guns.<sup>117</sup>

Stationed in the South, Orrin W. Cook, of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts wrote that he was “under the dominion of the usurping stars and bars; where this day is uncelebrated and undistinguished, the rebellious apostates having forfeited all right to share in its glory, as they long ago renounced the doctrines of man that made the day memorable.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Alvin C. Voris, *A Citizen's Civil War: The Letters of Brevet Major General Alvin C. Voris* (Dekalb, IL, 2002), 197.

<sup>114</sup> Kinsley, *Diary of a Christian Soldier*, 155.

<sup>115</sup> “The Fourth in the Army,” *The New York Herald*, July 7, 1864.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel M. Holt, *A Surgeon's Civil War: The Letters and Diary of Daniel M. Holt, M.D.* (Kent, OH, 1994), 214.

<sup>117</sup> “Grant's Siege of Petersburg,” *The Charleston Mercury*, July 8, 1864; “How the Fourth was Spent Before Petersburg,” *The New York Herald*, July 7, 1864.

<sup>118</sup> McLain, *Springfield Fights*, 65.

The end of the war in 1865 brought an opportunity for all Northerners to express their joy at being able to secure the Union once more. From Louisa Court House, in Virginia, Gen. Alvin Voris wrote that he had heard of plans to make this Fourth of July the largest holiday ever.<sup>119</sup> The *New Hampshire Sentinel* noted: “Never before since the birth of the nation, had we so abundant cause for public rejoicings as now. Formerly we rejoiced in a country gained; *now*, in a country gained and a country saved.”<sup>120</sup>

Cpl. Kinsley wrote that year: “To-day for the first time in history, does the old Liberty Bell in Independence Hall speak the truth.”<sup>121</sup> The *Philadelphia Inquirer* declared that there was a new reason to celebrate the day. The victory over the South provided orators with a unique opportunity: “There will be no need to confine their rhetorical efforts to the old-fashioned allusions to our Revolutionary ancestors.”<sup>122</sup>

Gettysburg and other spectacular Civil War victories stirred the patriotic sentiments in the North more than battles fought almost a century earlier.

Writing from Charleston, S.C., the Union physician Esther Hill Hawks regretted her location on the 1865 Fourth of July. Instead of joining thousands in Northern cities celebrating from sunup to sundown, in South Carolina, “it seemed like Sunday, everything was so still, not a gun, not a boy with a snap-cracker to indicate the ‘day we celebrate.’”<sup>123</sup> Hawks could only contrast her current situation to the celebrations going on elsewhere in the country.

Indeed, commemorations in the North outshone prior Fourth of July. In Philadelphia, the fireworks celebration surpassed anything previously seen in the city.

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<sup>119</sup> Voris, *A Citizen’s Civil War*, 265.

<sup>120</sup> “The Fourth of July, 1865 – Welcome to the Soldiers,” *The New Hampshire Sentinel*, July 6, 1865.

<sup>121</sup> Kinsley, *Diary of a Christian Soldier*, 177.

<sup>122</sup> “The Glorious Fourth,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 3, 1865.

<sup>123</sup> Esther H. Hawks, *A Woman Doctor’s Civil War: Esther Hill Hawks’ Diary* (Columbia, 1984), 205.

“Coming so close upon the end of the war, it really seemed to be a special providence that we could celebrate, as it were, the old and the new birthday of the nation at one and the same time.”<sup>124</sup>

The North’s vision of America had been reaffirmed by their victory over the South. The *Constitution* proclaimed: “Democracy has triumphed over assumed superiority, freedom over slavery, of liberty over despotism. Let the people on the next and every returning anniversary of our national independence greet the soldiers with public manifestations of joy, and commemorate their heroic deeds by the new demonstrations of gratitude and affection.”<sup>125</sup>

Future anniversaries would be greeted with a similar fervor, as former Union soldiers and survivors of a war-torn America came together to celebrate annually their victory over the South.

## Conclusions

Commemoration of the Fourth of July in the Union during the Civil War focused on certain aspects of the pre-war celebrations. While the celebrations themselves had only intensified and were not markedly different from earlier periods, the concepts stressed in the North provide a window into understanding the Northern perspective of America.

Key to the identity of Northerners was the American flag, which was repeatedly displayed on this holiday. “The flag to a soldier figures in a kind of deified solemnity

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<sup>124</sup> “Celebration of the Day,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 6, 1865.

<sup>125</sup> “A Proclamation,” *The Constitution*, July 5, 1865.

which he reveres and respects. Without it the soldier has lost that visible indication which reminds him of the great principles for which he exerts himself.”<sup>126</sup>

Northerners mocked the celebration of Independence Day in the South, calling it a “thoughtless homage,” and were perplexed by the idea of a Fourth of July without the American flag.<sup>127</sup> Northern Fourth of July salutes along the border were then interpreted as “thunders of retribution for desecrating the Union flag.”<sup>128</sup>

Also of importance was the recognition and honoring of the Union. One citizen wrote to the editor of the *San Francisco Morning Call* on the Fourth of July and declared that he was a patriot who loved “the Union, the Government, the Constitution.”<sup>129</sup>

Thirteen-gun national salutes acknowledged the original 13 states, which formed the backbone of the Union, and whose creation signified the beginning of America. In addition, twenty-two gun salutes were given for each current state in the union, which included all of the states of the Confederacy. This shows how important it was for the North not to give up the hope that the Union would be completely restored by war’s end.

While the North felt that the South had “dropped the old allegiance, the old faith and the old flag,” Northerners felt these were the aspects that were essential to their vision of America.<sup>130</sup> The South, however, focused upon other attributes of Fourth of July commemorations instead.

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<sup>126</sup> “The Fall of Vicksburg,” *The New York Herald*, July 15, 1863.

<sup>127</sup> “The Day We Celebrate,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>128</sup> “The Salutes of the Fourth,” *The Daily National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>129</sup> “The Invisible Fireworks,” *The San Francisco Daily Morning Call*, July 8, 1864.

<sup>130</sup> “The Fourth of July South,” *The New York Times*, July 3, 1862.

## **PART TWO: The Fourth of July in the Confederacy**

### **Political and Editorial Rhetoric**

Southern newspaper editorials and numerous orations delivered on the Fourth of July debated the merits of the holiday and its role in Southern society. These writings acknowledged that with secession, changes lay in store for the South. Among the views during this nation-building period were opinions on the commemoration of the Fourth of July. In 1861 the *Charleston Mercury* noted that Southerners still “regard the day as a distinguished day, and the ‘Fourth of July’ as a very memorable and praiseworthy institution; but they do not feel relieved from responsibilities for the future by their abject veneration of it; and regard that day as but the beginning of a work which they have yet to accomplish on the battlefields before them.”<sup>131</sup>

Confederates felt that the South had not yet secured the vision and ideas set down by the Founding Fathers. Among these principles were notions of independence, liberty, human rights, and the right to rebel to secure these values. These principles were honored on the Fourth of July, which celebrated not only the Declaration of Independence, but also the success of the American Revolution. This success was seen as a stepping-stone for future victories in the South.

At the 1861 meeting of the ’76 Association, a society that had convened on the Fourth of July for the preceding 51 years in Charleston to commemorate the achievements of the Founding Fathers, Alfred H. Dunkin chose to step down from his

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<sup>131</sup> “Notes of the War,” *Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1861.

position as orator. He explained: “Times have changed. We now no longer indulge in platitudes on Government and studied eulogies of the glories of the past; we are acting history; we are *fighting* for Independence ... My whole being is in the present; I cannot think, much less write, of the past.”<sup>132</sup>

The '76 Association even decided to move its celebration to December 20, on which the state “asserted and vindicated the principles of the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776.”<sup>133</sup> However, while Southerners recognized imminent war changes, many people felt that abandoning this holiday was not a necessary change. The move to celebrate independence on December 20 failed to take hold; instead, the Fourth of July remained the day to discuss, debate, and question the achievements of the Founding Fathers in the light of the current struggle.

That being said, evidently other Southerners questioned the right of the South to commemorate the Fourth of July. From the war’s beginning, and on each Fourth of July until the war’s end, newspaper editorials continued to address the question of the proper ownership of the holiday. In Georgia, the *Macon Telegraph* editorialized that too much had been written on abandoning the holiday, and that only one reason was needed for keeping it. “It is simply this: That the South cannot accept this recommendation without proving recreant to her own historic glory.”<sup>134</sup>

The *Telegraph* cited the pride Southern families felt when recounting “their own genealogical records of the revolution, and display the saber, the pistols, the epaulets or firelock of an heroic ancestor.”<sup>135</sup> To ignore the military victories and the principles

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<sup>132</sup> “'76 Association,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> “The 4<sup>th</sup> of July Still is And Should be a Southern Holiday!” *Macon Telegraph*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

created and embodied in the Declaration of Independence would be to ignore the strongest aspects of Southern glory.

The *Charleston Daily Courier* further explained: “The ‘Fourth of July’ is, in all its greatest lessons and associations, an inheritance of the Confederate States. It had originally nothing to do with the relations of American States to each other, but asserted their independence against foreign rule. It is rightfully ours, and we must regard it so.”<sup>136</sup>

This is an important delineation. The South did not view the holiday as commemorating the founding of America, but as commemorating the founding of the American idea of independence. This concept focused on the right to rebel and the right to proclaim independence from tyranny. This strong belief supported the Confederacy’s justification for secession when it perceived that the Union threatened its liberty.

Agreeing with the *Daily Courier*, the *Charleston Mercury* wrote: “We note that some discussion prevails as to the propriety of celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> July. Why not? That is truly our Independence Day. It is the North which should properly refuse to recognize it. That region has distinctly repudiated all the principles of the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1776. We have not.” In fact, rather than abandoning it, the day be embraced. The *Mercury* further insisted: “Let us not surrender it. Let us not give up one tith of the honorable reputation won by our sires. So far from doing so, let us celebrate it with increased enthusiasm. Let our orators show how truly we assert, and reassert, every principle for which they fought and bled.”<sup>137</sup>

This passage illustrates the second claim often made by newspaper editorials. After asserting the right to celebrate the Fourth of July in the South, writers quickly

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<sup>136</sup> “The ‘Fourth of July,’” *Charleston Daily Courier*, June 22, 1861.

<sup>137</sup> “Anniversaries of Independence,” *Charleston Mercury*, June 27, 1861.



invalidated the Northern claim on the holiday. The Fourth of July should be celebrated in the South, and it should be a solely Southern institution. Yet, another correspondent realized that while Southerners were fond of the holiday, ultimately the North had a stronger claim to the day. “To them [the North] it is everything they wanted, or can ever want. It was at once their own emancipation from Great Britain, and their achievement of dominion over the South; to them it symbolizes both liberty and power.”<sup>138</sup>

From the Northern perspective, the day stood out as a triumphant moment in history. However, the Fourth of July did not represent the memory of a complete victory for the South. Their struggle for independence only began in 1776, and had to be taken up again in 1861.

In the midst of this renewed struggle, the Fourth of July would be different from those of past years the *Richmond Dispatch* noted. Regardless of how it would be commemorated, “it is a sufficient tribute to it that we are engaged in the maintenance of the principles of human rights and liberty it announced, and that we are ready to sacrifice our lives and all we have in the effort.”<sup>139</sup> While the war would change how the South celebrated the day, concerns over the legitimacy of the commemoration would remain.

The following year, in 1862 the *Lynchburg Virginian* again questioned the ownership of the holiday. “To whom does the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, with all of its hallowed associations, belong? To the people who have repudiated the doctrines for which Jefferson and Washington fought? Or to us who this day reiterate all that may be fairly and legitimately inferred from the Declaration of Independence?”<sup>140</sup> Not only did the South have a right to the day, but in its eyes they could assert ownership by default, as the

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<sup>138</sup> “Notes from the War,” *Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1861.

<sup>139</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>140</sup> “Independence Day,” *Lynchburg Virginian*, July 4, 1862.

North had abandoned its claim to it by failing to uphold the principles of the Founding Fathers.

The *Lynchburg Virginian* further claimed that while Southerners had a right to the day, they had conceded the loss of the national flag to the North: “Let it go, for it has been sadly prostituted and dishonored.”<sup>141</sup> Instead, the newspaper suggested the South preserve the principles and memories once symbolized by the flag. It was acceptable to abandon certain aspects of the Fourth of July as long as the South remained true to its original premise.

In 1862 The Charleston *Daily Courier* also addressed the issue of the ownership of the holiday. It again raised the fact that there were different facets to past commemorations of the Fourth of July. Because the day had been so firmly tied to honoring the old Union, the *Courier* recognized that for Southerners “it is sometimes difficult to bring ourselves to realize the propriety of its celebration as a National Anniversary. But let us bear in mind that we are now reasserting the principles of ’76 and that we are now maintaining against false and treacherous friends, the same principles of Constitutional Liberty for which our ancestors went to war against the British Crown.”<sup>142</sup>

The day was as much a national anniversary for the South as it was for the North. The latter had desecrated the day by ignoring the principles of the Founding Fathers. The *Richmond Dispatch* again questioned the Northern celebration of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. It

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> “Independence Day,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 4, 1862.

wondered what reason the North would have to honor the day, after trampling upon all the principles it represented.<sup>143</sup>

Other 1862 editorials, however, were hopeful that this Fourth of July would bring a change in the war. “To-morrow, July the 4<sup>th</sup>, is the anniversary of American Independence, declared in 1776, and of which the Northern half of the late Union are trying their best to rob us of. Perhaps, like their brother Hessians of a by-gone era, they may be on that day fleeing before the avenging arm of a roused and insulted people.”<sup>144</sup> This again followed the spirit that the efforts in 1776 were just the beginning, and the war begun in 1861 might finally secure the July 4 principles.

Still, the question of ownership of the holiday would continue to resurface. For the 1863 celebration in Georgia, the *Macon Weekly Telegraph* stated that many people felt secession ended the Southern right to celebrate the Fourth of July. Some perhaps figured the North would steal it from them anyway. The *Telegraph* protested: “The South made that holiday, and around it will always cluster some of the proudest reminiscences of her history ... In one word, we believe the Fourth of July belongs to the South, and she should keep it as a national holiday.”<sup>145</sup> The South would fight to retain the holiday, as it had fought the North for the two previous years.

The war, however, had changed the holiday for the South. As the *Charleston Daily Courier* explained, the intent of the Civil War was to finally secure the principles of self-government set forth during the American Revolution. While the North would continue celebrating Union and the Fourth of July, the day belonged to the South “in all its essential and permanent lessons and significance, and we intend so to claim and honor

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<sup>143</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1862.

<sup>144</sup> “Yesterday, July 2d,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 3, 1862.

<sup>145</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, July 4, 1863.

it. As to the parades and ceremonies of celebration which used to mark it in our city, they are gone, we trust, forever. The weather is too hot, and we have other duties and calls.”<sup>146</sup>

While Southerners were less inclined to commemorate the Fourth of July actively, the *Richmond Dispatch* wrote that the holiday was “still dear to the Southern people, and they prove their devotion to it by maintaining with their blood and their lives the rights and principles asserted by our fathers in ’76. The Yankees ... have desecrated both the day and the principles which it commemorates, and the very best way in which we can celebrate it is by whipping them.”<sup>147</sup>

Newspapers still described the Fourth of July in 1776 as representing the dawn of liberty, and they experienced regret that now its light could not be seen in the South.<sup>148</sup> Yet, there was still hope in the South. The *Lynchburg Virginian* declared: “The liberties for which so many of our noble heroes have sacrificed their lives in the last two years, shall be firmly established, the memories of ‘Independence Day,’ will be all the more dearer, and its re-baptism of blood will consecrate it anew in the hearts of the true countrymen of Washington and Jefferson.”<sup>149</sup> This rhetoric suggested that jubilant Fourth of July celebrations would resume once the South finally secured its independence.

Debate over the ownership of the holiday continued to recur each year in the South around the Fourth of July. Even in 1864, newspapers felt they still had to address the issue of whether or not the South had a right to celebrate the holiday. Since the

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<sup>146</sup> “The Day We Used to Celebrate,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>147</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>148</sup> “Remarks of Mr. Lining,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>149</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Lynchburg Virginian*, July 3, 1863.

Confederacy remained committed to the principles behind the Declaration of Independence, which the Fourth of July commemorates, Southern editors believed the South still had a claim to the day: “If the battle has to be fought over again, because the faithless people of the North themselves ignore the doctrines of the Declaration, there is no obligation devolved upon us, and no propriety in our abandoning the anniversary with all the glorious memories of Independence Day, to the people who occupy towards us the very position which the British nation held towards the colonies.”<sup>150</sup>

Newspaper editorials continued to assert the South’s right to the principles set forth by the Declaration of Independence and to the celebration of the Fourth of July. The *Charleston Daily Courier* contended: “Notwithstanding the war and the times, the day should not be forgotten – nay, on account of the war, it should be appropriately honored and observed so far as to impress on all minds anew and freshly the great lessons of the day and its history.”<sup>151</sup>

Southerners questioned how the Fourth of July could ever cease to excite the emotions of patriotism and pride in the hearts of Americans.<sup>152</sup> The Fourth of July was an inherent part of Southern culture, which they would not abandon during the Civil War. This conclusion was not reached lightly. Writers continued to debate the finer points of what the holiday represented to the South.

## Home Front Celebrations

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> “Siege of Charleston,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 2, 1864.

<sup>152</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Lynchburg Virginian*, July 5, 1864.

As seen in the 1861 editorial rhetoric of the Southern papers, there were conflicting views over whether or not the South had a right to celebrate the Fourth of July. The *New Orleans Delta* had written: “It was evident that the day had lost, for the time at least, its old odor of sanctity. The Southern mind is somewhat perplexed by a confusion of ideas when contemplating its origin and its associations.”<sup>153</sup>

This being the first Independence Day of the Civil War, the discourse and reconciliation over the holiday had not yet finalized. Because of this, many communities across the South had subdued celebrations, or had no celebrations at all. A Tennessean wrote to his newspaper that he had to check his almanac for the date, as there was “no gathering of the people, no procession, no tinselled military, no 4<sup>th</sup> of July readers and orators, no barbecues, nothing to remind one of the day we *used* to celebrate.”<sup>154</sup>

Coupled with this was an issue that would surround the Fourth of July commemorations on both sides of the war. The Civil War was a tragic time for the country; many people felt that it was out of place for them to celebrate when sons and fathers were dying in battle. A letter written in to a newspaper described that at home: “the movements of troops, the probabilities of battle here or there, form the staple of male and female talk. Chit-chat and small talk are out of place ... Fashion, folly, furbelows and flounces are not the order of the day. The ball room is deserted.”<sup>155</sup>

The war had changed society. The gravity of the conflict replaced the former lightheartedness. In Louisiana, Kate Stone recorded in her diary that she felt the holiday was only being celebrated because of tradition, rather than honoring the day itself, for it

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<sup>153</sup> “No Fourth of July,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 27, 1861.

<sup>154</sup> “Montvalesprings – Affairs in East Tennessee,” *Macon Telegraph*, July 11, 1861.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

would not be proper “to be celebrating a day of independence when we are fighting for our very existence.”<sup>156</sup>

This viewpoint coincided with the opinion that while now was not the time for celebration, once victory was at hand, and the fighting was done, the South could resume celebrating the Fourth as a holiday. From a Virginia plantation, Maria Louisa Fleet thought “the most dreary ‘4<sup>th</sup> of July’ I ever saw, we Southerners will not celebrate it any more but will celebrate the day forever afterward when we whip the Yankees.”<sup>157</sup>

Seeing the confusion among their readers, the *Richmond Dispatch* suggested to Virginians to “let everyone celebrate the day as may seem best to himself or herself, but let no one indulge too frequently in ‘bumpers,’ even though they be drunk to the memory of the Departed Union.”<sup>158</sup> Regardless of how the rest of the community celebrated the day, though, newspapers still recognized the holiday, banks closed, and there was a traditional suspension of regular business across the South.<sup>159</sup>

Some areas took the opposite view and saw the war as a reason to show strong Confederate support. Northern papers had insisted that the larger 1861 Fourth of July commemorations in the South must have been led by Northern sympathizers forcing the community to celebrate, for the editors did not understand how Southerners could accept certain aspects of the holiday and not others.<sup>160</sup> However, this was not the case, as large celebrations occurred in Southern cities without strong unionist ties.

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<sup>156</sup> Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge, 1955), 36.

<sup>157</sup> Benjamin R. Fleet, *A Virginia Plantation Family During the Civil War: Being the Journal of Benjamin Robert Fleet and Letters of His Family* (Lexington, 1962), 63-64.

<sup>158</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1861.

<sup>159</sup> Charles Minor Blackford, ed., *Memoirs of Life in and out of the Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (Lynchburg, 1996), 1:155.

<sup>160</sup> “No Fourth of July,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 27, 1861.

A passionate celebration in Augusta, Georgia provided an example of the general practice of observances of the Fourth of July in 1861 across the South: “Business is, in a great measure, suspended here to-day. Confederate flags are waving in all parts of the city, and one among the most splendid waves majestically over the office of the *Augusta Constitutionalist*.”<sup>161</sup>

In Halifax County, Va., citizens arranged a grand Fourth of July picnic in a grove outside town. A group of uniformed soldiers arrived with a band and flags proclaiming: “Our Fourth of July, in memory of ’76,” and “*Sic Semper Tyrannis, Liberty or Blood!*” After drilling and a picnic dinner, a local orator gave a speech and a group of veterans presented the young soldiers with a new cannon.<sup>162</sup> Citizens of nearby Amelia Springs described a procession of Confederate banners, flowers, and wreaths, followed by a night display of fireworks.<sup>163</sup>

Similarly, in Charleston, S.C., the town held a traditional Fourth of July celebration with church bells ringing, artillery giving a Confederate salute, and a cadet corps firing a salute in honor of the original thirteen colonies. Sarcastically, the *Charleston Daily Courier* observed: “The blockaders, at daybreak, also fired a salute of thirty-four guns, for eleven of which the Commander might have acted more consistently if he had saved his powder.”<sup>164</sup>

Citizens in Charleston enjoyed picnics, bands, and boat excursions throughout the day. However, the Charleston ’76 Association chose to dispense with its public oration,

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<sup>161</sup> “Fourth of July,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1861.

<sup>162</sup> “The Fourth in Halifax – Crops, &c,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 10, 1861.

<sup>163</sup> “The Fourth in Amelia Springs,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 12, 1861.

<sup>164</sup> “Fourth of July,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 6, 1861.



and instead celebrate on December 20 the anniversary of South Carolina's secession. The usual military parade was noticeably absent.<sup>165</sup>

Traditional military displays were often missing from these Southern celebrations. *The New York Times* suggested that it was "perhaps because they had not soldiers enough to make a respectable parade."<sup>166</sup> Indeed, while less than half of men in the North served in the army, four out of five white men of military age served in Confederate armies. This significantly changed the atmosphere of celebrations on the home front. At one Fourth of July celebration, crowds consisted almost entirely of "the fair sex."<sup>167</sup> However, some celebrations still managed to retain their military displays. In New Orleans in 1861, there was a military parade at Camp Lewis, followed by a review and a Fourth of July oration.<sup>168</sup> Richmond had a few hundred men paraded in clean gray uniforms.<sup>169</sup>

The war tore apart the nation and, in the process, changed the mood of Fourth of July celebrations. In addition to the lack of men, an air of sadness and regret often surrounded the holiday and affected the Fourth of July. In 1863 Kate Cumming reminisced from Tennessee: "What a glorious day this was once. Alas! How changed. It is now one of universal sorrow and gloom. If we could only visit the home of many North and South, what a picture of desolation would be presented!"<sup>170</sup>

An editorial in the *Richmond Dispatch* stated that while the Americans were eventually able to become friends with the British after the Revolution, "hatred of the North will be a legacy of future generations of the South."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> "Fourth of July in Charleston." *New York Times*, July 14, 1861.

<sup>167</sup> "The Fourth in Halifax – Crops, &c.," *Richmond Dispatch*, July 10, 1861.

<sup>168</sup> "The Fourth of July," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 16, 1861.

<sup>169</sup> "Our Richmond Correspondence," *Charleston Mercury*, July 8, 1861.

<sup>170</sup> Kate Cumming, *Kate: The Journal of a Confederate Nurse by Kate Cumming* (Baton Rouge, 1959), 113.

<sup>171</sup> "The Fourth of July," *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1863.

As the war continued, celebrations in the South shrank in size. Another 1863 newspaper notice described Augusta, Ga., as “painfully quiet on the 4<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>172</sup> Stores were closed, streets were deserted; other than the midday thirteen-gun salute and a few children with a drum in the streets, the Fourth of July was nonexistent.

Nevertheless, Southerners expressed a desire to continue commemorating the Fourth of July, both during and after the war. Kentuckian Edward O. Guerrant addressed the holiday itself: “How many sad & pleasing recollections of the past do you bring to our memory! But yet again we’ll vindicate your title & restore your time worn laurels – in the proud establishment of those birthrights whose declaration rendered you immortal.”<sup>173</sup>

Capt. Charles Blackford noted in 1863, “I hope we shall continue to celebrate the day for all time. It is a day of Virginia’s making. [Though] there was no attempt to celebrate it here except by a general suspension of business and the raising of the new Confederate States flag on the College hospital and firing a salute.”<sup>174</sup> A mother in Florida also observed, “the anniversary of American Independence – Oh that it might be celebrated by the acknowledgment of the Independence of the S. Confederacy.”<sup>175</sup>

Regardless of whether Southerners were in the mood to celebrate the day or not, almost all agreed that it was inappropriate for the North to celebrate the day. In Savannah, Ga., Josephine Habersham expressed dismay that “the *insolent Yankees* in our neighborhood are firing their guns in honor of *the day!* Little do *they* know or appreciate

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<sup>172</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 10, 1863.

<sup>173</sup> Edward O. Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 114-15.

<sup>174</sup> Blackford, ed., *Memoirs of Life*, 2:59.

<sup>175</sup> Arch Frederic Blakey, Ann Smith Lainhart, Winston Bryan Stephens, Jr., eds., *Rose Cottage Chronicles: Civil War Letters of the Bryant Stephens Families of North Florida* (Gainesville, 1998), 123.

the precious *boon of Liberty* left us by our fathers on that glorious day, 1776!”<sup>176</sup> This transition in the mood of Southern home front celebrations - from gaiety to solemnity - was likewise present in the war front celebrations.

## War Front Celebrations

In army camps and on the battlefield, the Fourth of July had special significance for the Confederacy. In 1861, while en route to Camp Ashland, Va., on July 4, a soldier noted: “There was a very patriotic demonstration of the citizens of this county on the road-side ... the fair daughters of Hanover showered lavishly the most fragrant bouquets” upon the soldiers.<sup>177</sup>

At Fort Powhatan, Va., Fourth of July ceremonies began with the reading of the Declaration of Independence (a practice that reflected the South’s perspective on what the holiday represented). A reading of the secession ordinance and other addresses and orations often followed this.<sup>178</sup>

Robert Walker recalled an 1861 Fourth of July celebration that he and other soldiers of the 12<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry attended. “The Glorious Fourth of July was celebrated in Ante-Bellum style with a big barn dance, attended by the devotees of Terpsichore from the surrounding country, as well as from Fulton, Kentucky and other nearby towns. One wedding resulted from this barn dance foolishness.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Josephine C. Habersham, *Ebb Tide: As Seen Through the Diary of Josephine Clay Habersham, 1863* (Athens, 1958), 34-35.

<sup>177</sup> “From Camp Ashland.” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 8, 1861.

<sup>178</sup> “The Fourth at Fort Powhatan,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 8, 1861.

<sup>179</sup> Robert Joseph Walker Matthews, “Reminiscences of the Civil War (1861-1865),” <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mscivilw/account.htm> (accessed Apr. 21, 2006).

Meanwhile, at Camp Pickens, near Manassas Junction, while the typical holiday festivities were absent, the soldiers individually honored the day. “Many a silent vow went up to Heaven that the remembrance of the ‘glorious Fourth’ should not be lost to us.”<sup>180</sup> In the spirit of the day, soldiers at Camp Pickens refused to drill, and instead had a full-dress parade around the encampment. Officers later arranged a dinner catered by one of the corporals.<sup>181</sup>

As had soldiers in the North, Confederate servicemen often commented on the feasts (or lack thereof) provided for them on the Fourth of July. In 1862 a regiment dined traditional barbecue, which was followed by speeches and “good apple brandy to drink.”<sup>182</sup> While Bragg’s army was in retreat in 1863, a soldier commented on the day’s meal. “We drew rations at this bridge, having fasted during the day, and on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at that! Our feast was not the dandiest for a raw bacon and cloggy bread; none were fastidious, however.” The same writer later described how soldiers “celebrated the night of the glorious Fourth in silence and in slumber, and not a drum was heard to awaken in memory the lively scenes of barbecues, celebrations and torch light processions.”<sup>183</sup>

At Vicksburg, before the 1863 surrender, the commissary had distributed the last rations of beef weeks earlier. He now issued a half-pound of mule to the soldiers, to which Major Simons remarked that it was a novel way to commemorate the holiday.<sup>184</sup>

The war had altered the mood and the content of Southern celebrations in the army, as had been seen in the celebrations on the home front. One observer noted in

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<sup>180</sup> “The Fourth at Camp Pickens – The Comet, &c.,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 8, 1861.

<sup>181</sup> “The Fourth at Manassas Junction,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 6, 1861.

<sup>182</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis, 1943), 168.

<sup>183</sup> “The Retreat of Bragg’s Army,” *The Charleston Mercury*, July 22, 1863.

<sup>184</sup> Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 94.

1863 that “our celebration of this day is more serious than in days gone by. Our military have no time for dress-parades and barbecues.”<sup>185</sup>

A private of the 16<sup>th</sup> Mississippi observed on July 4, 1862: “Everything [was] quiet, no one seems to think that today was once an observed anniversary.”<sup>186</sup> While in the federal prison on Johnson’s Island, Edward Drummond complained that the day was the “dullest 4<sup>th</sup> that I have ever spent.”<sup>187</sup>

The following year, Edmund Patterson described the holiday from his position packed into a boxcar headed to a different Federal prison, and stated how “men of the North tell us that our cause is a doomed one, that the populous North by sacrificing man for man will eventually exterminate the Southern people. Cool calculating murder.”<sup>188</sup> While Patterson was convinced the South would eventually prevail as their forefathers had, he certainly was in no mood for celebrating.

However, in the army, the Fourth of July became a boon to Southern soldiers in other ways. In 1862, ten soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Alabama escaped from a Federal prison near Springfield, Ill. At one point, they managed to pass themselves off as “Union soldiers that had been home on a Fourth of July furlough.”<sup>189</sup> In 1864, Ellen Renshaw House heard that on July 3, Confederate Gen. Jubal Early had surprised the enemy at Martinsburg, captured a number of soldiers and procured a Fourth of July dinner.<sup>190</sup>

Similarly, near Harpers Ferry that year, Henry Beck of the 5<sup>th</sup> Alabama reported driving

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<sup>185</sup> Judith M. McGuire, *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War* (New York, 1972), 226.

<sup>186</sup> Robert G. Evans, ed., *The 16<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry: Civil War Letters and Reminiscences* (Jackson, 2002), 90.

<sup>187</sup> Edward W. Drummond, *A Confederate Yankee: The Journal of Edward William Drummond, A Confederate Soldier from Maine* (Knoxville, 2004), 80.

<sup>188</sup> Edmund D. Patterson, *Yankee Rebel: The Civil War Journal of Edmund DeWitt Patterson* (Chapel Hill, 1966), 119.

<sup>189</sup> “Narrative of Escaped Prisoners.” *Macon Telegraph*, September 24, 1862.

<sup>190</sup> Ellen R. House, *A Very Violent Rebel: The Civil War Diary of Ellen Renshaw House* (Knoxville, 1996), 136.

the enemy from Bolivar Heights. Upon entering the town they learned, “the Yankees had made great preparations for a 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration. Our boys destroyed their fun however by giving them a little skirmish. They had found all the citizens in the neighborhood invited to participate of their delicacies. Our boys found any quantity of eatables & delicacies such as brandy, whiskey, candy, ice cream, cakes, etc.”<sup>191</sup>

Other Confederate soldiers, like their Northern counterparts, looked forward to the Fourth of July as a day when fighting might be more intensified. A sergeant in the 29<sup>th</sup> Georgia wrote to his wife from the line of battle: “We thought this morning being the 4<sup>th</sup> of July we would have a hopping time with them, but they seem to keep their proper distance.”<sup>192</sup>

## **Waning Southern Celebrations**

On July 4, 1863, the *Richmond Dispatch* reminisced that in past celebrations, alcohol fueled the patriotic sentiments of Southerners, and everyone happily honored the nation. However, “the day is now changed. We have no holiday. The ruthless enemy who has trampled upon every principle and right commemorated by the day itself, given no intermission for festive enjoyments, were we so inclined.” The *Dispatch* did, however, assert that the Fourth of July was “still dear to Southern people; and they prove their devotion to it by maintaining with their blood and their lives the rights and principles asserted by our fathers in ’76.” While the continued fight against the Yankees

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<sup>191</sup> G. Ward Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D: Diaries by the Greensboro Guards, Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, Army of Northern Virginia* (Athens, 2003), 297.

<sup>192</sup> John W. Hagan, *Confederate Letters of John W. Hagan* (Athens, 1978), 46.

prevented traditional celebrations, the newspaper thought that the best way to honor the day would be to strike a victory against the North in “the memory of the signers of the Declaration.”<sup>193</sup>

On July 4, 1863, as the editors were writing this piece, the city of Vicksburg surrendered after a six-week siege. As mentioned earlier, that Fourth of July also marked the beginning of Robert E. Lee’s retreat from defeat at Gettysburg, and the Union victory at the Battle of Helena, Ark., which provided them with an important access to the Mississippi River.

After the military losses of Vicksburg, Gettysburg, Helena, and Port Hudson, La., which were all centered on the Fourth of July in 1863, the optimism that had fueled the Confederacy and its commemoration of Independence Day began to wane. On July 2, 1864, the *Richmond Dispatch* observed that the Confederacy lost Vicksburg the previous year, and in the current year the North was threatening Richmond. “With the capture of Richmond, the war is to end, the principal rebels be executed, the plantations and negroes of the South pass to Northern proprietors, its mighty States dwindle into subjugated territories.”<sup>194</sup> It was not a time for celebration. The Fourth of July was a reminder of crushing 1863 defeats.

An article in the *London Times* questioned whether, “with the history of the last three years before them, can any Northern orator drag up against these tyrannies of the past and not feel that, with a changed name, the fable is being told of himself?”<sup>195</sup> The *Richmond Dispatch* even suggested that Northerners should only be allowed to read the

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<sup>193</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 4, 1863.

<sup>194</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 2, 1864.

<sup>195</sup> “The ‘Fourth of July’ – British Historical Reminiscences and Predictions of the London Times,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, July 29, 1864.

Declaration of Independence in the winter, when temperatures dipped below freezing.<sup>196</sup>

As the spirit of the Confederacy deteriorated, Southerners could not understand how the North could continue to lay claim to the holiday.

The South could not abandon its entitlement to the Fourth of July. The Fourth of July originated in Virginia, by the actions of Virginians such as Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, “to add new glories to the 4<sup>th</sup> of July by crushing Virginia forever to the dust is a conception which could enter none but the brains of a ‘peculiar people.’”<sup>197</sup> Recognizing that the Confederacy could actually end up losing the war only made celebrating the Fourth of July, and the principles upon which it was founded, more tragic.

Memories of the success of the first revolution were much more upsetting with the resulting loss of the Confederacy in this second revolution. Still, the South recognized the day, just in a more muted and somber way than prior commemorations. On July 3, 1864, John Beauchamp Jones recorded in his diary that while he expected Grant to set off fireworks in honor of the anniversary of Vicksburg’s surrender, he still could not fathom how the North could “feel any veneration for the day of Independence for the ‘rebels’ of 1776, without sympathy for the ‘rebels’ of 1864, struggling also for their independence.”<sup>198</sup>

The day awakened a patriotic fever in the hearts of Southerners, a Tennessee woman declared, even though the descendants of those who fought “shoulder to shoulder

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<sup>196</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *Richmond Dispatch*, July 2, 1864.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary* (New York, 1958), 399.



with the Fathers of southern freedom” in the American Revolution were now fighting against Southern independence.<sup>199</sup>

By the war’s end, the South had basically abandoned the commemoration of the Fourth. On July 4, 1865, the *Macon Telegraph* declared, “our people are in no condition to engage in hilarity and festivity. Where plenty once smiled upon us, we now see the impoverishment and exhaustion resulting from four years war.” Even more vividly, the *Telegraph* described the country. “We see the land draped in mourning, the maimed soldier hobbles through the streets, the cry of the widow, and the orphan is heard. Many, very many, sleep their last sleep, and will never again celebrate this anniversary of American independence.”<sup>200</sup>

In Charleston, stores and businesses remained closed on the Fourth, and no place could sell “ales, wines or liquors” between sunset on July 3 and sunrise on July 5.<sup>201</sup> The editors of the *Charleston Courier* announced their intent to celebrate the day among the people of Charleston. However, before the war the *Courier* was not a secessionist newspaper, and now its editors’ take on the day was not shared by the rest of Charleston. A doctor observed that the day in Charleston was as silent as the Sabbath. He contrasted it to what he felt must have been taking place in the North, “where, from midnight to midnight again, the air is filled with rejoicing and gunpowder and especially *this year*, how everything in the free north will go mad with joy over the day ... There isn’t much heart here for rejoicing!”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Eliza Fain, *Sanctified Trial: The Diary of Eliza Rhea Anderson Fain, a Confederate Woman in East Tennessee* (Knoxville, 2004), 195.

<sup>200</sup> “The Fourth,” *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, July 4, 1865.

<sup>201</sup> *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 3, 1865.

<sup>202</sup> “Independence Day,” *Charleston Daily Courier*, July 4, 1865; Hawks, *Doctor’s Civil War*, 205-6.

Meanwhile, sailors aboard the CSS *Shenandoah* were at sea and did not know about the war's end. On July 4, 1865, Lt. William C. Whittle, Jr., questioned the ownership of the Fourth of July. Surely, he thought, Northerners did not have a right to it, for they had been waging a war for four years in an effort to steal from the South "the very independence, the declaration of which 90 years ago, made this a day to be gloried in."

If anyone had a right to the day, it would be Southerners still fighting to maintain the rights set down by the Founding Fathers. "But," Lieutenant Whittle wrote, "if such a thing be possible and these wicked men be successful, I for one would regret from the depth of my heart that we ever knew a 4<sup>th</sup> of July."<sup>203</sup> These remarks were in sharp contrast to the subdued celebrations of 1865, showing what an effect the final losses of the Civil War had on the morale of the Confederacy,

Whittle's last comment also proved to be the most prophetic. The city of Vicksburg would not celebrate the Fourth of July again until 1945.<sup>204</sup> Some families, whose ancestors fought in those critical 1863 battles, would not celebrate the day until the mid-1970's, more than a century afterwards.<sup>205</sup> For most white Southerners, the desire to commemorate the Fourth of July ended with the end of the Confederacy.

## Conclusions

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<sup>203</sup> William C. Whittle, Jr., *The Voyage of the CSS Shenandoah: A Memorable Cruise* (Tuscaloosa, 2005), 173.

<sup>204</sup> "Vicksburg Surrenders," *Time Magazine*, July 9, 1945.

<sup>205</sup> Steve Elliott, "Co. I, 46<sup>th</sup> Alabama Inf. Rgt." Rootsweb, June 10, 2003, <http://archiver.rootsweb.com/th/read/ALHENRY/2003-06/1055268405> (January 11, 2007).

At the start of the Civil War, obvious questions needed to be asked in the South: Can the Confederacy celebrate the founding of the nation with which they had just severed ties, and if so, how would they celebrate the day? This question was so important that Southern newspapers revisited the issue on each Fourth of July throughout the war. The editorial consensus was that yes, the holiday could (and should) be celebrated, as the day commemorated the ideals set down by the Founding Fathers, rather than commemorating the nation itself.

On the home front, the Civil War brought changes to the observance of the Fourth of July. The day was often tinged with remorse and regret, for how could citizens have a jubilant celebration while soldiers were dying in battle? Still, celebrations continued, though often at a smaller scale than during pre-war times. Southerners felt they still owned the holiday, and if now was not the time for grand celebrations, they would rejoice again as soon as they had won the war.

On the battlefields and in the army camps, Confederate soldiers also took note of the holiday. Dress parades and orations were common, and soldiers often reminisced about past Fourth of July feasts. As the war continued, celebrations at the front took a more somber note. Soldiers often wished to commemorate the day with a sound victory.

Victory, however, escaped the Confederacy. With the number of painful Confederate losses around the Fourth of July in 1863, the holiday took on an even more dismal tone. With the death of the Confederacy in sight, white Southerners were in no mood to celebrate. As the Civil War ended, so too did the Southern commemoration of the Fourth of July.

# COMPETING VISIONS OF AMERICA

## American Culture in the North and South

In analyzing the differences between the North and the South, historian David M. Potter came to the conclusion that the two sides were only separated by minor dissimilarities.<sup>206</sup> Conflicting values, rather than conflicting cultures, led to secession. The South had a distinctive culture, but one that was not fully separate from that of the North.<sup>207</sup> In fact, Potter claimed, “there was probably more cultural homogeneity in American society on the eve of secession than there had been when the Union was formed, or than there would be a century later.”<sup>208</sup> As proof of this, Potter cites the fact that after the war American nationalism was still strong enough to revitalize the country quickly after being torn apart for four years.<sup>209</sup>

Although the South had seceded from the Union, the creation of the Confederacy did not lead to the creation of a different nationality.<sup>210</sup> Both sides of the war saw themselves as Americans. As such, they felt a connection to the founding of their nation and to its commemoration during the Fourth of July. However, a subtle distinction exists: those Americans in the North and those in the South chose slightly different aspects of the Fourth of July to commemorate. Each side felt that it was being true to America and

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<sup>206</sup> David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York, 1976), 32-34.

<sup>207</sup> Potter, *Sectional Conflict*, 68-69.

<sup>208</sup> Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 472.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>210</sup> Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still, Jr., *The Elements of Confederate Defeat: Nationalism, War Aims, and Religion* (Athens, 1988), 31.

to the ideals set forth by the Founding Fathers. Since this was the case, both saw the other side as being traitors.

These competing visions of America produced the illusion that the differences between the North and the South were insurmountable. Emory Thomas declared that even though the actual differences were a matter of “shade and degree,” the South believed it had a separate Southern culture.<sup>211</sup> By highlighting this difference, the divide between the North and the South in essence briefly created two separate American cultures. The differing interpretations of America, as seen through the commemoration of the Fourth of July, would only be reconciled with the end of the Civil War.

## **Northern View Remains**

With the end of the Civil War, the Union victory over the Confederacy reaffirmed all of the aspects of the Northern vision of America. Crucial to the identity of Northerners were the ideas of strength in unity, and the faith that once more the nation would be secure under the American flag. Forcing back into the Union all of the states that had seceded showed the strength and commitment of Americans to having an unbroken Union. Rather than reproaching the South, Northern editorials urged that Southerners should be “welcomed back to their rightful share of the national heritage.”<sup>212</sup> Victory over the Confederacy meant that the Northern vision of America would continue.

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<sup>211</sup> Thomas, *Revolutionary Experience*, 20-21.

<sup>212</sup> “The Celebration of the Glorious Fourth of July,” *The New York Herald*, July 3, 1865.

It was even suggested to name the day on which General Lee surrendered to General Grant the “Fourth of July, Jr.”<sup>213</sup>

The war also would bring some changes to the celebration of the Fourth of July. On the day in 1865, *The New York Herald* commented that instead of canonizing national figures, such as Washington, Lincoln and Grant, “we group all our worthies together and perpetuate their fame by a grand celebration of the national birthday – the Fourth of July.”<sup>214</sup> With the result of the war, Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant had joined the Founding Fathers as iconic heroes of America.

As the Civil War reaffirmed Northern beliefs, it is no surprise that the Fourth of July became tied to the events of the Civil War. On July 4, 1865, the citizens of Gettysburg laid the cornerstone to the Soldier’s Monument at the national cemetery.<sup>215</sup> In 1866, Philadelphia organized their Fourth of July commemoration around the presentation of state battle flags.<sup>216</sup> Also that year, Nashville celebrated the Fourth of July where General George H. Thomas’s cavalry charge took place at the Battle of Nashville.<sup>217</sup> At a soldiers’ celebration of the Fourth of July in Salem, Ill., the crowd reached over 25,000 people.<sup>218</sup> For decades, later commemorations would center on honoring veterans, raising money for war orphans, and setting up war memorials.

The *Daily National Intelligencer* urged Americans, secure in their victory, to cultivate an American spirit across the country: “We must do that which Washington and Lincoln so earnestly and affectionately advised; we must frown down every demagogue

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<sup>213</sup> “The Fourth of July, Jr.,” *The Friend*, July 1, 1865.

<sup>214</sup> “The Celebration of the Glorious Fourth of July,” *The New York Herald*, July 3, 1865.

<sup>215</sup> “The Gettysburg Celebration,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1865.

<sup>216</sup> “The Celebration,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1866.

<sup>217</sup> “From Nashville,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 2, 1866.

<sup>218</sup> “The Soldiers’ Celebration,” *The New Hampshire Sentinel*, July 5, 1866.

who would make sectional strife, in any form, between us; and we must make haste to bind up the *nation's* wounds.”<sup>219</sup> In binding the nation’s wounds, Northerners hoped Southerners would embrace their vision of America.

## **Southern View Fades**

In 1863, Edward O. Guerrant, of Kentucky wrote an obituary for the Union, which showed that even with the death of freedom, the ideals of the Fourth of July would live on in the South. “4<sup>th</sup> July 1776. Freedom’s Birth Day, on this side of the Waters of the Great Sea! Died on 4h March 1861 – aged 85 years! Left one heir & Glorious offspring, - in Dixie! ... We will cling with grateful veneration to its hallowed recollections, & revive its spirit in our patriotic actions!”<sup>220</sup> However, by the end of the war and the loss of the Confederacy, the Southern spirit in the Fourth of July died as well.

The Southern vision of America focused on the idea of continuing the work of the Founding Fathers. The Civil War was a direct sequel to the American Revolution. Southerners felt like they were still fighting for their independence. They sought to protect a vision of the American idea of independence. Yet as the war shifted and the losses mounted after July 1863, this vision and the hope for freedom began to fade. While the South may have asserted their right to celebrate the Fourth of July, the defeat of the Confederacy was also a defeat of their will to honor the founding of America.

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<sup>219</sup> “This Anniversary of American Independence,” *The Daily National Intelligencer*, July 4, 1865.

<sup>220</sup> Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 301-2.

*The Richmond Dispatch* wrote in 1866 how the times had changed for citizens in the South. “The Southern people, feeling that they have no part in the government of the country, have little disposition to participate in the national jubilees.”<sup>221</sup>

The *Lynchburg Virginian* declared that Virginia had lost its freedom as a result of the war. “We are again united, but when shall we be the free and happy people that once we were?”<sup>222</sup> The Southern vision of America could not survive the death of the Confederacy.

However, as their views and hopes of freedom were fading, another was emerging in the freed black population in the South.

## **Freed Black View Emerges**

If the ex-Confederates chose not embrace the Fourth of July, the newly freed black population would. Beginning with the Union occupation of Southern cities during the Civil War, blacks began to identify strongly with the holiday. In 1863, the same year that the celebration by white Southerners began to wane, Col. Robert Gould Shaw attended a Fourth of July celebration of blacks in Morris Island, S.C. He was quite impressed by a colored preacher from Baltimore. “Can you imagine anything more wonderful than a coloured-Abolitionist meeting on a South Carolina plantation? Here were collected all of the freed slaves on this Island listening to the most ultra abolitionist

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<sup>221</sup> “The Fourth of July in Richmond,” *The Richmond Dispatch*, July 6, 1866.

<sup>222</sup> “The Fourth of July,” *The Lynchburg Virginian*, July 4, 1865.



speeches, that could be made; while two years ago, their masters were still here, the lords of the soil & of them.”<sup>223</sup>

That same year, near Vicksburg, “agents of Freedmen’s Relief Associations, officers of colored regiments, and teachers of contrabands” held a grand celebration at Jefferson Davis’s family mansion. Over a hundred guests arrived to join an equal number of blacks dressed in their holiday finest. The Declaration of Independence was read; many wondered if “these ‘self-evident’ truths were ever expressed before publicly in this locality,” and the former servants rejoiced in their emancipation.<sup>224</sup>

Samuel Pickens, formerly of the 5<sup>th</sup> Alabama, recorded that the day was a great celebration for the Yankees and the blacks in his community. Salutes were fired at the military posts, and the Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation were read to the blacks. Pickens complained after a large barbecue that the road was filled with Yankees and blacks returning to the countryside.<sup>225</sup>

The *Daily National Intelligencer*, in Washington D.C., noted in 1864 that on the Fourth of July, “one of the most noticed and noticeable features was the long processions of the largely-increased colored population.”<sup>226</sup> The following year, the only public celebration of the Fourth of July in Washington was by the freed blacks of the National Monument Association. They were working to raise money for a monument to honor Abraham Lincoln.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Robert G. Shaw, *Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw* (Athens, 1992), 373.

<sup>224</sup> “Fourth of July at the House that Jeff Built,” *Liberator*, July 29, 1864.

<sup>225</sup> Hubbs, *Voices from Company D*, 390.

<sup>226</sup> “The Late National Anniversary,” *The Daily National Intelligencer*, July 6, 1864.

<sup>227</sup> “Celebration of the Fourth,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 1865.

In 1865 The *Liberator* noted that for the first time blacks could celebrate the holiday without the chains of slavery. “We have an interest in the undying legacy of our forefathers; we have a right to ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ and by God’s help, we will maintain these rights.”<sup>228</sup> In Louisville, Ky., blacks rejoiced in a grand Fourth of July celebration of slavery’s demise.

Virginians noticed in 1866 that the freedmen and freedwomen of Richmond marked the Fourth of July. “They took complete possession of the day and of the city; the highways, the byways, and Capitol Square, were black with moving masses of darkeys.”<sup>229</sup> Except for the Federal troops, the commemoration of the Fourth of July in the South lay solely in the hands of the black population.

Almost four million slaves had become emancipated by the end of the Civil War. The contrast between the situation of blacks in America during the first Fourth of July of the Civil War, and the last of the Civil War sparked a new, hopeful vision of America in the black population. Stressing the ideas of liberty and freedom, this view of America would build momentum across the South in the years after the Civil War.

## **Competing Visions of America**

During the Fourth of July throughout the Civil War, Americans on both sides of the war took the time to express and to celebrate their visions of America. The Fourth of July created an opportunity once a year for Americans to think about the future of their

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<sup>228</sup> “Celebration of the Fourth of July in Louisville, KY,” *The Liberator*, July 21, 1865.

<sup>229</sup> “The Fourth of July in Richmond,” *The Richmond Dispatch*, July 6, 1866.

country, and to honor the achievements of the past. The Civil War gave immediacy to these commemorative recollections, and the resulting dialogue reinforced their perspectives.

While North and South both thought of themselves as Americans, they clung to competing visions of America. The commemoration of the Fourth of July illuminated the differences in these views of Northerners and Southerners. Civil War America became divided by attachments to different aspects of the concept of America. Tragically though, these two visions could not be reconciled.

According to the North, America's strength lay in the union of her states. Secession went against this perspective, and the Northern vision of America could not be achieved until the Confederacy rejoined the Union. For the South, however, America was about liberty and independence. Southerners sought to protect this through secession. With the defeat of the Confederacy, there was no way to maintain this view of America. However, the freed black population then took up the buoyant celebration of liberty.

Though the Civil War commemorations of the Fourth of July revealed these competing visions of America, the country's eventual reunification after the war showed that Americans were not far removed from each other. Americans on both sides of the war were still Americans at heart. They shared more in common with each other than it seemed at the time. Just as the Civil War left a lasting mark on the nation, it also transformed how Americans commemorated the founding of their country. The discourse and celebrations on both sides of the war not only show how the Fourth of July was

celebrated, but they also give a greater understanding of Northern and Southern attitudes toward America and one another.

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