

True Blue: White Unionists in the Deep South during the Civil War and
Reconstruction, 1860-1880

Clayton J. Butler

M.A., University of Virginia, 2016
B.A., Pomona College, 2010

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Corcoran Department of History

University of Virginia

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For My Mother and Sister

And in Memory of My Father

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Introduction

In the early 1990s, a friend of Tennessean Glenda McWhirter Todd asked her if she would care to join the United Daughters of the Confederacy. “Sure,” Todd responded, “my great, great grandfather, Andrew Ferrier McWhirter, from Marion County, Alabama, was in the Civil War.” Excited at the prospect, she set out to educate herself about her assumed Confederate heritage. To her “surprise” and “dismay,” she learned her ancestor had actually fought for the Union and was buried in the national cemetery in Nashville. Notwithstanding her dismay at learning of her non-Confederate ancestry, Todd began to conduct more research. Andrew McWhirter, service records revealed, had served in Company K of the First Alabama Cavalry (U.S.), along with two of his sons – George and Thomas. Todd had known none of this, but decided to keep digging and eventually compiled a number of voluminous resources on the First Alabama Cavalry into an amateur history of the unit titled *Homage to Patriotism*, which she published in 1999.¹

In spite of her ambivalent reaction to learning the truth of her family history, Todd sought to bring her ancestor and those like him to light. She hoped to spread awareness of the presence of Unionists and Unionism in parts of the South where many people, she had good reason to believe, presumed them not to have existed. Recovery of the history and memory of regiments such as the First Alabama provides a new angle on the Union cause for scholars of the American Civil War. White southern Unionists illustrate better than most of their contemporaries the terms of attachment to the Union in

¹ Glenda McWhirter Todd, *First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A.—Homage to Patriotism* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books Inc., 1999), v; Compiled service records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Alabama, First Cavalry, M276, roll 6, RG94, NARA, “McWhirter, Andrew F” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/109781366>]. Hereafter cited as *CSR, Alabama, First Cavalry*.

nineteenth-century America and its traction as a concept worth fighting for, one that could find steadfast adherents even in the heart of the Confederacy.²

In the Deep South, unconditional white Unionists composed an undeniably small percentage of the total population. Yet an examination of their aims, expectations, and experiences – as well as the place they occupied in the minds of those in both the United States and the Confederacy – helps to shed light on some of the most crucial issues of the entire era. Relatively few in number compared to pro-Confederate neighbors or even their Upper South counterparts, Deep South Unionists as a group possessed a remarkable economic, political, and cultural diversity that makes their wartime alignment in support of the preservation of the Union all the more interesting, and their subsequent postwar divergence all the more instructive. During the Civil War era, Unionists took on a symbolic importance out of proportion to their limited numbers. But, as the case of Glenda Todd illustrates, the intervening years extinguished almost all awareness of their existence. These particular Unionists, long unacknowledged and still understudied, can teach contemporary scholars much about the Civil War and Reconstruction.

This dissertation engages several central questions. Who were the white Unionists of the Deep South? Why did they take their Unionist stand? How did they do so? How were they perceived by people in the Confederacy and the United States? And what happened to them as a result both during and after the war? To address these questions, this dissertation focuses on three Union regiments recruited from among the white residents of the Deep South, individuals who passed what historian Carl Degler called the

² Todd passed away in 2017.

“severest test” of their Unionism by volunteering to enlist in the army.³ The First Louisiana Cavalry, First Alabama Cavalry, and Thirteenth Tennessee Union Cavalry – also known as Bradford’s Battalion – served as the point of embarkation for my research.⁴ In a historical moment of layered and shifting national identities which scholars continue to analyze, a white southerner donning a blue Federal uniform represented the most unambiguous expression of national allegiance one could make.⁵ Profiling these soldiers, their backgrounds and communities, and following the various threads of evidence that they provided offered valuable insight into the motivations, expectations, and experiences of white Unionists throughout the Deep South.⁶

Though not representative of every manifestation of Deep South Unionism, these regiments – whose base of recruitment and areas of service extended beyond their geographic appellations – tell the fullest possible story. And a number of fascinating stories emerge in the telling—such as that of Henry Bullard Taliaferro, Sherman’s only loyal pupil at the Louisiana state military academy, who joined the First Louisiana Cavalry; his father, James Govan Taliaferro, who went from slaveholder in 1860 to president of the radical Louisiana state constitutional convention in 1867; Algernon Sidney Badger, who ended the war as colonel of the First Louisiana Cavalry and became

³ Carl N. Degler, *The Other South: Southern Dissenters In The Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 174.

⁴ The Union military raised several white infantry regiments as well – in Louisiana and Arkansas for example – but favored deploying southern Unionists as cavalry because of their aptitude for scouting and knowledge of the country that northern soldiers could not match.

⁵ Richard Nelson Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers From the Confederacy* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 139-147; John A. Hedrick to Benjamin S. Hedrick, July 27, 1862; August 24, 1862. Benjamin Sherwood Hedrick Papers #325, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁶ See David M. Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 67, no. 4, 1962, 924 – 950; Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13; Judkin Browning, *Shifting Loyalties: The Union Occupation of Eastern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.

chief of the New Orleans Metropolitan Police during Reconstruction and fought side by side with James Longstreet against the White League at the Battle of Liberty Place in 1875; George Rudolph Snelling, a native Georgian who served as one of Sherman's guides on the March to the Sea and who went out of his way to destroy his hated secessionist uncle's cotton gin; his unit, the entire First Alabama Cavalry, in which Snelling rose to captain and whose colonel George Eliphaz Spencer became the state's carpetbag senator in 1868 and served until 1879; and William Frederick Bradford, whose battalion of white west Tennesseans faced the murderous wrath of Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederates at the battle of Fort Pillow and who, for the crime of fighting in league with African Americans, received summary execution at the hands of Forrest's men.

Beyond their individually compelling stories, Deep South Unionists possessed broader symbolic importance as a group. Partisans in the United States and the Confederacy thought and wrote about them a considerable amount over the course of the conflict, often projecting onto them in ways that revealed their respective hopes and apprehensions. To northerners, they represented the tangible nucleus of Union support within the rebelling states on which Reconstruction policies could be built. White southern Union soldiers made up the vanguard of wartime reconstruction, and symbolized the government's efforts to harmonize the military and political elements of reunion. Both northern Democrats and Republicans rhetorically enlisted Unionists to their side during the war and framed their platforms and policies as designed for their benefit.⁷ To Confederates, these Deep South Unionists represented Tories, traitors to the

⁷ See Elizabeth R. Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 6.

political ideals of the Confederacy and, most important as the war went on, to the white race. Unionists' wartime allegiance and service to the United States then became an important touchstone during the political chaos and realignment of Reconstruction, a period when many of these veterans played an important role.

* * * * *

For much of the twentieth century, the pervasiveness of the Lost Cause historiographical narrative discouraged many people from looking for Unionists in the heart of the Confederacy. The Unionists' marginal status in contemporary popular memory reflects their minimal place in academic writing on Civil War over the long term.⁸ Mainstream scholars of the mid twentieth century tended to explain away instances of both upcountry and urban Unionism within the Confederacy as anomalous pockets of ignorance and political apathy. A fundamental belief in the past racial unity of the "Old South" guided authoritative historians such as Walter L. Fleming, who thus treated Unionists – whose presence challenged this article of faith – with derision.⁹

Where concerted Unionism did appear in the literature, class tended to serve as the key explanatory factor. Resistance to the Confederacy born of resentment toward the slaveholding aristocracy figured prominently in the many analyses, and does contain an important grain of truth.¹⁰ In general, though, scholars tended to characterize Unionist individuals and communities as more aberrant than symptomatic of any larger social trends. Not until the 1970s did Paul D. Escott revitalize the internal-collapse argument of

⁸ As Barton A. Myers points out, for example, no Unionists feature anywhere in Tony Horwitz's 1998 Pulitzer-winning book *Confederates in the Attic*, a bellwether of late twentieth century popular memory of the Civil War. See Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy: North Carolina's Unionists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2-3.

⁹ Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Cleveland: The A.H. Clark Company, 1911), 114.

¹⁰ Carl H. Moneyhon, "Disloyalty and Class Consciousness In Southwestern Arkansas, 1862-1865." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 3, 1993, 230-32, 241-42.

Charles W. Ramsdell and begin to popularize the idea that class conflict on the home front had lain at the heart of the Confederacy's ultimate capitulation.¹¹ Since then, the historiographical current in Civil War scholarship has moved steadily toward the internal-weakness explanation for Confederate defeat. Southern Unionists who occupied the extreme end of the spectrum of class discontent began to garner increased attention from historians as agents of the Confederacy's supposed collapse from within. White southerners who refused to back the Confederacy, or indeed actively contributed to the Union war effort, served as evidence of the fundamental fissures in the Confederate body politic, latent from the beginning of the conflict and evident as early as the secession crisis. The failure of the Confederacy to secure total white support across class and gender lines, some scholars contend, doomed the southern nation-building project from the start.¹² This historiographical trend represents a reversal of the Lost Cause school of thought. Rather than a united South succumbing to overwhelming northern resources, many historians increasingly contend that divisions within the Confederacy contributed decisively to its downfall, with northern military superiority largely out of the picture. This inversion represents the culmination of years of revision to the formerly dominant way of conceptualizing the South during the Civil War and has brought southern Unionism in many ways to the fore of Civil War scholarship.¹³

Recent scholarship on southern Unionists has revealed a great deal about their

¹¹ Paul D. Escott, *After Secession: Jefferson Davis and the Failure of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Charles W. Ramsdell, *Behind the Lines in the Southern Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), vii.

¹² See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 10.

¹³ See William W. Freehling, *The South vs. The South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped The Course Of The Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War* (New York: New Press, 2008).

diversity, particularly across class lines. The importance of local circumstances, kinship networks, pre-war political ideologies and military contingencies stand out in scholarship exploring the wellsprings of Unionism.¹⁴ Class resentment no longer supplies the all-encompassing explanatory power it once did respecting the motivations of southern Unionists.¹⁵ Historians now generally agree that no one factor satisfactorily explains all of its various manifestations.¹⁶ Ultimately, what unconditional Unionists held in common, despite their diversity, was a positive attachment to the Union, as opposed to a negatively defined “politics of opposition” to the Confederacy.¹⁷

While newer scholarship has thus done a great deal to restore white southern Unionists to the picture, it has at times presented them as more pivotal to the outcome of the war than evidence warrants.¹⁸ Historians drawn to the subject have tended to focus on the question of whether disloyalty to the Confederacy contributed to its military defeat.¹⁹

¹⁴ See Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True History of the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict In Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); James Marten, *Texas Divided: Loyalty and Dissent In the Lone Star State, 1856-1874* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1990); Wayne K. Durrill, *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community In the Great Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Daniel E. Sutherland, *Seasons of War: The Ordeal of a Confederate Community, 1861-1865* (New York: Free Press, 1995), and Noel C. Fisher, *War At Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence In East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Peter S. Carmichael, “Into the Murky World of Class Consciousness” *Reviews in American History* Vol. 37, No. 4 (Dec, 2009), 556; Moneyhon, “Disloyalty and Class Consciousness,” 226-27; David Brown, “North Carolinian Ambivalence: Rethinking Loyalty and Disaffection in the Civil War Piedmont,” in Paul D. Escott ed., *North Carolinians In the Era of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁶ Recent syntheses include Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., *Guerrillas, Unionists, And Violence On The Confederate Home Front* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999); John C. Inscoe and Robert C. Kenzer eds., *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives On Unionists In The Civil War South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001) and James A. Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters In the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Margaret M. Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama, 1860-1861.” *The Journal of Southern History* 69.1 (February 1, 2003), 76; Gary W. Gallagher, “Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation: Some Directions In Recent Scholarship On The Confederacy.” *Civil War History* 55.3 (Sep. 2009): 352.

¹⁸ David Williams, for example, asserts in *Bitterly Divided* that Southern dissenters forced the Confederacy into a “two-front war” (1).

¹⁹ See Michael D. Pierson, *Mutiny At Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 50-51.

My research concerns itself less with the question of whether Unionist activity proved militarily decisive. While some citizens of Confederate states did make a significant personal contribution to the Union war effort, and Unionist men and women found themselves at the center of the conflict in ways that have previously gone unappreciated, I do not contend that the Unionist efforts of Deep South whites substantially altered the outcome of the war. Rather, the historical significance of the white Unionists of the Deep South lies in the ways that both the Union and Confederacy imagined them, from the secession crisis through to the postwar period. Though the profiled regiments did creditable service, this dissertation concerns itself more with what they thought they stood for, how others perceived them, and what those aspirations and projections reveal about the key issues of the era and the stakes of the conflict as contemporaries saw them.

Although white southern Unionism in general no longer seems understudied, the same does not hold true for unconditional white Unionism originating in the Deep South. Historians have tended to localize white Unionism in the Upper and Border South, the Appalachian mountain chain and the Trans-Mississippi West.²⁰ Almost all examinations of anti-Confederate activity in Deep South states understandably have focused on the efforts of enslaved and free African Americans who made up by far the greater number of Union recruits in the region. William W. Freehling, for example, in his influential synthesis *The South vs. The South*, expressly treats the Upper South as the theater of white anti-Confederate activity and the Lower South as the theater of black anti-

²⁰ Exceptions to this trend have generally focused on urban Unionism in Deep South cities. See Thomas G. Dyer, *Secret Yankees: The Union Circle in Confederate Atlanta* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); William W. Rogers, *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), and Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson* (2008). Margaret M. Storey's *Loyalty and Loss* (LSU Press, 2004) represents one of the only studies of Unionism in rural Alabama from the secession crisis through Reconstruction.

Confederate activity.²¹ His otherwise valuable work ignores white Unionism in the Deep South altogether. It seems a missed opportunity to neglect to mention the First Alabama Cavalry, for example, or the white Unionist victims of the Fort Pillow Massacre. Christopher M. Rein's *Alabamians in Blue* (2019), a recently published study of Unionism in a Deep South state, represents a notable exception and this dissertation engages with it at numerous points.²²

This dissertation takes the Deep South to mean the original seven seceding states, as well as parts of Tennessee and Arkansas, because of their economic, social, cultural, and political ties to the Mississippi Delta region. Tennessee is traditionally divided into three parts; the “grand divisions” – mountainous East, flatter Middle, and low-lying/cotton-laden West – are enshrined in the three stars on the state flag. The western portion of Tennessee – economically, culturally, demographically, politically – fits comfortably within the designation of Deep South.²³ The ill-fated Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, Bradford's Battalion – which forms the basis for this study's fourth chapter – hailed from that part of the state, where Unionism was far less widespread than the rest. Although Mississippians fought in all three of the units profiled in this dissertation, the state fell outside its scope because it did not supply a full white regiment to the U.S. military forces.²⁴

²¹ Freehling, *The South vs. The South*, 85.

²² Christopher M. Rein, *Alabamians in Blue: Freedmen, Unionists, and the Civil War in the Cotton State* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019).

²³ Robert Tracy McKenzie, *One South Or Many?: Plantation Belt and Upcountry In Civil War-Era Tennessee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2-7.

²⁴ The Marine Brigade and Mounted Rifles fell short of regimental status. Historians such as Victoria Bynum have also already ably described Mississippi's celebrated niche of anti-Confederate activity, the notorious “Free State of Jones.” Victoria E. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil*

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My dissertation begins with an investigation of the motivating factors of unconditional Unionism in the Deep South. While the backgrounds of white Unionists defy generalization, encompassing former Whigs, Jackson Democrats, slave-owners and subsistence farmers, laborers and immigrants, all evinced a similar positive attachment to the Union in language similar to what proliferated in northern states. The opening chapter also describes the perception of, and initial stance toward, white Unionists by people in the United States and the nascent Confederacy. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 profile the First Louisiana, First Alabama, and Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry respectively, investigating their background, formation, composition, career, and what they reveal about the nature of unconditional Unionism in their states. The fifth chapter covers the period of Reconstruction, in which white Unionists played a central role. Initially dismayed by the lenient policies of Andrew Johnson, former Unionists benefited politically from the national Republican backlash that resulted in the “radical” phase of Reconstruction. Ultimately, however, the failure of the “scalawags” to form a meaningful social and political alliance with African Americans in states like Alabama and Louisiana helped pave the way for the Democratic “redemption” of the former Confederacy and left former Unionists once again on the outside looking in, feeling as though and treated as though they had fought on the losing side of the war. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue that focuses on the place of white Unionists from the Deep South in national memory and on the ways that the descendants of Unionists ultimately allowed the memory of their service to be forgotten.

War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also Sally Jenkins and John Stauffer, *The State of Jones* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

In the end, white southern Unionists, as with other dissident groups, represent an indispensable subject of historical inquiry because they often make explicit what those in the cultural mainstream leave implicit. When Louisianan Robert W. Taliaferro expressed to his father in December 1860 that, “if the worst comes to the worst—I am willing to let land and slaves go,” rather than forsake the Union, he said a great deal about the stakes of the prospective conflict as his contemporaries understood them.²⁵ Dissidents provide an invaluable prism through which historians can understand the social, cultural, and political pressures at work in the times they lived and acted. Their testimony can reveal often unspoken, due to widespread tacit agreement, understandings of the issues.

White southern Unionists, particularly in the Deep South, shed light on the important question of why men went to great lengths for the cause of the Union. If one removes emancipation, which white southerners almost uniformly opposed in 1860, from the moral picture, the question of why a white southerner would fight for the Union becomes even more perplexing. The answer relies on an appreciation of what the concept of the Union, and its still tenuous status, represented to white Americans in the nineteenth century, something that has been almost totally lost on public consciousness today.²⁶ Indeed, as the concept of Union has steadily lost its meaning and cultural purchase in American society, so also has the memory of southern Unionism – motivated neither by an aversion to slavery as a southern institution nor sympathy for enslaved people – faded from view.

²⁵ Robert W. Taliaferro to James G. Taliaferro, December 21, 1860. James G. Taliaferro Papers, Mss. 5094, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Hereafter cited as *Taliaferro Papers*.

²⁶ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 5.

Southern Unionists, and especially white southern Union veterans, also played an integral part in the unfolding of the crucial period of Reconstruction. Only by understanding the continuity of their values and goals between the war and its aftermath – their fundamental antipathy toward secession, with slavery as its genesis, without any solicitude for the enslaved – can scholars fully understand the decisive forces of the era as a whole. No biracial political or social coalition ever materialized in the region to the degree necessary to ensure the “success” of Reconstruction in the Deep South. White Unionists proved willing to ally with African Americans during the war to save the Union, but not after the war to protect their civil rights or help realize the vision of a biracial polity.

Chapter One

“We Are True Blue”: Origins and Perceptions of Deep South Unionists, 1860-1862

In 1861, unconditional white Unionists in the Deep South comprised a decidedly small segment of society, yet represented a remarkably diverse set of backgrounds, motivations, and expectations of the conflict ahead. Who were they, and why did they take the stand that they did? Subsistence farmers and planters, urban laborers and country lawyers, scions of old southern families and newly arrived European immigrants, each for their own reasons refused to go along with the newly formed Confederacy. They possessed myriad, often uniquely personal, motivations for doing so. Absent among them, it must be said, was any special sympathy for enslaved people. In the conflict that erupted in the wake of secession, some Deep South Unionists would fight for an end to slaveholders' political dominance, others to safeguard their slave property. Some took sides with the Union against the Confederacy because they had no economic stake in slavery; others, as they saw it, did so to protect the stake that they had. Practically none, in taking the stand that they did, sought justice for African Americans, a position they shared with the majority of white Americans—North and South. “It requires no especial love for the negro race,” wrote the *Nashville Daily Union*, “to hate a traitor and labor for his just punishment.” Fundamentally, all believed in the primacy of the Union and hoped for the reinstitution of federal authority, though in 1861 none knew what that reinstated

federal authority would look like. By supporting the Union and rejecting the Confederacy without qualification, all of them risked more than they stood to gain.¹

Most white residents of Alabama, Louisiana, and west Tennessee favored immediate secession from the time of Lincoln's election in November 1860. The less sanguine, for a time, maintained a conditional Unionism based on a wait-and-see attitude and sought cooperation and coordination with other slave states. By the spring of 1861, however, virtually all of these conditional Unionists shifted their allegiance to the new Confederacy as the conditions of their Unionism were broken. As Daniel W. Crofts explains, the meaning of Unionism itself changed for most white southerners. Rightly or wrongly, they believed that to remain in the Union and live under the new Republican administration would threaten their way of life more than it had protected it up to that point. At each stage of the secession winter and into spring more and more men and women who had resisted at first surrendered to the seemingly irrepressible momentum of events. With attitudes ranging from belligerent enthusiasm to a kind of fatalistic acceptance, the overwhelming majority of the white population of the Deep South welcomed the inauguration of the Confederate state in the spring of 1861. Northerners, and Republicans in particular, overestimated the degree of unqualified loyalty to the Union that survived among the white population at the commencement of the war. Unconditional Unionists were few and far between. Only a very small minority refused to condone the dissolution of the Union under any circumstances and maintained their allegiance to the United States even as the Confederacy took real form all around them.²

¹ *The Nashville (Tn.) Daily Union*, May 29, 1863; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 9.

² Ralph A. Wooster, "The Secession of the Lower South: An Examination of Changing Interpretations." *Civil War History* (June, 1961): 117-127; Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), see chapter 13.

I—Sources of Unconditional Unionism

Many scholars have tried to divide unconditionally loyal white southerners—who rejected the legitimacy of the Confederacy, spurned neutrality, and hoped for an imminent return to the national fold at the outset of the war—into discrete groups. According to historians Stephen V. Ash and Daniel E. Sutherland, for example, southern Unionists were more likely to have had a formative connection to the North (birth, marriage, education), been prewar Whigs, or come from poor subsistence farming districts antagonistic both to slaveholders and their slaves. Such categorizations do not suffice to provide a convincing picture. Membership in one or two of these groups did not by itself serve as a dependable indicator of an individual's loyalty. Just as often, those who belonged to those same groups and who had the same backgrounds, economic interests, or political affiliations sided with the Confederacy. Certain conditions might have inclined individuals and communities toward their Unionism, but no single variable reliably predicted it. As Carl N. Degler explained in his perceptive discussion of southern dissent, "any analysis of motives always does some violence to the complexity of the springs of human decisions and actions." Determining the source of uncompromising Unionism in the Deep South, therefore, most often comes down to a case-by-case basis.³

Northern Alabama stands out as a region of the Deep South unusually rife with Unionism and provides an apt starting point for an examination of the phenomenon. A greater concentration of native white southerners resisted the imposition of Confederate

³ Sutherland, *Guerrillas, Unionists, And Violence On The Confederate Home Front*, 6; Stephen V. Ash, *When The Yankees Came: Conflict And Chaos In The Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 109-110; Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 316-317; Degler, *The Other South*, 202.

authority there than in any other Deep South state. While a number of factors contributed to their unusual recusance, perhaps most important among them was a sense of isolation and detachment from the planter class and Black Belt-plantation culture. Alabama historian Walter Lynwood Fleming explains that, “There was a certain social antipathy felt by them toward the lowland and valley people . . . and a blind antagonism to the ‘nigger lord’ as they called the slaveholder, wherever he was found.” Many viewed secession and the establishment of the Confederacy simply as a plot hatched by slaveholders for the exclusive benefit of the slaveholding class and refused to support it. Sectional distrust reached such intensity, Fleming hyperbolized, that “it is safe to state for North Alabama that had the Black Belt declared for the Union, that section would have voted for secession.”⁴ For decades, historians rather uncritically accepted the class explanation for Unionism in upcountry regions of Alabama, resulting in what Margaret Storey calls a “one-dimensional politics of opposition.” Recent scholarship has proven that explanation incomplete, yet it retains an important grain of truth. The bitterness was real, and palpable. James Bell, for example, a resident of Winston County, Alabama, wrote to his son Henry, then living in a secessionist county of Mississippi, that, “all they [the slaveholders] want is to git you pupt up and go to fight for there infurnal negroes and after you do there fighting you may kiss there hine parts for o [all] they care.” Subsistence-level farmers from the upcountry White Belt deeply resented Black Belt planters’ efforts to drag them into a conflict in which they felt they had much to lose and little to gain. In 1861 northern Alabama had more in common demographically and economically with eastern Tennessee than it did with southern Alabama, and many in the

⁴ Fleming generally treats upcountry Unionists with disdain, writing that, “today those people are represented by the makers of ‘moonshine’ whiskey and those who shoot revenue officers” (114).

region similarly resolved to wait for deliverance from Union forces rather than support a slaveholders' rebellion.⁵

At the secession convention in January, Winston County, Alabama elected Charles C. Sheats as its representative. Sheats garnered four times as many votes as his opponent, a planter committed to immediate separation. The 21-year-old schoolteacher, the youngest delegate in Montgomery, consistently maintained an unconditional stance in favor of the Union and against secession. Though other representatives from northern counties also expressed opposition to disunion, once it became a fait accompli all but a tiny handful acceded and professed their loyalty to their state and the new nation. Jeremiah Clemens, who would become a prominent Unionist, for example, opposed secession as a delegate from Madison County but submitted to the will of the convention once it became clear that the ordinance would pass, and, in his own words, “walked deliberately into rebellion.” Ultimately, secession in Alabama passed by a 61-39 vote, but a far greater number of delegates eventually signed the ordinance than had voted for its passage. “Diehard Unionist” Sheats refused to do so and returned to Winston County. On July 4, he spoke at a pro-Union meeting held at Looney’s Tavern attended by 2,500 people where Winston County symbolically seceded from Alabama.⁶ No transcript exists of Sheats’s remarks, but the gathering did officially commend Sheats for his “loyalty and

⁵ Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction In Alabama*, 114; Georgia Lee Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 4, Fleming quotation p. 8; Hugh C. Bailey, "Disloyalty in Early Confederate Alabama." *The Journal of Southern History* 23.4 (Nov. 1957), 525; Paul Horton, "Submitting to the 'Shadow of Slavery': The Secession Crisis and Civil War in Alabama's Lawrence County." *Civil War History* 44.2 (June 1, 1998): 115; Storey, "Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama," 74-76; William C. Harris, *With Charity For All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 84. See also Escott, *After Secession*, 94-100; Donald B. Dodd, "Unionism in Confederate Alabama." PhD Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1969.

⁶ Bill Looney, the tavern’s proprietor, later recruited for the First Alabama Cavalry and his son Anderson became one of its first enlistees. Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 23; CSR, *Alabama, First Cavalry*, M276, roll 5, RG94, NARA, “Looney, Anderson M” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/100490858>].

fidelity to the people whom [he] represented in voting against secession, first, last, and all of the time.” Sheats’s constituents in the “Free State of Winston” even elected him to the Alabama House in 1862, and he attempted to take his seat but his fellow legislators prevented him from doing so due to his obvious disloyalty. After his expulsion, he pledged to join with Union forces and “expose fiendish villainy before the world,” but ultimately spent most of the war in a Confederate prison in North Carolina. Winston County went unrepresented in the lower house for the remainder of the war.⁷

C. C. Sheats was an unusually strident figure who represented an unusually outspoken constituency. Alabamians who still held Unionist sentiments at the outset of the war tended to suppress them publicly, or else they risked imprisonment, destruction of their property, or outright violence toward themselves and their families. They remained well behind the front of the battle lines being drawn, deep in the heart of the Confederacy. Outnumbered and surrounded, unconditional Unionists generally faded from view for the time being, and waited in hope for a chance to openly reaffirm their loyalty to the United States. John Roberts Phillips, a 26-year-old farmer from Fayette County, suffered terrific abuse from Confederate neighbors, but “cherished the hope that Uncle Sam would surely put them all to death at an early day, and I stood it the best I could.” In hindsight, they frequently characterized it as the “shut mouth time.” Unionists

⁷ Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, 125; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 50; Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, *The Scalawag In Alabama Politics, 1865-1881* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1977), 33; Margaret M. Storey, “Southern Ishmaelites: Wartime Unionism and its Consequences, 1860-1874.” PhD Dissertation, Emory University, 1999, 341; Wesley S. Thompson, “*The Free State of Winston*”: *A History of Winston County, Alabama* (Winfield, AL: Pareil Press, 1968), 3; Malcolm C. McMillan, *The Alabama Confederate Reader* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1963), 173. The divergent spelling of ‘Sheats’ or ‘Sheets’ remains a mystery to me. Both spellings appear frequently in contemporary accounts and subsequent commemoration and scholarship.

refused to contribute to the formation of a slaveholder's republic but as of 1861 could do nothing to stop its ascent.⁸

Fleming estimated that at the start of the war that “there were probably no more than 2000 men who were wholly disaffected” in the whole state of Alabama. Though undoubtedly low – Alabama’s white population in 1860 exceeded 500,000, and 2,500 people reportedly attended the Unionist meeting at Looney’s Tavern alone – that figure does give some indication of the status of unconditional Unionists proportionate to the general population. The preponderance of white southerners in 1861, especially in the Deep South states, subordinated whatever class grievances they may have possessed to the preservation of the racial hierarchy ostensibly under threat from the “Black Republican” administration. The social and economic situation of North Alabamians, however, led to a number of exceptions to this trend. Upcountry residents, explains Margaret Storey, were often only “liminally part of Alabama’s staple crop and slave economy,” and had far less frequent contact with African Americans or people who were not smallholding farmers like themselves. Hill country neighborhoods such as those in Winston County, she finds, remained quite insular. As a result, the prospect even of the abolition of slavery – as utterly unpalatable as the concept undoubtedly seemed to them – did not amount to a justification for the dissolution of the Union as it did in other parts of the Deep South. Northern Alabama’s geographic isolation and unusual economic and

⁸ Storey, "Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama, 1860-1861," 103; A. G. Campbell and John Roberts Phillips. *John Roberts Phillips: An Autobiography, Genealogy, History of the Civil War and of a Tory of Alabama Fighting for the Union, including Parts of Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina and Alabama*. (Chattanooga, TN: A.G. Campbell, 1986), 28; Storey. *Loyalty and Loss*, 56.

social circumstances fostered a hidden wellspring of Unionism in the heart of the Confederacy.⁹

In 1862, Robert S. Tharin, lifelong resident of the Deep South and one-time law partner of William Lowndes Yancey, attempted to explain the situation of, and position himself as the spokesman for, the beleaguered Unionists of Alabama. Forced to flee to the North once his “undeviating and unadulterated” Unionism became widely known, Tharin advocated on their behalf for the rest of the war from the relative safety of Indiana. In a deposition given late that year, Tharin, known as “the Alabama refugee,” made clear that resentment toward the slave-owning class lay at the heart of many north Alabamians’ sustained Unionism. “The cotton planters, as a class,” he explained, “have reduced the non-slaveholding population to a level with the despised negro.” Though he disavowed any affiliation with abolitionists, whom he blamed in nearly equal measure for the country’s descent into war, he utterly denied the legitimacy of secession and decried the undemocratic and illiberal actions of the secessionists. The slaveholding aristocracy, he wrote, “have immolated upon the self same altars whereon they endeavor to sacrifice the whole country, the freedom of the press and the liberty of speech.” Hypocritical and morally bankrupt, they had brutally silenced the non-slaveholding Unionist element that remained in the upcountry regions of the state. Now, “they bring upon the country a revolution, which *they* are to ride . . . into power and greatness. Under the cry of ‘Southern Rights,’ they openly trample upon Southern Rights.” Fellow Alabamian Frederick Anderson, a doctor and former Whig, concurred that secession had been,

⁹ John S. Sledge, *These Rugged Days: Alabama in the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), 3; Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama,” 94; Fleming, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, 128-129; Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy, 1861-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 79.

“carried forward by unscrupulous men to promote their own ambitious schemes for self aggrandisement and not for the good of the people.” In a letter to Secretary of the Interior Caleb B. Smith in 1862, Tharin implored the administration not to name a planter provisional governor, as it would insult and alienate the segment of the population that had demonstrated the greatest commitment to the Union. It ought to go, he said, to one who had continuously defended the Union without qualification, and who did not come from the ranks of those who had brought on the ruinous war in the first place. He suggested himself for the position.¹⁰

The evidence indicates that class resentment, though not the sole determinant of Unionism in parts of Alabama, frequently figured into the mental calculus of Unionists there. It also played a significant role in the development of resistance to the Confederacy in Louisiana, especially in the great urban center of New Orleans. The majority of unconditional Unionists – and future Union soldiers – from Louisiana resided in New Orleans, by far the largest city in the Confederacy. In fact, a remarkable 43 percent of Louisiana’s total white population lived in New Orleans and the adjacent cities of Algiers, Carrollton, and Jefferson. In 1860, nearly forty percent of New Orleans’ 170,000 residents were foreign-born. Irish and German immigrants, predominantly working-class laborers, resented the political exclusion they suffered and showed little enthusiasm for secession. While some historians, such as John Winters, argue that the foreign-born population lacked strong loyalties either way and picked sides out of simple opportunism

¹⁰ Robert Seymour Symmes Tharin. *Arbitrary Arrests In the South; Or, Scenes From the Experience of an Alabama Unionist* (New York: J. Bradburn, 1863), 8-11; Storey, "Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama, 1860-1861," 84; Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916: Robert S. Tharin, October 3, 1862. Deposition regarding Jeremiah Clemens. October 3, 1862. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <<https://www.loc.gov/item/mal1883900/>>.

and the need to provide for their families, others like Michael D. Pierson and G. Howard Hunter have found evidence to the contrary. “Ideological motivations fueled by a genuine patriotism,” writes Hunter, “as well as a pronounced resentment . . . against the established Confederate order which they associated with Know-Nothingism” fostered a strong foundation of Unionism that emerged under wartime occupation. Union General Benjamin F. Butler consciously exploited class divisions during his superintendence of the city. “This rebellion is a rebellion against the working classes,” he charged, “begun and carried on for the purpose of creating a landed aristocracy, which shall give to four hundred thousand the government of eight millions of white and four millions of blacks.” More than five thousand white Louisianans, mostly from New Orleans, eventually enlisted to fight in the Union army, almost twice as many as from any other Deep South state. Considerable numbers of foreign-born residents of New Orleans and native-born residents of northern Alabama, though different in seemingly every other circumstance, both rejected the Confederacy as a vehicle for the aggrandizement of the slaveholding class from which they did not stand to benefit.¹¹

A different brand of Deep South Unionist clung to their Unionism for practically the exact opposite reason: to protect the slave property they already possessed. A small number of elite, typically aged, planters argued that disunion – and the war and chaos sure to follow – would imperil slavery and accomplish the opposite of what it sought. James G. Taliaferro, for example, represented Catahoula Parish at the Louisiana

¹¹ G. Howard Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment: Unionism Regiments and the New Orleans Immigrant Community, 1862-1864” *Louisiana History* Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring, 2003), 191; Ted Tunnell. *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana, 1862-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 19; Michael D. Pierson, “He Helped the Poor and Snubbed the Rich”: Benjamin F. Butler and Class Politics in Lowell and New Orleans” *Massachusetts Historical Review* Vol. 7 (2005), 52. See also Michael D. Pierson. *Mutiny at Fort Jackson* and John D. Winters. *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

secession convention and took an unconditionally Unionist stance there. In contrast to Sheets, Taliaferro was the oldest member of Louisiana's secession convention. Born in 1798 in Virginia, Taliaferro had resided in the Delta for more than four decades. The census records for 1860 indicate that he owned 27 slaves and real estate valued at \$87,000. He vociferously opposed secession, however, and after the convention's members approved the ordinance by a vote of 113 to 17, Taliaferro submitted a formal protest. "Secession will defeat the purpose it is intended to accomplish," he wrote, and "its certain results will be to impair instead of strengthen the security of southern institutions." He predicted that "anarchy and war" would follow, and with it "ruinous exactions upon property in the form of direct taxation, a withering blight upon the prosperity of the state, and a fatal prostration of all its great interests." Taliaferro refused to sign the ordinance, and maintained that Louisiana's secession would do more to destroy slavery there than anything the federal government currently had in its power to accomplish. Though the convention declined to record his protest in the official journal, Taliaferro, along with a small number of like-minded planters such as James M. Wells of Rapides Parish, made it known that they did not condone the Confederacy, and had not renounced the protection of the United States constitution. Secessionist neighbors, in response, burned his lumberyard and cotton gin. Nevertheless, he maintained his controversial stance. In public, Taliaferro quoted Cicero: "I defended the republic in my youth; I shall not stop as an old man." His son too would soon defend the republic in a Union uniform, the only one of his 103 classmates at the Louisiana State Seminary and Military Academy to do so.¹²

¹² Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 54-55; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 35; Robert W. Taliaferro to James G. Taliaferro, December 9, 1860 and December 21, 1860. *Taliaferro Papers*; Peyton McCrary, *Abraham*

Fellow Louisianan James Madison Wells owned 95 slaves in 1860 but took the same position as Taliaferro. Wells more than lived in the slave South—he thrived in it. He raged to a property-assessor that, “his niggers would all be set free, on account of secession.” The Wells family had resided in Louisiana since before it became a state, and his father had represented Rapides Parish at its first constitutional convention. Despite his deep southern roots, quintessential planter credentials, and status “among the largest slaveholders in the South,” Wells refused to countenance the dissolution of the Union or the formation of the Confederacy. He broke even with his family to take his stance, his brother Montfort publicly labeling him a “scoundrel.” One pro-Confederate neighbor later testified that, “To give the Devil his due, Wells was a Union man all through.” Another said that “if he wasn’t a true Union man, the water in that River don’t run down stream.” In the view of Frank J. Wetta, he represented “the most prominent scalawag to oppose the Confederates openly and actively” in Louisiana. Wells made his political stance abundantly clear to those around him. He hoped that his Unionist bona fides would protect himself and his property when the Yankees inevitably came to restore authority, and give him influence with the administration in the state’s reconstruction. In the meantime, however, Confederate sympathizers burned his cotton bales and forced him to go into hiding in the swamp near his plantation at Jessamine Hill.¹³

Lincoln and Reconstruction: The Louisiana Experiment (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 60; James G. Taliaferro, *A Protest Against the Ordinance of Secession*. Catahoula, 1861. PDF. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <<https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.02402700/>>; *Harrisonburg (La.) Independent*, May 8, 1861; *The National Tribune* (Washington, DC), June 3, 1897.

¹³ Frank J. Wetta. *The Louisiana Scalawags: Politics, Race, and Terrorism During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 38, 56; Walter McGehee Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells.” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* vol. 31 (1948), 1000, 1006; James Madison Wells Papers, Mss. 806, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Hereafter cited as *Wells Papers*. See also Degler, *The Other South*, 183-184.

A combination of important factors inclined Taliaferro and Wells toward their peculiar brand of radically conservative Unionism. Both were old-line Whigs who had spent important time in their lives outside the Deep South. Taliaferro attended Transylvania College in Kentucky, where he met his wife and became acquainted with Henry Clay. He even named one of his sons Daniel Webster Taliaferro, after the famous Whig and champion of the Union. From 1856 until May of 1861, he owned and edited the aptly named Harrisonburg *Independent*, at which time, he wrote, he was, “no longer able to conduct the paper in conformity with its title.” J. M. Wells attended Alden Partridge’s American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy in Middletown, Connecticut before earning his legal degree at the Cincinnati School of Law in Ohio under Charles Hammond, the noted Federalist and antislavery advocate. Taliaferro and Wells both returned to Louisiana, became successful planters, and participated enthusiastically in the slavery-driven economy. Both also retained a nationalistic and fundamentally conservative viewpoint reflective of their politics and education that they acted upon throughout the secession crisis and into the war. The Union undergirded everything in their material and ideological world and they stubbornly refused to countenance its dissolution. “Revolutions have a way of slipping away from those who begin them,” writes Carl Degler, and “such thoughts must have underlain the decisions of a number of great planters when they refused to accept the political solution of secession though it was offered for their benefit.” Old line Whigs, as well as those who had had prolonged exposure to life outside the Deep South, appear overrepresented among Unionists, particularly those that came from the upper echelons of society.¹⁴

¹⁴ Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 997-998; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 34-39; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 54; Degler, *The Other South*, 184; Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy*, 4.

Numerous factors could dispose an individual toward Unionism. Indeed, many arrived on the common ground of Unionism from seemingly irreconcilable political starting points. But while Unionists rejected the Confederacy for many different reasons, they tended to offer similar reasons for their positive support for the Union. Unionism, writes Gary W. Gallagher, “represented the cherished legacy of the founding generation, a democratic republic with a constitution that guaranteed political liberty and afforded individuals a chance to better themselves economically.” This held true for Unionists North and South. All southern Unionists reiterated these tenets in some fashion. One commonly expressed belief maintained that secession constituted anarchy and contravened the Constitution. In his formal protest, Taliaferro contended that secession, “violates the great fundamental principle of American government,” and “is a right unknown to the constitution of the United States.” Taliaferro and Tharin, both lawyers, argued that “Southern Rights” enjoyed greater protection under the Constitution than they would without it. Employing similar logic, Elissay Bell of Winston County, Alabama, daughter of the aforementioned James and brother of Henry, wrote to him, among other things, of why she would never marry a secessionist. “I would disdain to keep company with a disunionist,” she wrote, “for if he will cede from the government that has always sustained his Rights he would cede from his family.” Secession represented lawlessness and betrayal, and many Unionists refused to participate for precisely that reason.¹⁵

For many, family loyalty bound them to the Union. Individuals were more likely to become Unionists if they enjoyed the support and security of their kinship network.

“One is struck,” writes historian John Inscoe, “by the extent to which men often acted in

¹⁵ Gallagher, *The Union War*, 2; Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama,” 93; Bailey, “Disloyalty in Early Confederate Alabama,” 525.

concert with other family members in expressing their opposition to the Confederacy and to the war.” The Sixth Tennessee Union Cavalry, for example, led by Colonel Fielding Hurst, counted no less than 23 members of the Hurst clan in its ranks. Recruited from the same West Tennessee communities as Nathan Bedford Forrest’s Confederate Cavalry, the Sixth became one of the most notorious of all “Tory” regiments, and the area they patrolled became known as “Hurst Nation.” Historian Victoria Bynum has shown the significance of kinship networks to Newton Knight’s notorious band in Jones County, Mississippi. Divided loyalties could just as often fracture families, however. Henry Bell, whose father and sister back in Winston County wrote to him of their unconditional Unionism, ultimately decided that his future lay with the new Confederacy. He submitted their letters to the Alabama governor’s office as evidence of their treason.¹⁶

Unionists also frequently expressed veneration for, and a desire to preserve, the achievements of the Revolutionary generation. Alabamian John Roberts Phillips wrote that, “It was firmly fixed in my mind that I would never go back on ‘Old Glory.’ I had heard too much from my old grandparents and Aunt Jennie about the sufferings and privations they had to endure during the Revolutionary War to ever engage against the ‘Stars and Stripes.’” Explicit expressions of loyalty to the flag itself abound in the accounts of Unionists, North and South. Jacob Albright, of Franklin County, also refused to support the Confederacy on account of his father’s service in the Revolutionary War. “My father fought for the Union,” he explained, “and I could not go against it . . . and that sooner than turn over [to the Confederacy] I would die right there.” James Bell pleaded in

¹⁶ Inscoc and Kenzer. *Enemies of the Country*, 8; Gary Blankinship, “Colonel Fielding Hurst and the Hurst Nation.” *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 34 (1980), 7; James A. Baggett. *Homegrown Yankees: Tennessee’s Union Cavalry in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 383; Bailey, “Disloyalty in Early Confederate Alabama,” 528. See also Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*.

vain with his son to “think back to a time when his ancestors walked over the frozen ground with bleeding feet in order to establish the freedom which the American people enjoyed.” These individuals stood for the preservation of the Union, and not simply against the Confederacy. Unlike Confederates, who also attempted to lay claim to the legacy of the Revolutionary generation, writes Margaret Storey, “Unionists highlighted the sacrosanct quality of the political entity those men had created.” They became Unionists, she explains, “not simply out of opposition to something but also out of their desire to cleave to something.”¹⁷

Even in Montgomery, Alabama, the city where the Confederate national government came into existence, a small cadre clung on to the Union. Their numbers—“at no time were there more than thirty,” notes William W. Rogers, appear unsurprisingly small. Their Unionism, he writes, “transcended class lines,” and included merchants, doctors, and the registrar of lands. Most of them had northern backgrounds. William Bibb, however, descended from one of the leading families of state. His uncle, William Wyatt Bibb, had been appointed the first governor of the Alabama Territory by President Monroe. The forty-one-year-old cotton planter and owner of fifty slaves in 1860 believed the “United States government . . . the best on earth,” and openly disavowed secession and the Confederacy. He judged the rebel government, “an illegal monstrosity, born out of tortured constitutional logic and carried out by extremists who exploited passions and ungrounded fears.” Only the combination of his physical disability and family prestige saved him from banishment or worse. Bibb, a contemporary remarked, could “say and do things that other men would not have been allowed to say or do.” Others were not so

¹⁷ David Williams, *A People's History of the Civil War: Struggles for the Meaning of Freedom* (New York: The New Press, 2005), 70; Phillips, *Autobiography*, 27; Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama, 1860-1861,” 82, 90; Thompson, *The Free State of Winston*, 38.

privileged. Daniel S. E. Starr, a native of Connecticut but resident of Montgomery, suffered, in Rogers's view, "one of the worst war-related crimes on the southern home front," when a group of men dragged him from his prison cell one night and lynched him. The underground group of Montgomery Unionists mostly resisted in modest ways, secretly aiding Union prisoners and reluctant Confederate conscripts in the city. They also raised a collection to give to Representative C. C. Sheats when he was released from prison. Bibb later personally presented Sheats with the money.¹⁸

Historians now recognize the political and economic diversity of white southern Unionists. They came from every social stratum and walk of life, and not just from the ranks of what Walter Fleming called the "secluded and ignorant." Democratic constituencies in the upcountry counties of north Alabama, Whig planters in the delta parishes of Louisiana, German and Irish immigrants in New Orleans, southern-born lawyers in Montgomery and Memphis—each for their own idiosyncratic reasons rejected the Confederacy and held fast to the Union. They were a diverse group, though not particularly numerous, and as of 1861 the unlikely coalition remained widely dispersed and lacked the external support necessary to make any impact in the Deep South. They appealed to the North for deliverance however and whenever possible, but for the most part, as the walls of the Confederacy closed around them, they entered a period of prudent silence and "survival lying." Asked if he had been a Union man, a merchant from St. Helena Parish, Louisiana replied, "I was until they fixed up a rope to hang me." Some, unable to keep themselves safely secluded, were even forced into Confederate service.

When John Roberts Phillips's young daughter died in early 1862, Confederate soldiers

¹⁸ Rogers, *Confederate Home Front*, 105-113; William W. Rogers, "Safety Lies Only in Silence: Secrecy and Subversion in Montgomery's Unionist Community," from Inscoe and Kenzer, eds. *Enemies of the Country*, 172-188.

stalked her gravesite. One evening when Phillips went to visit, the soldiers arrested him and forced him into the army. “I then resolved to shoot every Rebel soldier I saw, if my chance of escape looked good,” he later wrote. “This I did.” Northerners, Republicans in particular, became fixated on this population of dormant Unionists in the Deep South, swallowed up in the maw of secession.¹⁹

II—Perceptions of Southern Unionists in the North

Historians have amply demonstrated the Republican administration’s belief in 1861 that a majority of white southerners retained a fundamental Unionism and had been duped into secession by the duplicitous slave-power conspiracy. Due to the precipitate, and democratically dubious, nature of secession in the Deep South, many northerners – President Lincoln included – hoped that rank and file white southerners could be brought back to their senses with proper handling on the part of the government. This article of faith became a crucial element of northern expectations and policies at the outset of the war. The “conspiracy thesis” of secession, wrote Thomas J. Pressly, which survives even into contemporary historiography, “furnished the comforting assurance that the Union cause was in accord with the republican principle of majority rule.” Rekindling latent Unionism and providing support to the obdurate Unionists imprisoned in the heart of the rebellion represented principle war aims. None doubted, however, that a rising tide of

¹⁹ Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama*, 114; Michael Fellman. *Inside War: Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 48-49; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 9; Phillips, *Autobiography*, 31.

bellicose Confederate nationalism had at least temporarily submerged the loyal men and women of the South.²⁰

In the early months of the war, northern newspapers discussed the plight of southern Unionists at length. In June 1861, prior even to the Confederate victories at Bull Run and Wilson's Creek, the *New York Times* portrayed a nightmarish situation facing the loyal citizens of the seceded states. "Men and women have been scourged, in many cases to death; scores have been hung; hundreds thrown into dungeons," they wrote, all because "they will not abjure the sacred Constitution which was sealed by the blood of their fathers and ours, nor make war upon a Union consecrated by the tears and triumphs of near a hundred years." Many had fled their homes and become the war's first refugees, pouring into cities in the Border States and telling all who would listen of their desperate tales at the hands of the triumphal rebels. Still more, wrote the *Times*,

Equally loyal, who, unable to escape, and unwilling to subject their helpless families to persecution and insult, have bowed their heads before the storm, and now seemingly acquiesce in what they hope will prove to be but a temporary ebullition of political intoxication. They think it vain to contend unarmed with a rabid beast; but they wait hopefully for the hour of help and deliverance.

Similar appeals appeared in numerous northern newspapers. The government's clear and present duty was to protect its loyal citizens and to alleviate the catastrophe that had befallen them. "It costs something to be a Union man at the South now," wrote one Pennsylvania paper, "and he who is true to his colors, notwithstanding the storm that is

²⁰ Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret Their Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 21. See also Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 5-9; Inscoc and Kenzer, *Enemies of the Country*, 1; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 31.

breaking around him, is a patriot indeed.” The northern public had an obligation to fight for the southern Unionist.²¹

Northern politicians frequently invoked southern Unionists in their calls for unity of purpose. Daniel S. Dickinson of New York, for example, implored “all loyal citizens to rally to the standard of the Union. To the traitors he said, we must mete out speedy justice; to the loyal we must extend aid to free them from the yoke which now enslaves them.” Charles H. Foster, a Democrat, went further, saying, “till the integrity of our national empire is again made good, and oppressed Southern loyalists freed from a duress worse than negro bondage, all political vocabularies should be forgotten.” Though he refrained from making overt comparisons to slavery, Wisconsin Senator Timothy O. Howe argued in a speech before the floor that it was “the duty of the government to assist those who had thus been stricken down with the flag of the Union in their hands. He would enter no war of subjugation, but rather would endeavor to free the South from subjugation.” At the outset of a conflict teeming with moral and political complexity, the responsibility of the federal government to its persecuted southern citizens appeared uncontroversial and unifying. “If indeed white Unionists existed in large numbers throughout the Confederacy,” writes Michael Pierson, “then the war was an effort to liberate Americans who had fallen under the shadow of a coercive government.” In October 1861, the Pennsylvanian *Raftsmen’s Journal* challenged “the patriots who are clamoring for peace at the expense of the Union” to explain “the right and equity by which they consign those Southerners, whose loyalty so bitterly tried is found perfect, to the tyranny of self-elected anarchs and traitors.” It concluded that, “if no other motive

²¹ *White Cloud Kansas Chief*, June 13, 1861; *The Potter Journal* (Coudersport, PA) July 25, 1861.

impelled the Government to a relentless prosecution of the war, its obligation to Southern loyalists would be sufficient.”²²

Northern papers, filled with reports of the brutal suppression of southern Unionists, implored the government to use the military to help Unionists help themselves. Without the support of the Union army and navy, Unionists in the Deep South remained powerless. But, wrote the *Evansville Daily Journal*, “once let the Union armies remove the despotism perched upon the necks of Southern loyalists, and they will take care of the balance.” In June 1861, a letter from “A Tennessee Editor” appeared in Washington’s *National Republican* newspaper. “All we ask of the Government” it read, “is a little aid in the way of munitions of war. We have *the men*, brave and true, who are ready and anxious to put down the rebels. Let us have the guns and ammunition, and we will present an argument that will be fully understood by secessiondom.” Northern newspapers sought to assure their readers that many southerners would greet Union armies as liberators and that they furtively desired to contribute to the restoration of the old Union. “Circumstances . . . show very forcibly the disposition of the oppressed Unionists of the South to avail themselves of their disenfranchisement,” judged the *Bradford Reporter*, and “we may look for similar indications from other parts of the South as the soldiers of the government advance and break the chains of the overridden people.” Confederates had not succeeded in extinguishing Unionism, they argued, but had only temporarily stifled and defanged it. “It is despair, not desertion,” wrote the *New York Daily Tribune*, “that has seemed to thin the ranks of the Southern Unionists since the disgrace at Bull Run. Let a triumphant and resistless Union army appear in the South, and

²² *National Republican* (Washington, DC), August 26, 1861; *Western Reserve Chronicle* (Warren, OH), September 18, 1861; *Daily Exchange* (Baltimore, MD), March 26, 1861; Pierson, *Mutiny At Fort Jackson*, 46; *Raftsmen’s Journal* (Clearfield, PA), October 2, 1861.

it will be welcomed by a large share even of the whites.” As the Union army prepared for the gargantuan task of subduing the seceded states, its leaders hoped and expected that they would be able to rally loyal white southerners as they went.²³

The mobilization and organization of southern Unionists occupied an important place in the strategic thinking of both military and political officials and demonstrates, as ever, the vital connection between military and political developments during the Civil War. Ted Tunnell writes that, “Lincoln’s entire effort at wartime Reconstruction hinged on cooperation between Unionists and Northern military commanders.” The Army would create room for the open expression of Unionist sentiments, pave the way for the safe reentry of Unionists into local politics, and allow military age men to enlist to fight and help put down the rebellion. As Senator Howe explained, the United States had to ensure that the war “would not be a war between the States of the North and the States of the South, but between the loyalists of the country and the disloyalists.” Only the rehabilitation and empowerment of southern Unionists offered the prospect of lasting peace in the end. In this respect, as many contemporaries recognized, southern Unionists represented the key to reunion. They attained a symbolic importance as the men through whom reconstruction could begin. “It is only through their patriotic influence and example,” explained *The Star of the North* in April 1862, “that we can hope to bring the Southern people back to the allegiance they owe to the Union, peacefully and contentedly, after the war shall have settled the mere, and by no means finally decisive, question of our power to hold them in subjection to its authority.” As Lincoln wrote to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton later that year, when discussing the recruitment of

²³ *Evansville (Ind.) Daily Journal*, February 17, 1862; *The National Republican*, June 25, 1861; *Bradford Reporter* (Towanda, PA), March 6, 1862; *New York Daily Tribune*, October 14, 1862.

Union soldiers in northern Alabama and Mississippi, “one man there is worth two here . . . for which advantage we can afford to endure a little extra trouble and perplexity.” When the pieces began to move in 1862, northern eyes trained on southern Unionists, searching for evidence to confirm their ideology of deliverance.²⁴

Unlike many historians today, northerners in 1861 tended to make little distinction between the Upper and Lower South respecting the underlying prevalence of Unionism. In contrast to William W. Freehling, for example, who anachronistically bifurcates southern Unionism – describing separate “white anti-Confederate” activity in the Upper South and “black anti-Confederate” activity in the Lower South – Union military commanders expected to find loyal white citizens awaiting their arrival, if not necessarily in the same concentrations, everywhere they went in the Confederacy. With the possible exception of South Carolina, President Lincoln remarked in his first wartime message to Congress, “there is much reason to believe that the Union men are the majority in many, if not every one, of the so-called seceded states.” Only the fact that “the bayonets are all on one side of the question,” he said, had decided the matter. Newspapers often featured accounts of Unionists in Louisiana, west Tennessee, Mississippi – indeed every Confederate state except South Carolina – appealing for military assistance. A typical article in the *Milwaukee Morning Sentinel* averred that, “there are thousands . . . all throughout the South who only wait to see Federal bayonets in order to avow their loyalty.” After an early foray up the Tennessee River in February 1862, Admiral Andrew H. Foote reported to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles that “Union sentiment in South Tennessee and North Alabama [is] very strong,” and added

²⁴ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 9; *Daily Exchange*, March 26, 1861; *The Star of the North* (Bloomsburg, PA) April 23, 1862; Roy P. Basler ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953-1955), 5:456.

that he would call for an infantry regiment to accompany the next gunboat up the river, “which will aid the loyal people of those States to raise Union forces within their borders.” Later in the year, a correspondent for the *Gallipolis Journal* stationed near the Shiloh battlefield reported that, “there has been so many statements as to the extent of the Union sentiment in various parts of the South, that it seems useless to express any opinion in reference to it here.” He would say, though, that the enlistment of fighting men represented the true measure of Unionism within the Confederacy, and pointed to recent recruits in Alabama, New Orleans, as well as Fielding Hurst in west Tennessee, as evidence of its vitality.²⁵

Northerners would soon discover, however, that although unconditional white southern Unionists held out in every seceded state, not nearly as many remained as they had hoped. Secession proved not a momentary lapse in judgment, but a decided course that the majority of white southerners had determined to see through to the end. Most northerners had fundamentally misunderstood the conditional nature of most white southerners’ Unionism. Ultimately, overwhelming historical evidence points to a popular mandate for secession and a war effort reflective of the positive will of the white population. The “conspiracy thesis” appears insufficient. Avery O. Craven, canonical historian of southern nationalism, concluded that “the old notion that a few aggressive leaders tricked the South into secession . . . does not stand up as an explanation for the Southern action in 1860-1861.” White residents of the Deep South became convinced that national power represented more of a threat than a security to African-American

²⁵ Freehling. *The South vs. The South*, 85; Sledge, *These Rugged Years*, 43-44; Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session, April 27, 1861, in David S. Reynolds, ed., *Lincoln’s Selected Writings* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015), 24-47; *New York Herald*, February 26, 1862; *Gallipolis (Ohio) Journal*, September 25, 1862.

slavery, not only as a form of property but also as a system of social control. The imminent prospect of emancipation, and all its imagined retributive fury, beckoned. At that point, Craven explains, “this great body of Southerners gradually accepted secession as the only way out.” In August 1861, the Confederate *New Orleans Daily Crescent* attempted to refute the notion, then still popular in the North, that secession did not represent majority rule in the South. “This is a slander upon the Southern people,” it countered, and “to suppose that ‘the great body’ of them would submit quietly to a small minority is not only preposterously absurd, but a reflection upon their manhood. If this statement were true, the ‘great body of the Southern people’ are simply dastards and cravens.” Confederates did, however, remain acutely aware of a small but unconditionally loyal contingent in their midst. The Confederate press, politicians, and military commanders, like their United States counterparts, also concerned themselves with southern Unionists, who quickly took on an important symbolic role.²⁶

III—Perceptions of Southern Unionists in the Confederacy

Many Confederates conceived of the Civil War at its outset as a kind of second American Revolution. “The tea has been thrown overboard,” rejoiced the *Charleston Mercury*, “the revolution of 1860 has been initiated.” The Revolutionary era suffused their thinking and writing. As they assessed their situation in 1861, Confederates measuring the degree of ‘Toryism’ remaining in the would-be nation had reason to feel

²⁶ Avery O. Craven, *The Growth of Confederate Nationalism, 1848-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 399-400; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, August 24, 1861; see also Durward Long, “Unanimity and Disloyalty in Secessionist Alabama,” *Civil War History* (September, 1965): 257-273; Lawrence N. Powell and Michael S. Wayne, “Self-Interest and the Decline of Confederate Nationalism,” in Harry P. Owens and James J. Cooke eds., *The Old South in the Crucible of War* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1983), 31; Wooster, “The Secession of the Lower South,” 117; Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

buoyed when they compared it to that of 1776. “Not even the men ’76,” opined the *Shreveport Semi-Weekly News*, “those forefathers whom we are accustomed to think of as battling with undivided hearts . . . approached so near to perfect unity as ourselves, in this struggle against a foe more malignant and vindictive than the one confronted by them.” During the Revolution, it reminded readers, “whole districts were inhabited by tories, who strove to throttle the infant liberties of their countries, and bind her by fetters to the throne. In our struggle they are rarely to be met.” Confederates marveled at the apparent unanimity of their white population, and asserted confidently that they had renounced their loyalty to the Union for good. “There were a hundred Tories in the war of the Revolution, to one Union man now in the South,” read one piece in the *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, “in the name of common sense, why do the northern people continue to give currency to this glaring misrepresentation?”²⁷

Though this particular author exaggerated, the numbers in the Deep South appear to support the conclusions of pro-Confederate pundits. During the Revolution, Tories supplied an impressive 30 regiments and roughly 20,000 men to the service of the Crown. When one compares white enlistment in Deep South states between Confederate and Union forces during the Civil War, the results appear starkly different. Even when taking logistical differences such as the difficulties of recruitment and mobilization into account, it is clear that there were far more Tories in the first than the second American Revolution. According to Richard N. Current, approximately 6,500-7,000 white Louisianans fought in Union units. Compared to an estimated 60,000 who fought for the Confederacy, the resulting figure of ten-to-one Confederates to Unionists seems apt to describe the population of Louisiana as a whole. Alabama presents an even more extreme

²⁷ *Shreveport (La.) Semi-Weekly News*, June 27, 1862; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, August 24, 1861.

picture. Current estimates that “well over 3,000” white Alabamians enlisted in the Union army. Roughly 80,000 enlisted to fight for the Confederacy, however, better than 20:1 in favor of southern independence. The records, especially on the Confederate side, present some difficulties, but historians generally agree that in total about 100,000 white southerners from seceded states (the preponderance from Tennessee and Virginia) served in the Union army during the Civil War. Albert B. Moore and James M. McPherson both estimate that between 850,000 and 900,000 men ultimately fought for the Confederacy, indicating that one-in-ten represented the typical distribution of active Unionists relative to the total white population. Still, Confederates remained wary. “Toryism is still lurking in our midst, in all its hideousness and malignity,” wrote the Rome, Georgia *Tri-Weekly Courier* in February 1862. ““Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,”” it prompted its readers, “and now, in the birth-throes of our Republic, is the hour when our every action should be governed by the spirit of the aphorism.””²⁸

While they acknowledged the presence of Unionism, Confederates continually expressed bewilderment and disgust at the thought that any white southerners could possess any remaining fondness or loyalty to the United States. “It is humiliating to know,” wrote the Montgomery *Weekly Advertiser*, “that there are men in Alabama . . . men in league with the spirit of Northern domination—men ready to sell the South—to sell their souls.” They frequently expressed their hope and conviction that these “traitors” could not have been southern-born. They represented the opposite of everything the new

²⁸ Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 216-218; Thomas L. Livermore, *Number and Losses in the Civil War in America 1861-65* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901), 25; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 10; Freehling, *The South vs. The South*, xiii; Albert B. Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 357-358; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 306; *Tri-Weekly Courier* (Rome, GA), February 1, 1862.

nation stood for. At the same time, as historian Thomas G. Dyer notes, Confederates continually referenced Unionists in order “to define by negation what it meant to be a loyal Confederate. Internal enemies, imagined or real, thus contributed to the Confederate search for nationality and provided ready grist for propaganda mills.” One Virginia paper editorialized that “we had rather be a dog and bay at the moon, a toad and feed upon the vapors of a dungeon, than a Tory,” they explained, “for we look upon anyone who favors . . . reunion as being no less than a vile and unmitigated Abolitionist.” A Mississippi paper offered a definition of “Unionist” as “Submissionist—Emancipationist—Abolitionist—Anythingest to stick to the stinking, rotten old concern called ‘the United States.’” In sum, they embodied all the forces and deadly –isms the new nation had arrayed itself against.²⁹

In September 1861, the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* did not hold back in its bitter condemnation of southern Unionists. The paper declared that a white southerner still desirous of reunion was,

The most degraded creature that ever crawled upon the earth; a vile ingrate to the martyred dead, a foul traitor to the race, the State, the church, the family, the honor and the happiness of his own native land; a traitor to his own wife, and to the honor and safety of his own hearthstone; false not only to every relation, human and Divine, but even to himself. Traitors we have had in the last as in the first Revolution; Judas Iscariots there have been many in the church, and Benedict Arnolds in the State, but never did a political traitor merit so black a doom as that of the reprobate who will dare to whisper in his dreams of reconstruction the old Union.

²⁹ *Montgomery (Ala.) Daily Advertiser*, May 16, 1860, quoted in Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama,” 71; Dyer, *Secret Yankees*, 4-5; *American Citizen* (Canton, MS), September 12, 1862; *Winchester (Va.) Daily Bulletin*, February 5, 1863.

Just as they did in many other cases, Confederates looked to the example of the Revolution as a prism through which to view the present conflict. When it came to “loud mouthed Unionists (or more properly tories),” as one rebel paper wrote, making a distinction without a difference, Confederates tended to view the Tories of 1861 as even greater villains than those who had remained loyal to Great Britain during the Revolution. “A man might have been a Tory then and have made some pretensions to moral and political principle,” argued the Athens, Tennessee *Post*, but “George the Third waged no such war against humanity itself as is waged against the South by Abraham Lincoln, and the Southern man who leagues with him is a traitor, not only to his country, but to the human race.”³⁰

Confederates wondered what course to adopt toward the potential fifth column in their new nation. In August 1861, the *New Orleans Daily Crescent* advised the government to take the same approach that General Washington had adopted in when he took possession of Boston in 1776. “Shall the ‘rebel’ leaders of our second revolution not profit by the illustrious example” of the first, they asked, “and teach Southern tories, in 1861, a salutary lesson?” The paper advocated the confiscation and public auction of Unionists’ property, and that they be “prosecuted, and declared enemies and traitors to their county.” The appropriated wealth would then go toward the effort for independence.³¹ The Confederacy must impress upon the people, it concluded, that “the cause for which our ‘rebel’ fathers fought in ’76 is the same as that in which we are now engaged against the despot Lincoln and his tyrannical Cabinet, and that no obstacles shall

³⁰ *Richmond (Va.) Daily Dispatch*, September 9, 1861; *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), April 7, 1864; *Athens (Tn.) Post*, June 20, 1862.

³¹ See Daniel W. Hamilton, “The Confederate Sequestration Act,” *Civil War History*, Vol. 52, No. 4, Dec. 2006: 373-408.

stand in the way of its ultimate success.” One North Carolina paper worried that “the welfare of millions may be jeopardized by a solitary traitor, or a selfish tory,” and “for him no mercy should be shown.” Civic vigilance committees dedicated to rooting out and eradicating any remaining Unionism sprang up throughout the Confederacy. The *Shreveport Semi-Weekly News* stated simply that “strangers must give satisfactory account of themselves; the doubtful must be closely watched; the disloyal must be imprisoned, and when found guilty of treason, must be held liable to the penalty due to that capital crime.” In an atmosphere of impending invasion, those who would welcome and seek to aid the invader deserved incarceration or death.³²

As the government sought to formulate and codify its official policies toward Unionists, Confederate citizens frequently took the law into their own hands. “All wars generate a crisis atmosphere that stirs calls for unanimity,” explains historian Steven Ash, but many white southerners in 1861 believed that they fought for their very survival as a people. Solidarity became paramount, he writes, and “they therefore turned on their Unionist neighbors with great fury, bringing to bear all the community’s means of coercion, including public humiliation, shunning, and outright violence.” Stories that reached the North of the depredation of Unionists at the hands of exultant Confederates needed little embellishment. Barn burnings, tarring-and-feathering, and even hanging appeared grimly commonplace. “For white Unionists,” writes Barton A. Myers, “their loyalty stripped them of many of the antebellum protections that their race afforded them.” Many accounts feature reports of white Unionists chased by bloodhounds, an

³² *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, August 5, 1861; *Western Sentinel* (Winston-Salem, NC), April 18, 1862; David T. Ballantyne, “‘Whenever the Yankees Were Gone, I Was a Confederate’: Loyalty and Dissent In Civil War–Era Rapides Parish, Louisiana.” *Civil War History*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2017, 41; Storey, “Civil War Unionists and the Political Culture of Loyalty in Alabama,” 91; *Shreveport Semi-Weekly News*, June 27, 1862.

indignity usually only reserved for runaway slaves.³³ Presbyterian clergyman John H. Aughey, adopted Mississippian, later attested that numerous lynchings occurred during this “reign of terror.” The intimidation and expulsion of southern Unionists horrified northerners, but seemed eminently justifiable to Confederates. “When the foe who aims at our subjugation is pressing our soil, short must be the shrift of those who stand ready to welcome him,” explained a Louisiana paper. “We have no room here for tories,” echoed the *Daily Nashville Patriot*. “We may be accused of intolerance, as we have been by those who disguise their real friendship for the Lincoln despotism by the advocacy of the Union,” they concluded, “but we repeat, all tories had better leave the State.”³⁴

Robert Tharin’s experience at the hands of a Lowndes County, Alabama vigilance committee appears illustrative. In February 1861, community leaders backed by a small mob arrested Tharin at his home and accused him of disloyalty and conspiracy. He had “conversed with several non-slaveholders in the neighborhood,” they charged, and he “was organizing the people into secret associations” to resist secession. Immediately declaring Tharin guilty, a makeshift court ordered that he receive “thirty-nine lashes,” on his bare back, and that he “be escorted . . . to Benton [ten miles north on the Alabama River] and placed in charge of the captain of the first boat” and shipped away. His sick wife and handicapped child remained at home. The committee further decreed that, “shall he ever return to this community, he shall be hanged.” The local *Cahawba Gazette*

³³ *Christian Recorder*, November 14, 1863. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 69

³⁴ Ash, *When The Yankees Came*, 11; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 9; *Shreveport Semi-Weekly News*, June 27, 1862; *Daily Nashville Patriot*, August 22, 1861. For additional, detailed, accounts of the early-war persecution of Unionists by Confederates in the Deep South, see Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., *Southern Unionist Pamphlets and the Civil War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Williams, *A People’s History of the Civil War*, 287-288; John H. Aughey, *Tupelo* (Lincoln, NE: State Journal Co., Printers, 1888), 47; D. E. Haynes and Arthur W. Bergeron, *A Thrilling Narrative: The Memoir of a Southern Unionist* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006); R. W. Surby, *Chickasaw, a Mississippi Scout for the Union: The Civil War Memoir of Levi H. Naron* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2005).

reported shortly thereafter in an article headlined “ORDERED OFF” that Tharin “was taken up at Collirene last week, tried by a jury of citizens, convicted, punished, and banished . . . for expressing and endeavoring to propagate sentiments that were dangerous to the peace of society.” The evidence against him, they reported, appeared damning, and the paper applauded the swift action of the committee.³⁵

In the late summer of 1861, the Confederate government formally ordered any Unionists still living in the seceded states to remove themselves from the new nation. On August 8, President Jefferson Davis issued a proclamation warning “every male citizen of the United States, of the age of fourteen years and upwards, now within the Confederate States, and adhering to the Government of the United States, and acknowledging the authority of the same . . . to depart from the Confederate States within forty days.” After which time, he concluded, “all persons above described . . . will be treated as alien enemies.” The Confederate press praised the edict. The *New Orleans Daily Crescent* advertised that “if any Lincolnite, who is desirous of getting away, finds difficulty in procuring a passport for want of a voucher, let them call on this Local.” They explained magnanimously that “we are opposed to hanging, and would much rather these people cleared out in time.” A week after the proclamation, the ironically named *Nashville Union & Patriot* wrote approvingly that the Confederate people would never allow “Lincoln’s hirelings . . . to consummate their hellish schemes.” Rather, they darkly predicted, patriotic citizens “will rise up and exterminate every tory in the land who is detected in plotting against our chosen government.” As of Davis’s edict, they concluded,

³⁵ Don West, *Robert Tharin: Biography of a Mountain Abolitionist* (Huntington, WV: Appalachian Movement Press, 1970), 1, 20. The title of West’s book is a misnomer. Tharin was not an abolitionist, nor did he ever live in a mountainous region. See also Tharin, *Arbitrary Arrests In the South*, 8, 105.

There is no longer any half way ground. He that is not for us in this war of plunder of our property . . . of invasion of our homes and destruction of our dearest rights, is against us. We can no longer afford the luxury of nourishing in our midst vile conspirators, who would welcome the assassin and invader upon our soil, and assist him in driving the knife to our bosoms.

When the war began in earnest, Confederates became determined to expunge any remaining Unionist holdouts from their midst, just as the United States military had resolved to rescue them. Their fate hung in a precarious balance. Louisiana governor Thomas O. Moore, at least, saw a potential upside to the situation. “If all such will only leave the South with the invaders,” he noted wryly, “their coming will have done some good.”³⁶

Conclusion

At the outset of the Civil War, white Unionists in the Deep South took on a symbolic role in both the Confederacy and the United States out of proportion to their actual numbers on the ground. To Confederates, Unionists were simply Tories: internal enemies that stood in the way of independence and political liberty. While they pointed to the relative dearth of Tories as evidence of the unity of their white population, Confederates turned on the tiny minority of Unionists, hounding them into compliance, silence, or out of the new nation entirely. Unionists also provided a negative referent against which Confederates sought to define themselves. To northerners, white southern Unionists represented the chief victims of the slave power conspiracy and the only people through whom reconstruction and reconciliation could hope to begin. The Union army

³⁶ *New York Times*, August 28, 1861; *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, October 11, 1861; *Nashville (Tn.) Union and Patriot*, August 7, 1861; Pierson, “Benjamin F. Butler and Class Politics in Lowell and New Orleans,” 52.

and northern public imagined itself as bringing deliverance to these loyal victims of Confederate oppression, and hoped that multitudes would rally to the Union banner upon its arrival. Events would prove contrary to the expectations of both sides. White southern Unionists did indeed remain in every Confederate state, but not in the numbers that northerners imagined or required. As the war went on, both sides would adjust their assessments and alter their approach toward Unionists in the Confederacy to suit emerging realities.

Ultimately, any understanding of the manifestation of Unionism in the Deep South relies upon an understanding of military events. Just as the patterns and progress of emancipation reflected the presence of the Union army, southern Unionism would require military support to achieve full expression. The Union army gave southern Unionists a vital outlet, just as they did for enslaved people. Patterns of enlistment, and the proliferation of loyalty oaths, throughout the Confederacy directly correlated to the contingencies of military campaigns. As Richard Current explains, “to join the U.S. army, a southerner of Unionist sympathies needed access to it.” In order to further examine the history of white southern Unionism in the Deep South, the next three chapters will focus on the formation, recruitment, career, and perception – North and South – of three Union cavalry regiments recruited from that region. Between them, they provide an illustrative cross-section of the backgrounds, motivations, expectations, and experiences of the unconditional southern Unionist during the Civil War.³⁷

³⁷ Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 147; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 14.

Chapter Two

“The First and Strongest Proof of the Restoration of Government”: The First Louisiana Cavalry (U.S.), 1862-1865

Writing to the veterans’ journal *The National Tribune* forty years after the end of the war, Justin McCarthy, former member of Company E, First Louisiana Cavalry (U.S.), recalled the battle at Sabine Crossroads in the spring of 1864. “I will swear,” he wrote, “that I saw tears in [General Nathaniel P.] Banks’s eyes” as his regiment came up and went into the fight against the Confederates. The First Louisiana, McCarthy informed readers, had screened the advance for much of the campaign, and by the end of the day “my colonel and most of the officers were wounded.” Though they rendered creditable service to the Union army during the war, the regiment’s symbolic role in the struggle was far greater. To the watching General Banks, white Louisianans in Federal blue fighting to put down the rebellion represented a stirring sight. Charged not only with defeating Confederate military forces but also with fostering the reconstitution of loyal civil government in Louisiana, Banks was one of the many who looked upon the men of the First Louisiana Cavalry as the embodiment of that joint effort.¹

It remains a significant yet perhaps understated fact that during the Civil War, Louisiana – a Deep South state – served as the first large-scale laboratory of wartime Reconstruction. As early as 1862 it had become an important proving ground where the federal government started to grapple with the unprecedented task of bringing a renegade state and its citizens back into the Union. The First Louisiana Cavalry, a regiment recruited from among its loyal white residents

¹ *The National Tribune*, November 9, 1905; Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Louisiana. First Cavalry, M396, roll 6, RG94, NARA, “McCarty, Justin” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260022816>]. Hereafter cited as *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*. James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 99.

beginning in 1862, represented an important element of that endeavor and signified a great deal more to contemporaries than their modest military record might at first indicate. The regiment was above all a living, fighting, and voting indicator of Union sentiment in Louisiana during the war. Its rank and file consisted of both southerners by birth and southerners by choice—usually foreign or northern-born immigrants to New Orleans – who rejected the Confederacy in the clearest possible terms.²

From the commencement of hostilities, Union military and political leaders consistently sought to enable loyal but temporarily daunted white southerners to come forward and play the leading role in the reconstruction of their states. The First Louisiana Cavalry illustrated both the successes and the failures of that effort. Ultimately, mustering loyal white men in the Deep South proved a discouraging venture for Union leadership, but those who did emerge would become the foundation for postwar Reconstruction. They formed the “tangible nucleus which the remainder of the state may rally around”—the men to whom President Lincoln looked to accelerate the restoration of the state to its “proper practical relations with the nation.” When Lincoln, in late 1863, introduced his Ten Percent Plan as a possible basis for reintegration into the Union, Louisiana politician Michael Hahn could point to regiments like the First Louisiana Cavalry, made up chiefly of his constituents, as evidence of his state’s readiness. Roughly six thousand white Louisianans took up arms for the Union during the war. Compared to the sixty thousand for the Confederacy, they almost exactly represented their state’s requisite ten percent to the country. For members of the First Louisiana, their military service to the United States—

² Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 45.

the “severest test” of one’s loyalty – marked them indelibly as unconditional Unionists and make them an ideal group through which to examine Unionism in the state during the Civil War.³

I—Louisiana Unionists Before Federal Occupation

Well over a year passed in Louisiana between secession and the first arrival of Union forces to the state. Before they had the opportunity to avail themselves of military protection, Louisiana’s Unionists and their families endured a variety of trying circumstances and depredations under the ascendant Confederate nation. Residents of rural parishes who remained stubbornly loyal to the Union often had to go to extreme lengths to defend themselves. Outnumbered and surrounded, they faced the wrath of their Confederate neighbors, the impressment or destruction of their property, and, by early 1862, the prospect of forced conscription. In urban areas like New Orleans, most Unionist residents – especially among the working-class immigrant population – found it nearly impossible to avoid being pressured into the service of the Confederacy in some fashion. Both groups looked anxiously for the arrival of Union forces for relief and, in the meantime, frequently took whatever measures they could to harass the Confederacy from within.

Early in 1861 in Pineville, Louisiana, William Tecumseh Sherman bid an emotional farewell to his cadets at the State Seminary of Learning & Military Academy before leaving for the North. Out of more than one hundred students, all but one, Cadet Henry Bullard Taliaferro, would go on to fight for the Confederacy. Bullard Taliaferro, whose father James had drafted the protest against secession at Louisiana’s convention, wrote that he “never acknowledged any flag

³ Kenneth M. Stampp. *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 33; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment: Unionist Regiments and the New Orleans Immigrant Community, 1862-1864,” 197; Harris, *With Charity For All*, 10, 191-196; Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 95; Justin A. Nystrom, *New Orleans After The Civil War: Race, Politics, and a New Birth of Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 36; Current, *Lincoln’s Loyalists*, 93; Degler, *The Other South*, 174.

but that of the United States,” and was devastated to see his respected teacher depart. “Feeling very cast down,” Taliaferro lingered as long as possible with Sherman, and “going to his room . . . bid him good-by as long as he could see him.” Taliaferro then returned home to Catahoula Parish and, as the only one of his classmates unwilling to pledge his loyalty to the new Confederacy, had to “lay out in the woods” when the war began. Even his brother John Quincy Adams Taliaferro – who went by Quincy – defied their father and enlisted in the Confederate Seventeenth Louisiana Infantry. Bullard remembered later how conscription officers eventually came for him with bloodhounds and how, as soon as it became possible, he made his way down the Mississippi River to New Orleans and “joined Col. Badger’s regiment of cavalry, made up of refugees.”⁴

James Madison Wells, like Taliaferro, also had to go into hiding. Though his grown son Thomas Montfort enlisted in the First Louisiana Cavalry (CSA), Wells’s widely known Unionist stance quickly got him into hot water with his neighbors and Confederate officials in Rapides Parish. After attempting, and briefly succeeding, in a political effort to obstruct military appropriations from the parish, Wells retreated from public and took refuge in Bear Wallow, his massive hunting preserve in the woods near Jessamine Hill. There, “after all peaceable means resorted to to [sic] defeat it [secession and war] were exhausted,” he later attested, “I then resorted to violence.” Wells, who remained a prominent, if politically marginal, figure managed to rally a small number of fellow Union sympathizers to his redoubt. He made an explicitly class-based appeal to local Unionists. “I had the poorer people with me,” Wells later explained, “people who had no slaves. People who had been taxed largely to build up the levees upon lands that had been bought for ten bits, and which were made worth \$100 to \$125 an acre by the

⁴ *The National Tribune*, June 3, 1897; Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Louisiana, Seventeenth Infantry, M320, roll 289, RG109, NARA, “Taliaferro, J Q A” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/271/77875295>].

levees. Those were the men that were with me—men that had no negroes.” Using Bear Wallow as a base, they “would attempt to catch their [Confederate] wagons and wagon trains and kill their men.” Wells and his followers earned the label of Jayhawkers, the term used for Unionist guerrillas west of the Mississippi River. He “gloried in the epithet,” however, and later said that he “had rather have been called a jayhawker than a traitor.” He remained sequestered well into 1862, at which point he was able to make written contact with Union forces at New Orleans. Wells stayed on his property as long as possible, until “my friends thought it advisable for me to leave the parish.” He reasoned that, “I had been arrested once and thought if I was again arrested I would be shot. I then concluded to leave and did so.” Wells made for the mouth of the Red River, where he went aboard the Federal gunboat *Choctaw*, which conveyed him to Natchez, Mississippi and then on to New Orleans. He would not return until 1864, when he accompanied General Banks at the outset of his Red River Campaign.⁵

Small-scale patchwork resistance by Jayhawkers of the sort led by Wells remained the only option for unconditionally Unionist residents of rural Louisiana in the early stages of the war. Occasionally, newspapers in Louisiana would note anti-Confederate activity within the state. In the summer of 1862, for example, the *Semi-Weekly Shreveport News* reported that, “a band of Tories in Winn Parish were taken to Fort Jackson a few days since. Some of them condemned to the halter.” In Avoyelles Parish a mob killed one Unionist and wounded two others in a “scuffle.” Governor Moore, at least, became concerned enough about subversive activity to write to Confederate President Jefferson Davis as Union forces bore down on his state. In April 1862 he informed Davis of “secret meetings of disloyal men” who “assert a desire to

⁵ *Wells Papers*; Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Louisiana, First Cavalry, M320, roll 7, RG109, NARA, “Wells, Thomas M” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/271/645683111>]; Degler, *The Other South*, 154; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1007-1009; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 38; Williams, *Bitterly Divided*, 158.

restore the Union and commit sundry other acts of disloyalty and disaffection to the present Government.” A month later he wrote Davis again, with greater urgency, seeking the authority to declare martial law. “Traitors have sprung up on Red River,” he wrote, “including in my own parish [Rapides].” Wells’s resistance, it seems, had garnered the attention of the governor. Davis approved Governor Moore’s request, suspending the writ of *habeas corpus* in Rapides, Avoyelles, and Natchitoches parishes. Unionist activity in the countryside, however, remained sporadic and of minimal impact without the firm backing of the Union army behind it.⁶

In an urban center like New Orleans, on the other hand, it became nearly impossible for Unionists – especially those in the working class – to avoid outward submission to the Confederacy. Unable to take refuge in the woods, they dealt with the reality of Confederate authority on a daily basis. Immigrants in particular who harbored Unionist views had to stifle any expression of their political beliefs in order to continue to make ends meet in the Confederacy’s largest city. Working-class immigrants in New Orleans remained economically vulnerable and alienated from the city’s political power structure. In addition to the indirect pressure to comply with the new regime, the local government instituted repressive measures to tamp down any dissent, including jail time and forced labor. “Nativist thugs” even impressed some men into the army against their will. “Like the press gangs that compelled Englishmen and others to serve in the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars,” writes Michael D. Pierson, “Confederate ‘recruiters’ used coercive methods to get New Orleans men into the ranks.” Rebel leaders were

⁶ *Semi-Weekly Shreveport News*, July 18, 1862; Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*, 54; Ethel Taylor, "Discontent In Confederate Louisiana." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 2, no. 4, 1961, 411.

well aware, and wary of, many immigrants' thinly veiled antipathy toward the Confederacy and apparent preference for the Union, as the severe measures they took indicate.⁷

Incidences of sabotage, thought to have been furtively carried out by disaffected Unionists, further unnerved officials. Around midnight one evening in late December 1861, a gunpowder mill on the west side of the river exploded under suspicious circumstances. The *New Orleans Daily True Delta* charged the “diabolical work” to the “traitors in our midst.” In March 1862, men attempted (unsuccessfully) to set fire to an ironclad under construction at the city docks, causing the *New Orleans Bee* to again warn readers of “traitors, who are in such large numbers in the Crescent City.” The *Daily Picayune* also featured an editorial titled “Domestic Traitors” regarding the now-proven existence of internal enemies. Confederate fears of a potential fifth column within its largest city, then, did not appear without some merit. As Union forces began to make inroads into the heart of the rebel nation in the spring of 1862, the Confederate government formally resorted to conscription. Men between the ages of 18 and 35 who continued to resist induction into the Confederate service now faced immediate imprisonment. In New Orleans, writes G. Howard Hunter, “foreign born troops were prodded at the point of a bayonet on to transport barges bound for Forts Jackson and St. Philip to defend the city.” Many future members of the First Louisiana Cavalry (U.S.) reluctantly served in the Confederate ranks under such circumstances, having been quite literally thrust into the conflict. For them and their fellow Unionists, the war had reached a critical juncture.⁸

II—The Union Occupation of New Orleans and the Formation of the First Louisiana Cavalry

⁷ Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1940), 41; Pierson, *Mutiny At Fort Jackson*, 51, 60-62; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 189.

⁸ Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*, 51-54; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, March 12, 1862, quoted in Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” 411; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 190.

In April 1862, Confederate conscription and the Union military arrived in Louisiana at virtually the same time, marking a crucial turning point in the war and in the history of Deep South Unionism. On March 28, President Jefferson Davis sent a message to the Confederate Congress asking them to enact a system of conscription, the first of its kind in American history. On April 14, the Federal fleet under commander David G. Farragut appeared at the mouth of the Mississippi, and by the first of May, New Orleans was firmly in Union hands. Unable to hinder the Union advance upriver, many of the conscripted Confederate defenders of Forts Jackson and St. Philip had mutinied, forcing the surrender of the city's last real line of defense. While Union leaders understandably believed that their relentless bombardment had caused the capitulation of the forts, Confederate officers were convinced otherwise. They placed the blame squarely on the predominantly working class and immigrant garrison and its insufficient commitment to the Confederacy. General Johnson Duncan, the forts' commander, wrote that the soldiers "were mostly foreign enlistments, without any great interests at stake in the ultimate success of the revolution." Unwilling to risk their lives in behalf of the Confederacy, he and his lieutenants asserted, they had practically laid out the welcome mat for the invaders. Only the St. Mary's Cannoneers, a militia group comprised totally of planters, had resisted to the end. General Duncan stated publicly that many of his charges had "decided to share the fortunes of the Federals," and that soon afterward "many . . . enlisted with the enemy." Thus, some white southerners directly contributed to the capture of one of the Confederacy's most important cities even before they had the opportunity to put on a blue uniform.⁹

On May 1 1862, General Benjamin F. Butler, soon to become one of the most infamous figures in the history of the storied city, arrived in New Orleans along with fourteen hundred

⁹ Pierson, *Mutiny At Fort Jackson*, 32, 119; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 100.

Union soldiers. New Orleans, the “Queen of the South,” had been a Confederate city for 455 days. Butler remains a notorious and controversial figure, especially respecting his time in New Orleans. One historian recently judged that Butler “has perhaps the worst reputation of any Union general in the Civil War.” Colorful anecdotes of spirited resistance to his authority, such as the production of chamber pots decorated with his portrait, have influenced the way historians have characterized both him and wartime New Orleans down to the present day. Neither characterization, though, appears totally accurate. Frequently maligned as the paragon of inept political generals, Butler actually left a surprisingly large impression on the course of the war. He showed a consistent aptitude for mobilizing the Confederacy’s own manpower, both white and black, against it. It was Butler who first formulated the “contraband” policy at Fort Monroe, Virginia, for example, and in New Orleans it was Butler who spearheaded the effort to raise units of white men to fight for the Union. Major General William “Baldy” Smith described Butler as “helpless as a child on the field of battle” but “as visionary as an opium eater in council.” His past political experience as a Democrat in Massachusetts representing working class constituencies, particularly the Irish, stood him in good stead for his task in New Orleans. Butler consciously courted the poorest elements of white society using the language of class politics, and upon his arrival in the city quickly set about the recruiting measures that resulted in the formation of the First Louisiana Cavalry.¹⁰

The same month that he took control of New Orleans, Butler telegraphed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and told him exactly what the administration had hoped to hear. “Large

¹⁰ Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 101-102; Gerald M. Capers Jr. “Confederates and Yankees in Occupied New Orleans, 1862-1865” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Nov, 1964), 406; Andrea Mehrländer, “‘With More Freedom and Independence Than the Yankees’: The Germans of Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans during the American Civil War,” in Susannah J. Ural ed., *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity In America's Bloodiest Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 75; Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*, 156; Pierson, “He Helped the Poor and Snubbed the Rich,” 37-38, 62. Smith quoted in Catton’s *Civil War: A Stillness at Appomattox*, 568.

numbers of Union men – Americans, Germans, and French – have desired to enlist in our service,” he said. “If the War Department desires and will permit,” he suggested, “I can have five thousand able bodied white citizens enlisted within sixty days, all of whom have lived here many years, and many of them drilled soldiers, to be commanded by loyal intelligent officers.” Stanton swiftly authorized Butler to do so. General Butler, in addition to his many other responsibilities, also feared the possibility of a Confederate counter-offensive. The replenishment of his steadily diminishing (chiefly through disease) forces with recruits from the local populace offered a typically pragmatic solution. He also required a cavalry arm, the “one branch of the service,” writes military historian Christopher Rein, “absolutely necessary to begin offensive operations in hostile territory.” Butler’s chief of staff, Lt. Col. Richard B. Irwin, explained that “in the intense heat and among the poisonous swamps the effective strength melted away day by day,” and “the condition of affairs was therefore such that Butler found himself with an army barely sufficient for the secure defense of the vast territory committed to his care, and for any offensive operation absolutely powerless.” Butler himself noted his need of cavalry to “hunt out the guerrillas,” adding that, “a regiment with what I have would do immense service.” The enlistment of white Louisianans into Union units got underway that summer. In August, Butler again wrote to Stanton, reporting proudly that he had “enlisted a thousand men in the old regiments,” and “1,200 being organized as the First Regiment of Louisiana Volunteers, National Guards, and two companies of cavalry.” Those companies formed the initial foundation of the First Louisiana Cavalry, which officially mustered into service in August 1862.¹¹

¹¹ Christopher M. Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army, 1862-1865” Master’s Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2001, 13-14; Richard B. Irwin, *History of the Nineteenth Army Corps* ([1884], Baton Rouge, LA: Elliot’s, 1985), 50-51; Current, *Lincoln’s Loyalists*, 89-90; Jessie Ames Marshall ed., *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen: Benjamin F. Butler, During the Period of the Civil War* (Norwood, MA: The Plimpton Press, 1917), 192.

The men who enlisted in the First Louisiana Cavalry that summer provide an illustrative sample selection of urban Unionists in the Deep South. Later, as their operations carried them throughout the state, the regiment would add to its ranks and become more representative of Unionism in Louisiana as a whole, but the initial 1862 enlistments came almost exclusively from New Orleans. The “metropolis of the cotton kingdom,” wrote Ella Lonn, was by “by far the most cosmopolitan” city in the Confederacy, and the ethnic makeup of the First Louisiana reflected that. A full fifty percent of the regiment’s enlistees were foreign-born: a far higher proportion than the average Union unit but one that closely approximates the city’s total of forty percent foreign-born residents. In 1860, German and Irish immigrants together represented roughly three quarters of New Orleans’ foreign-born population, with Germans constituting forty percent and the Irish a third of the total. Irish and German newcomers on their own represented more than a quarter of the city’s total population. French immigrants still comprised fifteen percent of the foreign-born population in 1860, almost three times as many as British – including those from Scotland and Canada. Immigration to the United States before the war undoubtedly flowed predominantly to the north, but New Orleans – the nation’s second largest port – received tens of thousands of arrivals every year, was thoroughly connected to the entire Atlantic World, and was the only city in the South that approached the size and ethnic diversity of a northern metropolis.¹²

While perhaps atypical of the Deep South as a whole, the First Louisiana Cavalry does appear typical of New Orleans and embodied the diversity of the city of its birth. Surviving enlistment contracts indicate recruits’ place of birth, age, occupation, and in some cases pre-war place of residence, and they paint a picture of a remarkably polyglot unit. The contracts list no fewer than twenty-three different native countries, at times offering an interesting snapshot of the

¹² Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 8-9; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 10-11; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 187, 194; Nystrom, *New Orleans After The Civil War*, 7; David T. Gleeson, *The Irish In the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 28.

peculiar political alignments of mid-nineteenth century Europe. Private Raphael Basse, for example, a 29-year-old laborer, gave “Sardinia, Austria” as his birthplace. In addition to significant numbers from Ireland, Britain, Germany, and France, enlistees from places as far afield as Cuba, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Holland, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, and Poland all made their way into the regiment. Some were recent arrivals; others had lived in the city for decades. All of them rejected the Confederacy and hoped for the immediate reestablishment of the Union, and by enlisting in the Federal service made their stance unambiguously clear.¹³

The immigrants who supported the Union cause during the Civil War, and made up half of the First Louisiana Cavalry, did so for numerous reasons. Though they generally expressed little sympathy for the plight of African Americans, most European immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century – even to Deep South – displayed a definite indisposition toward slavery as an institution. One German speaker in New Orleans boldly asserted that, “about all these Dutchmen would be not only Unionists, but Black Republicans if they dared.” Confederate diplomat John Slidell concurred, writing just after the 1860 election that the Irish and Germans of New Orleans “are at heart abolitionists.” Many immigrants associated the unduly concentrated power of the slaveocracy in America with that of Old World nobility and subscribed to a political antislavery based on their adherence to a free-labor ideology. “As in the North,” write Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, “this opposition to slavery took a variety of forms and did not necessarily assure sympathy for the slave.” Attitudes among immigrants toward the South’s “peculiar institution,” and the potential ramifications of emancipation varied, and as for most northern soldiers,

¹³ Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 14-15, 30; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 8-9; CSR, *Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 1, RG94, NARA, “Basse, Roffe” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260031487>]. The First Louisiana Infantry (U.S.), another regiment recruited by Butler, even had five Chinese-born soldiers in its ranks.

probably did not constitute the determining factor of their Unionism. For the Irish at least, their toleration of slavery as it stood antebellum, observes Michael Gleeson, “was vital to the tolerance extended . . . by native whites in the region”¹⁴

Confederate contemporaries, as well as much of the subsequent historiography – which Hunter describes as predominantly “pro-Confederate or economic in its interpretation” – detected little ideological motivation at all and ascribed immigrants’ professed Unionism to simple expediency and opportunism. Historian John Winters judged that Unionist enlistments in New Orleans resulted from apolitical “foreigners feeling the pangs of hunger.” The wife of a Confederate officer observed more prosaically that, “they were all yanks for the money.” These explanations appear incomplete, however. While economic factors undoubtedly influenced the decision of many working-class immigrants in New Orleans to join up, the enticement of soldiers’ pay does not preclude the coexistence of other, more traditionally lauded, motivations. As historian William L. Burton explains in his study *Melting Pot Soldiers*, “To note . . . that money was a factor in the decision to enter the military for many—perhaps most—volunteers is not to trash their motivations; it acknowledges the reality of their lives.” The Confederacy paid its soldiers too. In fact, considerable evidence exists of genuine patriotism and unconditional Unionism within the New Orleans immigrant community.¹⁵

¹⁴ Andre M. Fleche. *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 3-5; Alison Clark Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship In the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 60, 79; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 34; Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, “Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South,” *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 1195-1197; John Fredrick Nau, *The German People of New Orleans, 1850-1900* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1958), 34; Robert T. Clark Jr., “The New Orleans German Colony in the Civil War,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 20 (1937), 995; Gleeson, *The Irish in the South*, 8.

¹⁵ Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 84; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 190; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 10; Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*, 161-162; William L. Burton. *Melting Pot Soldiers: The Union's Ethnic Regiments* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), x.

What foreign-born Unionists most often held in common, with each other and with northern soldiers generally, was a sense of the preciousness of the Union and the promise of economic, religious, and political freedom that it represented. Refugees from the political chaos that shook Europe in 1848 felt this even more keenly perhaps than their native born counterparts. They, especially, felt a loyalty to the United States and the flag that had welcomed them and their families in their flight from persecution. In 1862 a group of immigrant laborers thanked General Butler in an official resolution, stating that if not for the timely arrival of his forces “we would have been compelled to join the so-called Confederate army or starve in a Confederate prison: compelled to fight against the only free government on earth, where men of every clime have a right of fellowship extended to them.” Though not a New Orleans paper, the *Deutsche Zeitung* of Charleston, South Carolina summed up the feelings of many immigrants to the Deep South when its editor warned in the fall of 1860 that, if the Union disintegrated, “the new world, which God had vouchsafed men as the altar of their eternal rights, will no longer be a homeland for the oppressed. For this reason the German loves the Union.” Adolph Berger, a 26 year old German immigrant and member of the First Louisiana Cavalry from its inception, explained in a letter in February 1863 that, “during the occupation of this city by the rebels I was obliged to secrete myself . . . to prevent my being impressed into the rebel Army & thus forced to serve a cause, which my education as well as my own conscience taught me to condemn.” He signed it “one who is desiring to serve his adopted country and always willing to do his duty.”¹⁶

This should not suggest, however, that immigrants to the Deep South uniformly gave their support to the Union cause during the Civil War. In fact, that same article in Charleston’s

¹⁶ Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, 3; Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, 53, 76; Efford, *German Immigrants, Race, and Citizenship In the Civil War Era*, 8, 21, 43; Clark, “The New Orleans German Colony in the Civil War,” 994; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 45; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 191; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 10; Nau, *The German People of New Orleans*, 41; CSR, *Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 1, RG94, NARA, “Berger, Adolphe” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260034873>].

Deutsche Zeitung finished by saying that “the German . . . is true to the section which he voluntarily chose as his home,” and “stands by those . . . who were friends, brothers and neighbors to him.” Many foreign-born white southerners transferred their loyalty to the Confederacy after secession, and numerous studies enumerate their contributions to the war effort. A full third of the famed Louisiana “Tigers” of the Army of Northern Virginia, for example, were foreign-born, the overwhelming majority having volunteered in New Orleans. Lieutenant Colonel Camille Armand Jules Marie de Polignac, a French nobleman who had commanded troops in Crimea and would again in the Franco-Prussian War, lent his impressive military pedigree to the Confederate cause during the Civil War and would face the First Louisiana Cavalry during the Red River Campaign. Immigrants fought on both sides and for every imaginable reason. Though many in New Orleans did voluntarily side with the Confederacy, the greater number appear to have preferred the Union, especially when given a choice in the matter.¹⁷

The pronounced foreign-born element in the First Louisiana Cavalry quickly characterized the regiment as alien in the eyes of Confederate contemporaries and has continued to do so even for most historians. Those who emphasize the foreign origins of much of its rank and file, however, can miss the point. “For most foreign born soldiers ethnicity was just one aspect of their character, not the burning core of their very being,” writes Burton, and they “for the most part shared the motivations of his native born counterparts.” Louisiana was the southern state with by far the most prominent foreign population in the entire Confederacy, with ten times the concentration of immigrants as its Deep South neighbors Mississippi and Alabama, and both its Union and its Confederate units reflected that. The fact remains that there were many Union

¹⁷ *Deutsche Zeitung* (Charleston, SC), November 13, 1861, quoted in Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 45; Hunter, “Politics of Resentment,” 194.

regiments with a much higher percentage of immigrants in their ranks, and the First Louisiana Cavalry—far from anomalous—more or less accurately represented the (white) demographics of New Orleans. In addition to the half of the regiment born abroad, most of the other half consisted of natives to the Deep South.¹⁸

On top of the diversity of its foreign-born volunteers, the First Louisiana Cavalry could boast natives from every Confederate state, as well as Kentucky and Missouri. Louisiana was by far the best represented state in the regiment, but Mississippi and Alabama also both contributed a fair number. Notable Louisianans include the aforementioned Taliaferro, as well as Captain William Henry Hiestand. Hiestand's father Ezra had also owned a prosperous plantation before the war but refused to go along with secession. Like Bullard Taliaferro, but by no means a given, Hiestand also took the same Unionist position as his father and sought military service for the Union. While the two patriarchs soon emerged as prominent representatives of Louisiana's unconditional Unionists in public, their sons enlisted with the First Cavalry of their native state. The 21-year-old Hiestand volunteered for three years, rose to command of Company E, and later became a distinguished judge and delegate to the state constitutional convention. Henry O. Maher, a native of St. Bernard Parish and future customs weigher of the port of New Orleans, also enlisted as "a stripling of seventeen." The surviving muster rolls also list one Floridian. In fact, the regiment – between transfers in, officers, and volunteers – included at least one man from every single state in the Union except California, Oregon, Minnesota, and Delaware.¹⁹

¹⁸ Burton, *Melting Pot Soldiers*, x, and see chapters 5 and 6; Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy*, 11, 31; Nystrom, *New Orleans After The Civil War*, 3-4; Rein, "Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army," 14.

¹⁹ Rein, "Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army," 30; *San Bernardino (Cal.) Sun*, November, 11 1912; *Donaldsonville (La.) Chief*, November 27, 1915; CSR, *Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 5, RG94, NARA, "Hiestand, William H" [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/259930523>].

Many of the white southerners in the unit had served previously for the Confederacy as forced conscripts. Union Captain John W. DeForest, later author of the well-known novel *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* –stationed in New Orleans during the summer of 1862 noted that, “probably half the fellows who defended the [lower] forts against us are already wearing our uniform.” Other Union enlistees, some with their families some without, had made their way to New Orleans as refugees from nearby parts of the Deep South and volunteered. Some Texas Unionists crossed into Mexico, and went from there to New Orleans to enlist. Many denizens of the countryside had gone to great lengths to reach the safety of Union lines. For others, residents of the South’s largest city, the Union lines had come to their doorstep.²⁰

Henry Gardner, a New Yorker who recruited for the regiment in New Orleans in the summer of 1862, described the technical process by which a volunteer became a soldier:

Every man that is enlisted has duplicate papers made out – those with the ‘victim’ are turned over to the tender mercies of the Officer in charge. The men go in to a large room, where they are kept until examined by the Surgeon, and clothed by Q.M. [quartermaster]. The papers are given to me. On a large book, appropriately ruled, their names, where born, age, height, color of eyes, hair & complexion, occupation, when & by whom enlisted & period. In a column is entered the remarks, whether ‘passed or rejected’ by the Surgeon, when mustered into service, and into what organization . . . Then the mustering Officer comes, administers the oath and they are truly and firmly in the service of the U.S.

Ultimately, more than six thousand white Louisianans – the majority from New Orleans – went through this process and served in the Union Army during the Civil War, twice that of any other Deep South state.²¹

²⁰ John William DeForest, *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 31; Capers Jr, “Confederates and Yankees in Occupied New Orleans,” 424; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 78, 80; *Union Refugee Transport Contract*, Mss. 4007, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

²¹ Kenneth E. Shoemaker and Andrew K. Prinz, eds., “A Yankee in Louisiana: Selections from the Diary and Correspondence of Henry R. Gardner, 1862-1866” *Louisiana History* 5 (Summer 1964), 275.

III—The Career of the First Louisiana Cavalry

Some citizens of the loyal states had grown skeptical that any white residents of the Deep South would fight against the Confederacy. “Whatever hopes were entertained at first that the Union element of the South would be powerful as a needed ally to the Government,” wrote the Republican *Delaware Statesman and Journal* in August 1862, “enough has been seen to prove that the limit of active aid is pretty nearly reached.” The Border States had succeeded in putting men into the field, it pointed out, “but who expects to hear of a single regiment of Union men being raised in Louisiana? And who does not feel that the chance of raising them in any of the original seceding ‘seven’ would be naught?” Ironically, the First Louisiana Cavalry (U.S.) had mustered into service that very week. The First Alabama Cavalry (U.S.) would also do so before the close of the year in Corinth, Mississippi.²²

At the end of August, in contrast to the pessimism of the Delaware paper, the *New York Daily Herald* reported enthusiastically on the success of Union recruiting efforts in Louisiana. “The first public parade of the First Regiment of Louisiana *Union* Volunteers took place in the city of New Orleans yesterday,” it announced, “the troops looked finely, and during their long march from the barracks to Canal street, a distance of four miles, were ogled and eyed by thousands of Creole ladies.” Northern eyes were on them too. “We anticipate a good deal from this regiment,” they concluded. The *New York Times* also carried news of the parade, noting “there are now fifteen hundred men under the flag who were enrolled here, and I am happy to say, these Louisiana volunteers promise to be an ornament to the service.” It added that “a large number of these men have been in the Confederate service; they know how galling was the yoke

²² *Delaware Statesman and Journal* (Wilmington, DE), August 8, 1862; Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines: The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908), 997, 1212. Florida and Texas, of the “original seceding seven” would also muster regiments of cavalry into Union service before the end of the war.

imposed upon them, and accordingly they fight well and desperately.” As the war entered its second year, many in the United States continued to focus on the white southerners, still to be disenthralled from the Confederacy, who could yet play an important part in the rapidly escalating conflict. A fuller picture of white Unionism in the Deep South began to emerge that late summer and fall as Union forces made inroads into the Confederate heartland. While the hoped for Unionists never materialized on the desired scale, those that did step forward received newspaper coverage in the North and the attentions of an expectant nation.²³

Butler and his Louisiana volunteers provoked the ire of the Confederate nation as well, which sought to discredit the emerging Union recruits as unrepresentative and not ‘true’ southerners, incorrectly asserting that the regiment – the “litter of the ‘Beast’” – comprised exclusively of northern and foreign enlistees. As Michael Pierson has argued, Confederates’ hatred of Butler, at least in part, derived from his efforts to show that the Confederacy did not command the unanimous support of its white population. “To say that was to undermine the Confederacy’s legitimacy as a nation, and Butler’s New Orleans said just that every day.” For better or worse, Butler was a “political general” who understood the outsized symbolic importance that white Unionists held for both sides and, with parades like the one for the First Louisiana, capitalized on it to the best of his ability.²⁴

In the fall of 1862, as the men in the first waves of enlistment began their service, the tribulations of Unionists in Confederate-held Louisiana – still most of the state – continued and in some places intensified. In addition to the refugees who began to pour into New Orleans and relay their stories in person, General Butler also received written appeals from beleaguered Unionists who remained in the countryside. One petition, signed by the mostly German

²³ *New York Daily Herald*, September 6, 1862. Emphasis in original; *New York Times*, August 26, 1862.

²⁴ *Spirit of the Age* (Raleigh, NC), February 15, 1864; Pierson, *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*, 32, 161, 168; Current, *Lincoln’s Loyalists*, 154.

“gardeners and growers of vegetables” of the “Vacherie settlement” in St. James Parish near Lac des Allemandes, declared that its signatories “have ever been loyal to the United States government, have never in any manner or form aided or assisted the present rebellion,” and implored Butler for protection. “The wrongs and abuses they have suffered for their refusal to aid the rebellion, and to take up arms against their government,” they wrote, “have been of so gross and cruel a nature, and of such frequent occurrence, that their recital in detail would prove tedious to read.” The undersigned, they finished, “call upon you to come to their assistance and give them that protection which is due to every loyal American citizen. They earnestly hope and pray that you may be able to send a force into that important section of the country to effect this object.” Their loyalty had become notorious among Confederates, and ultimately produced brutal consequences. Earlier that the summer, seven men from nearby Des Allemands had enlisted in New Orleans when the Union Army arrived, joining the Eighth Vermont Infantry. In September, in a skirmish at Boutte Station, Confederate militia captured part of the regiment. When they learned that some of their prisoners were Louisianans from the Unionist settlement near Des Allemands, the Confederates “staged a mock trial and executed the men by firing squad.”²⁵

The men of the First Louisiana Cavalry, for their part, first met the enemy the following month as part of Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel’s Lafourche Campaign, screening the brigade’s advance down the bayou into prosperous sugar and cotton country. Carrying their Sharp’s carbines, revolvers, and sabers, they participated in the Union victory at Georgia Landing near Labadieville on October 27, 1862, and moved in to occupy Thibodeaux. Weitzel recorded that “my cavalry has been of invaluable service to me . . . I wish I had four times the number.” Weitzel, a German-American himself, expressed considerably more enthusiasm for his white Louisianans than the African-American Native Guards also under his command that fall.

²⁵ *Letters of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler*, 89-90; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 16.

He commended Company A of the First Louisiana specifically for preventing the destruction of key railroad bridges over the Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Terrebonne. The unit also suffered twenty casualties, a considerable number for cavalry.²⁶

Intentionally or not, by their very presence Union forces had also initiated the process of emancipation in the rural parishes. Captain John F. Godfrey, a New England native in command of Company C, wrote in a letter home that on the march “the greater proportion of the negroes followed us. It was the funniest sight I ever saw. The whole country as far as the eye could reach in our rear on both sides of the bayou, was full of carts piled full to overflowing with woolly heads, little and big, men and women.” The consequence, he summarized breezily, “is that all the plantations are left without hands, and millions of dollars worth of sugar cane are going to ruin for want of hands to gather it.” He expressed ambivalence toward black soldiers, writing they “are just as good for [guarding railroads] as white men, as to how they will fight I cannot tell.” Godfrey evidently enjoyed the commission General Butler had given him, writing in November that, “we have taken almost everything there is to take in this part of the country, and we are longing for a new field.” He also appreciated the freedom his command afforded. “I am just as independent as a colonel of a regiment,” he recorded with satisfaction. Unfortunately for Godfrey, in December 1862 Major General Nathaniel P. Banks, another Massachusetts politician and former Speaker of the House, replaced Butler in command of the Department of the Gulf and soon put his own stamp on the unit.²⁷

²⁶ U. S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 volumes, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1888-1901) Series I, v. 15, 169-172. (Hereafter cited as *OR*); Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 18.

²⁷ Stephen J. Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: André Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre In Civil War New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 117; John Franklin Godfrey, *The Civil War Letters of Capt. John Franklin Godfrey* (South Portland, ME: Ascensius Press, 1993), 20, 24; Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 84.

Banks, as part of his reorganization of the department, sought to consolidate the regiment and brought in his own man to run it: Major Harai Robinson. Immediately, Robinson curtailed the independence of company commanders. No doubt irked at having his authority undermined, Godfrey initially described Robinson as “a petty, small sort of man,” and a “cowardly, bragging, and ignorant major.” Known to the Confederates as a “renegade Texan,” the thirty-five year old multilingual Robinson assembled the semi-independent companies, raised additional troops, and began to build his reputation as the figurehead of the First Louisiana Cavalry. “None,” he averred, “will be . . . strong enough to place me on the bench of Traitors, or even of lukewarm patriots.” At the outbreak of the war, Robinson was conducting business in Barranquilla, Colombia. He returned to the United States via New York, purchasing a substantial shipment of arms for the Union en route. While in New York, a group including Mayor George Opdyke invited Robinson to deliver a lecture at the Cooper Institute on “the duty and necessity of furnishing the Government with a greater and more efficient cavalry force than we now have in the field.” He accompanied Banks when he was sent to relieve Butler in New Orleans at the end of 1862, and soon had the opportunity to put his ideas into practice at the head of the First Louisiana Cavalry.²⁸

Captain Richard Barrett, of Company B, adapted to the alteration in command structure more readily than Godfrey. Barrett and his men had already managed to distinguish themselves on the campaign, and Robinson quickly came to rely on him. “His specialty was picket skirmishing,” writes Donald S. Frazier, “and his men were proud of their ability to best Rebel horsemen and bring in prisoners for interrogation.” One Confederate officer noted of Barrett that,

²⁸ Godfrey, *Letters*, 46; Donald S. Frazier, “‘The Carnival of Death’: The Cavalry Battle at Cheneyville, Louisiana, May 20, 1863” *Louisiana History* Vol. 42, No. 2 (Spring, 2001), 194; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 8, RG94, NARA, “Robinson, Harai” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/263155880>]; Harai Robinson Papers, Mss. 488, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Hereafter cited as *Harai Robinson Papers*.

“this officer and company were the especial boast and pride of the enemy.” Though Barrett had been involved in a run-in with an officer of the Native Guards, he and his men appear no more pronounced in their hostility toward black soldiers than any other Union regiment in the Gulf. Whatever antipathy they may have felt regarding the Union military’s use of African-American troops, their objection did not divert them from their single-minded commitment to the Union cause. Early in Robinson’s tenure, in the spring of 1863, Barrett and his men were involved in perhaps the most ferocious episode of fighting experienced by the regiment during the war.²⁹

That May, as General Banks prepared to lay siege to the citadel of Port Hudson, the First Louisiana Cavalry served in the rear-guard as Union forces approached the city from the west. Detachments of Confederate cavalry harassed the column on the march, and at night the two sometimes camped within hearing distance of one another. “This regiment [the 1st Louisiana Cavalry] . . . and our battalion . . . frequently exchanged very warm compliments,” recalled one Confederate. “The frequency of these collisions had raised a spirit of rivalry among them, as to which were the better troops, and they were anxious to try each other on.” On the morning of the 20th, near Cheneyville, the Confederates laid an ambush for the Louisianans. Barrett and his men, “recognizable to the Texans from weeks of close encounters,” came charging down the road “rather too daringly,” Robinson later reported, when the rebel cavalry hove into them. “It was like the meeting of two mighty engines, and the very earth trembled from the shock,” remembered one Confederate, “the front companies on each side were interlocked and entwined with each other, and the carnival of death commenced, each party determined to win or die.” Major Hannibal H. Boone, leader of the Confederate cavalry, reported just after the battle that “several of the enemy succeeded in cutting their way through, and were handling my rear very roughly with their sabers . . . When my men had discharged their rifles, those who were without

²⁹ Ochs, *A Black Patriot and a White Priest*, 120; Frazier, “The Carnival of Death,” 194.

pistols clubbed their guns and used them against the sabers of the enemy.” Another Confederate later remarked that, “this is the only hand to hand fight I ever saw.” The First Louisiana suffered seventeen men killed or wounded, in addition to thirteen ultimately taken prisoner, though General Weitzel at first wrongly informed Banks that Barrett and his entire company had been lost. Barrett had apparently found refuge in the swamp, and staggered into Union lines the following morning “sans hat, sans coat, sans boots and dripping wet.” After the war, Confederate cavalryman Bill Davidson reflected that, “This struggle is remarkable for the fact that it was not southern blood against northern blood, but the only blood shed there was southern.” Northerners, he declared, “should remember that some of the best troops they had on their side were from southern states, who were abandoning home, kindred, and friends to fight under their flag, because they believed it right.”³⁰

The First Louisiana Cavalry played an active role throughout the campaign against the critical Confederate stronghold at Port Hudson. Along with Vicksburg, Confederate control of Port Hudson denied the Union navy access to a crucial hundred-mile stretch of the Mississippi River and kept tenuous but vital Confederate supply routes across the waterway intact. Securing the surrender of these two cities constituted the chief aim of Union strategy in the Western Theater in the summer of 1863. One of the First Louisiana Cavalry’s young leaders, Captain Algernon Sidney Badger of Company D, explained in a letter to his father that his regiment had proven vital to the effort. “Cavalry is scarce in this department,” he wrote, “and what there is they keep moving.” The Massachusetts native, who would spend the rest of his life in Louisiana and soon make a name for himself in the state, took evident pride in his men and their role in the

³⁰ *The Overton (Tex.) Sharpshooter*, June 28, 1888, quoted in Frazier, “The Carnival of Death,” 197, 202, 207; “Maj. Boone’s Report,” H. H. Boone, In Camp, Col. Norwood’s Plantation, to Richard Taylor, May 26, 1863, as printed in *The Bellville (Tex.) Countryman*, August 8, 1863; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 19; *OR* Series I, v. 26, pt. 1, 39.

struggle. Badger joined the regiment at its inception partly out of admiration for Butler and flourished in his leadership role. "I am much pleased with the behavior of my company," he wrote, "there is no white feather about them. It was sport to see them chase the Rebel cavalry into the woods." Companies C, D, and E, he asserted, had "played a conspicuous part and . . . did all the fighting we have had on land" during the Port Hudson campaign. In one of his letters home, Badger included a report by one of his superiors, part of which read:

Too much praise cannot be awarded to either Officers or men of this Regiment, for their gallantry on that occasion, and especially to Major Badger . . . who was not only at all times with his command, but in the charge led the advance, being at one time immediately up with the retreating Enemy. I would beg leave to state further that during the whole march, both officers and men behaved with the utmost gallantry, flinching at no time from any danger that threatened, performing their arduous duties with a cheerfulness worthy of the great cause in which they are engaged.³¹

The regiment also had its reverses, though. Banks deployed detachments from the unit frequently, and it garnered its fair share of casualties. To his young siblings, Badger reported that, "we have lost a great many men taking Port Hudson. Our men had to cross an open plain to reach the Rebel entrenchments, and in doing so, the fire from the enemy mowed them down like grass." Occasionally, he said, "a ball would come uncomfortably near my head. Some call these 'wizards [whizzed?] music,' I don't." Badger concluded his letter to his brother and sister writing, "war is terrible, I am glad you have to see none of its work." The First Louisiana, in terms of their combat record that summer, performed as faithfully as any regiment in the Department of the Gulf. Following on the surrender of Vicksburg, Port Hudson finally fell on July 9, 1863, thanks in part to Louisiana's Union cavalry, and the Unionist men and women of

³¹ Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 99; Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, 1863 March 22," Algernon Badger family papers, Manuscripts Collection 1080, Box 1, Louisiana Research Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118. Hereafter cited as *Badger Papers*; "Extract from Official Report of Col. Crebs to Brigadier Gen. Arnold, Undated," *Badger Papers*.

Louisiana rejoiced that sovereignty of the Mississippi River once again belonged fully to the United States.³²

Following the capitulation of Port Hudson, the First Louisiana Cavalry continued to perform scouting duty and clash with the enemy sporadically. In the lulls, however, discipline sometimes deteriorated in the unit, as it did in many others. Drunkenness was an issue among officers and enlisted men alike. Soldiers on leave, in particular, did not cover the regiment in glory. Earlier in the year, the *New Orleans Times Picayune* reported that, “Sergeant Turpin, of the 1st Louisiana Cavalry, was before the Court on a charge of having gone into a house kept by a colored woman, and behaved there in a most rude and violent manner.” The officer, the paper added, “was also accused of having got angry at the resistance which the woman offered him, and of taking from an armoire eleven shirts and seven plated spoons.” The judge made him reimburse the owner, plus \$5 for her trouble. On another occasion, two soldiers from Company E “were tried on a charge of stealing horses from planters in the parish of St. Charles.” Private John Owens of Company B, who had fought at Cheneyville, “was tried for going into a barroom, creating a disturbance because the proprietor would not furnish him with a whiskey punch.” Owens, the paper reported, “drew his revolver and threatened to shoot him, but the pistol was taken away from him by citizens standing by.” He was sentenced to six months hard labor on Ship Island, but returned to the regiment immediately afterward.³³

During one episode, discipline in the regiment became a grave issue, and Major Robinson sparked a national controversy with the stringency of his punitive measures. In August 1863,

³² Algernon S. Badger to Sarah and George Badger, July 14, 1863, *Badger Papers*; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 28; Michael Hahn to Abraham Lincoln, August 11, 1863, *Lincoln Papers*.

³³ Godfrey, *Letters*, 18; Capers Jr, “Confederates and Yankees in Occupied New Orleans,” 420-421; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 1, 1863; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 8, 1863; *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, September 1, 1863; CSR, *Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 7, RG94, NARA, “Owens, John” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/259887266>].

while the men were encamped at Thibodeaux, General Banks ordered Robinson to absorb the remaining members of the defunct Second Rhode Island Cavalry into the First Louisiana. Many of the Rhode Islanders vigorously protested. A Rhode Island paper later recorded that the soldiers “were proud of hailing from Rhode Island, and did not wish to be identified as men belonging to a state which had contributed so largely to the Confederate armies.” Robinson called out the regiment, and re-read Banks’s Special Orders No. 209 to integrate the two units. “After I had addressed them myself in English, Spanish, and French,” Robinson later testified, “not a man of the mutineers stirred. I then told them emphatically that if they did not rise up and form line, I should order them to be fired on.” When a few stood their ground, he selected two of the supposed ringleaders and promptly had them “shot to death in front of the whole command.” After this “military necessity,” the rest of the men fell in. Northern newspapers carried word of the dramatic “Mutiny at Thibodeaux.” The *Cincinnati Enquirer*, for example, printed a full account of the incident. Most of the onlookers had apparently “thought they would be reprieved at the last moment, yet the scene was so terrible that there was not one whose heart was not beating audibly on seeing these preparations for the death of two men who were generally liked in the regiment.” The paper’s correspondent omitted none of the grim details. The first volley ordered by Robinson somehow having failed to kill the men, he recorded, “they were finished by the Adjutant and the orderly sergeant of Company F, First Louisiana, approaching them and firing all the charges of their revolvers into them.” The Governor of Rhode Island submitted a formal complaint to Secretary of War Stanton. Yet, despite the severity of his measures, a military commission convened to look into the matter not only exonerated Robinson, it commended him. In fact, Robinson received a promotion to colonel, as befit his command of a regiment.³⁴

³⁴ *United States Congressional Serial Set*, Vol. 2769 (Washington: GPO, 1891), “August 29-30, 1863—Mutiny at

IV—The First Louisiana, Politics, and the Press

In late 1863 and early 1864, the stature of Robinson and his regiment continued to grow. The First Louisiana absorbed additional companies of men (without incident) who had volunteered in New Orleans and Natchez, Mississippi, and enjoyed a burgeoning reputation among supporters of the Union war effort everywhere. News even improbably reached across the Atlantic. Under the heading “Important from New Orleans” the *Glasgow Herald* noted, among other things, the organization of a “new white regiment” by General Banks. Unionist newspapers in America expressed their pride. “This body of cavalry . . . were enlisted in New Orleans” wrote the *New Bern Progress*, “they know that if they were to fall into the hands of the Confederates they would be considered as traitors and would be dealt with accordingly. Therefore they fight well, fight to the death, and have no idea of surrendering as prisoners.” The papers in Union-controlled parts of Louisiana particularly exalted them. “Louisiana regiments are filling up rapidly,” announced the New Orleans *Daily True Delta*, “braver men are nowhere to be found; with them it is their country—first, last, and forever.” The attainments of Louisiana volunteers, concluded the *Times Democrat*, “remains a recorded response of Louisiana’s native sons” coming to the aid of the Union in its darkest hour.³⁵

Ten days before Christmas, the *Times Democrat* noted in its pages “the arrival from the front of Lieut. Col. Harai Robinson, commanding the 1st Louisiana Cavalry, in which – as being now identified with the State – we feel especial interest.” The group “has ever been ready to meet the enemy under any circumstances, [and] has recently much distinguished itself.” During

Camp Hubbard, Thibodeaux, La.” 262-273; Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 192-193; *Harai Robinson Papers*; Claude M. Morgan, “Mutiny at Camp Hubbard” *Rhode Island History*, 30 (1971), 136-140; *The Cincinnati (Ohio) Enquirer*, September 26, 1863. CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry, M396, roll 8, RG94, NARA, “Robinson, Harai”

[<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/263155646>].

³⁵ *Glasgow (U.K.) Herald*, May 5, 1863; *New Bern (N.C.) Progress*, February 4, 1863; *New Orleans Daily True Delta*, January 27, 1864; *New Orleans Times Democrat*, October 16, 1863.

the late Teche campaign, it effused, “this gallant regiment from our State, after fighting isolated, for one hour, against the entire centre of the enemy . . . saved the day, and then led the attack on the enemy, and drove them from the field, after capturing nearly 100 prisoners.” Extolling the virtues of its commanding officer, the paper concluded by saying that, “Col. Robinson’s stay among us is only for a day, as his presence is required in the front. Knowing the . . . sacrifices he has made to the cause for which he is fighting, we hail with delight this brilliant achievement on his part, and consider it an earnest of what we may expect in future from one whose whole heart and soul are in the service.” The First Louisiana Cavalry had firmly secured the attention and acclaim of the Unionist faction of white Louisianans, and Robinson especially as their fearless leader.³⁶

Judge Ezra Hiestand, longtime New Orleans resident and unconditional Unionist whose son served in the First Louisiana, delivered a speech at the Cooper Institute in New York that fall in which he celebrated the deeds of loyal white southerners. To northerners remote from the harsh realities of war, he said, “you who are as prosperous now as you ever were, although the Secessionists told us that after secession commenced grass would grow in your streets— [Laughter]—you cannot appreciate the position of the few men in the Southern States who have been true to their country.” In Louisiana, he declared, “we have plenty of such heroes . . . men who have held out when the storm was blackest and there was no voice to cheer or comfort them; but their deeds have yet to be blazoned before a grateful country.” He also asserted that white southern Unionists accepted the destruction of slavery as the cost of restoring the Union. Those like the Louisiana volunteers, who displayed unflinching loyalty and continued to carry the fight to the rebels, demonstrated that the rank and file endorsed emancipation, if only as a war measure. The speech delivered by Hiestand – a slaveowner “ever since he was able to own one”

³⁶ *New Orleans Times Democrat*, December 14, 1863.

yet whose son fought on the Union side – reportedly had an “electrical effect” on the northern audience.³⁷

Back in Louisiana, Michael Hahn – born in the Rhineland but raised from a young age in New Orleans – had emerged as the leading political voice of the white unconditional Unionists of the state. Elected representative of Louisiana’s Second Congressional District in December 1862 by eligible voters who had taken a loyalty oath, Hahn had used the Louisiana volunteers to justify his mandate and bolster his uncertain representative authority. His fellow congressmen, in early 1863, explicitly asked him “whether he is in fact substantially the representative of the constituency he claims to represent!” and “how many loyal men has your district furnished to the army of the United States?” Hahn attested to the loyalty of the “large majority of the people of New Orleans—permanent inhabitants and citizens there,” in addition to “some now in the galleries of this House, honoring me as their Representative with their attention, who for their love of this Union are refugees and exiles from the State of Louisiana.” Secession had passed at bayonet-point, he repeated, and without a direct vote of the people. In addition, he assured the House, the voters of his district, and not the military, had demanded the recent election and sent him to Washington. In terms of its military contribution, Hahn continued, “I will answer the gentleman from Pennsylvania. When General Butler’s army landed in New Orleans, a great many of his regiments were diminished in the number of soldiers, and it became necessary to recruit them. He filled those regiments up to their full number by enlisting about two thousand; he formed in addition separate regiments, making in all four thousand men. In this I do not include the three thousand colored soldiers there enlisted.” Those recruited, he added, “did not participate in this election,” but no doubt existed as to where their loyalties lay. “The people of Louisiana,” he finished, “do not stand in this Union upon any selfish platform attributed to them

³⁷ *New Orleans Times Democrat*, October 6, 1863; *The Liberator*, October 16, 1863.

by some. They stand by this Union, because they think it is the most perfect and the most liberal system of government that the wit of man ever devised; and they are willing—to-day they are willing—to make any sacrifice in the world, consistent with freemen, to remain a part of this Union.” During his time in Washington, Hahn – a prewar Democrat– supported the war measures of emancipation and conscription and voted steadfastly with the administration, establishing his credentials as an unconditional Unionist and centrist backer of President Lincoln. He consciously identified himself with the white volunteers of his state, and as their political representative sanctioned both the destruction of slavery and the use of black troops, affirming his and their unwavering commitment to ending the war and reuniting the states, and to the temporary subordination of all other questions.³⁸

Late in 1863, Hahn made a bid for the governorship of Louisiana. In November he delivered a speech to the Union Association of New Orleans titled “What Is Unconditional Unionism?” Printed and distributed widely as a pamphlet, it presented his political philosophy to the country and became in effect the stump speech of his campaign in Louisiana. Hahn expressed his support for the Lincoln administration’s policy of emancipation as a war measure but insisted on ending the conversation there, pleading with his fellow Unionists to table any concerns over the place of African Americans in future civil society and to focus on the more pressing task at hand. He ran on a simple centrist platform committed to seeing the war through to its end, saving the Union, and working out the policy specifics – regarding citizenship and voting rights – later.³⁹

³⁸ Amos E. Simpson and Vaughan Baker, "Michael Hahn: Steady Patriot." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1972, 229, 233; “Speech of Hon. M. Hahn, of Louisiana, on the Louisiana Election: Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 17, 1863” (Washington, D.C.: L. Towers and Co., Printers, 1863).

³⁹ Wakelyn, *Southern Unionist Pamphlets and the Civil War*, 225-237.

For his lieutenant governor, Hahn chose James Madison Wells. In fact, in a remarkable development, Wells accepted the nomination for lieutenant governor from both Louisiana candidates. His unimpeachable Unionist credentials remained virtually unmatched among the prominent men in the state, and both Hahn and Flanders (Hahn's more radical opponent) consulted and publicly sought to associate themselves with him. Critically, even the former large slaveholder Wells acquiesced on the issue of emancipation, condoning an end to slavery in exchange for the prospect of an end to the war. He made very few public comments; only his unconditional loyalty had become widely known.⁴⁰

During the campaign, Hahn continued to refer to, and invoke the endorsement of, the troops Louisiana had put into the field in his speeches. A week before the election, on February 12 1864, Hahn's paper the *New Orleans Daily True Delta* reported on the reception of a recent recitation of his "Unconditional Unionism" speech he had given in the city. "The greeting which saluted him impoverishes description. The vast concourse seemed to have been endowed with superhuman power of lungs," it recorded, explaining that, "Louisiana volunteers were present in large numbers, and exhibited lively manifestation of their hearty endorsement of the principles so eloquently enunciated by the speakers." In the end, Hahn won the election handily. "The vote by the First regiment of Louisiana volunteers," reported the *True Delta*, "stands thus: Hahn 233, Flanders 7." Louisiana's white Union soldiers recognized and supported his brand of unconditional Unionism, and did their part to elevate him to the state's highest office as their representative.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Lowrey, "The Political Career of James Madison Wells," 1014-1016; Mark W. Summers, "The Moderates' Last Chance: The Louisiana Election of 1865," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1983, 51.

⁴¹ *New Orleans Daily True Delta*, February 18, 1864; *New Orleans Daily True Delta*, February 23, 1864; James G. Hollandsworth Jr. *An Absolute Massacre: The New Orleans Race Riot of July 30, 1866* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 16.

On March 4 1864, the thirty-three year old Hahn became the first German-born citizen elected governor in United States history. The event was attended with great fanfare. A band of 300 musicians and a choir of 5,000 schoolchildren performed the “anvil chorus” from *Il Trovatore* as forty men beat anvils in rhythm and fifty cannons fired in unison. 21-year-old Union soldier Henry Clay Warmouth, who would himself become governor four years later, attended the ceremony.⁴² Beginning his inaugural address, Hahn styled himself a “true son of Louisiana” and laid out his agenda. He again reiterated the importance of Louisiana Unionists, the “faithful volunteer defenders” serving in the army. “The loyal men of Louisiana have suffered much and deeply,” said Hahn, and despite the fact that they had fought with “valor and fidelity” at “all the principal battle-fields in this state,” their contributions remained insufficiently recognized. While he cautioned that, “for the moment civil government must necessarily harmonize with military administration,” he concluded that, “the volunteer force of the State . . . will assist materially in the early restoration of peace and the prosperity of the people, and present to the country soundest proof of loyalty.” He predicted the war would end within the next year.⁴³

V—The Red River Campaign and the Unionists of Rural Louisiana

The First Louisiana Cavalry and its officers continued their service on Banks’s Red River Campaign in the spring of 1864, where as part of the Nineteenth Corps they again served alongside a brigade of United States Colored Troops. Though he made his personal aversion to the U.S.C.T. clear, Lieutenant Governor Wells also accompanied Banks on the campaign, hoping

⁴² Henry Clay Warmoth. *War, Politics, and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 35.

⁴³ Simpson and Baker, “Michael Hahn: Steady Patriot,” 242; “Inaugural Address of Michael Hahn, delivered at New Orleans, March 4, 1864.” Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.02403900/>.

to finally return to his home outside Alexandria. In April, in a powerful metaphor for the changes the war had already wrought, the Corps d’Afrique camped at Wells’s Jessamine Hill estate. During the advance, Union forces appropriated his lumber and cotton, “for hospital use,” as well as for “fortifications and blockades of streets,” for which he still sought recompense from the government decades later. “The negroes,” he complained, “used it extravagantly.” Two of Wells’s middle-aged former slaves, Moses and Joseph, joined the white Louisiana regiments as cook and blacksmith, respectively. Joseph deserted at Baton Rouge later that year. During the retreat, Union engineers also used Wells’s lumber in the construction of the ingeniously resourceful dams that allowed the Union gunboats to pass the low Red River rapids and make a dramatic escape. Wells later claimed that Admiral Porter thanked him personally. Though evidently uneasy about the radical course the war had taken by 1864, Wells continued to make a substantial contribution to the cause and quickly reassumed his role as a champion of the unconditional white Unionists of rural Louisiana, recruiting several companies of Louisiana volunteers into Union service that spring.⁴⁴

These men were, like Wells, almost exclusively native to the Deep South and residents of central Louisiana. They came chiefly from Rapides, Winn, Catahoula, and Calcasieu parishes. In March, a northern soldier made a note in his diary of “men coming every day [to Alexandria] that have escaped the conscript officers and have been living in the woods like wild beasts . . . The stories they tell of the wrongs they have suffered, made my blood boil with sympathy.” Another recalled his encounter near Pineville with a woman who claimed,

That her husband was a Union man, and had been hiding in the woods for several

⁴⁴ OR, Series I, v.34, pt.1, 171; *Wells Papers*; CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry, M396, roll 10, RG94, NARA, “Wells, Moses” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260076810>]; CSR, Louisiana, First Battalion Cavalry Scouts, M396, roll 11, RG94, NARA, “Wells, Joseph” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260407058>]; Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 23; Degler, *The Other South*, 155; McCrary, *Abraham Lincoln and Reconstruction*, 243.

months to keep from being drafted into the rebel army, and she had been feeding him. . . . And I might well say that this was not an isolated case for we found many men, and women too, throughout the South faithful to their country and flag: ready to sacrifice property and life too, if need be to protect them from wicked rebellion.

Harper's Weekly informed its readers in May 1864 that, "these are desperate men, who have suffered all manner of outrage at the hands of the enemy, and who, on that account, lose no opportunity to inflict the heaviest punishment on those who have driven them to shelter of the swamps and forests." In total, close to four hundred volunteers enlisted with Union forces during the Red River campaign. Banks deployed Wells with the express hope of recruiting such men into the Union forces. He conveyed his belief to Major General Henry W. Halleck back in Washington that, "the amalgamation of the people of the rebel States with the army of the Union will be the first and strongest proof of the restoration of government." Banks declared his Louisiana regiments, to which he continued to add, "among the best . . . in the department."⁴⁵

One volunteer that spring was the former Filibusterer Dennis E. Haynes, who became closely acquainted with Wells, whom he dubbed "king of the Jayhawkers." Haynes wrote soon after the war in his memoir *A Thrilling Narrative of the Suffering of Union Refugees* that during the Red River campaign many Unionists came out of hiding to appeal for help and strike a blow against the Confederacy. Unfortunately for many loyal Louisianans, the Red River campaign proved a disaster for Union forces. Though the First Louisiana fought commendably, Banks suffered a crucial defeat at Sabine Crossroads in April. Colonel Robinson received a serious wound (recalled forty years later by Private Justin McCarthy) that marked the end of his active service with the regiment. 24-year-old Captain Badger, who Robinson had previously endorsed

⁴⁵ *Wells Papers*; Rein, "Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army," 23, 31; Lawrence Van Alstyne, March 29, 1864, *Diary of an Enlisted Man* (New Haven, Conn.: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor, 1910), 294; George G. Smith, *Leaves from a Soldier's Diary*, (Putnam, CT: G. G. Smith, 1906), 107; *Harper's Weekly*, May 7, 1864; Ballantyne, "Whenever the Yankees Were Gone, I Was a Confederate," 45-46; Lowrey, "The Political Career of James Madison Wells," 1018; *OR*, Series I, v. 26, 1:766-767.

as a “thorough officer in every respect,” replaced him but only had time to oversee the unit’s withdrawal. Banks was forced to pull all his troops back, and in the wake of his retreat Confederates dealt out harsh retribution to white Unionists who had welcomed the invaders. “Not a Union man that stayed at home, and was caught,” reported Haynes, “but was ‘shot with bullets as thick as they could stick in him,’ as was the usual phrase of those villains.”⁴⁶

Confederates also ransacked Wells’s property after he fled. “When we ran away from there,” Wells testified, “they commenced burning and burned everything I left behind me except my kitchen and smoke-house.” They would have destroyed those too, he explained, but his wife’s brother – who served on Confederate General Richard Taylor’s staff – spared them for her sake. Wells had “established himself as a strong Unionist, both with the Confederates and the Unionists,” with all the associated consequences. On April 23, Louisiana Confederate soldier Louis A. Bringier wrote home an account of their conquest. “Last night we made a raid on Lt. Gov. Wells’ plantation,” he wrote, “destroying all the cotton (2,000 bales), his buildings, and confiscated all the mules . . . in other words cleaned him out.” He concluded that “we have attained the object of our expedition: created a grand stir among the Yankees at Alexandria,” and ended ominously that “we have also disposed of about 30 jayhawkers.” Two days earlier, Bringier had more explicitly stated their mission to “exterminate” the “Jayhawkers—Yankee sympathizers & co.,” providing some grim corroboration for Haynes’ account. Wells would not

⁴⁶ D. E. Haynes, *A Thrilling Narrative: The Memoir of a Southern Unionist* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 65, 92, 102; Arthur W. Bergeron, “Dennis Haynes and his ‘Thrilling Narrative of the Sufferings of . . . the Martyrs of Liberty of Western Louisiana’” *Louisiana History*, 38 (1997), 29-42; CSR, *Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 1, RG94, NARA, “Badger, Algernon S” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260025904>].

return home to Alexandria again until 1866, when he did so as Governor of Louisiana.⁴⁷

VI—Louisiana Unionists, the Election of 1864, and the End of the War

Despite their setback in the field, the First Louisiana Cavalry continued to attract national attention and acclaim throughout 1864 due to the important constituency they represented. Reports of the wounding of Colonel Robinson appeared in northern papers. The outfit remained a powerful referent of white Unionism in a politically important state. Hahn's constituents in the First Louisiana Cavalry "were a substantial symbol of Lincoln's great hope of a reconstructed Louisiana," and under the President's Ten Percent Plan, they could vote. The men who made up the First Louisiana Cavalry represented the vanguard of Unionism in the state; those who would lead the way back to reunion for their prodigal neighbors. One Ohio paper went even farther than Lincoln's ten percent. Even if, "there are a thousand loyal people in Louisiana," it said, "we will make a great State out of them. There was eight persons came out of Noah's Ark, and now, behold, they have peopled a world. Why not those thousand make a free State of Louisiana?"⁴⁸

Many northerners viewed Louisiana as a microcosm of the political implications of the conflict as a whole. Some saw the state as representative of the ways the war effort had gone off track. The Democratic *Ottawa Free Trader* of Illinois, for example, wrote that "the case of Louisiana presents the issue squarely and broadly—shall the Union be restored and the constitution maintained, or shall slavery be destroyed?" Worried that the emancipationist policies of the administration would irrevocably alienate white southerners and make reunion impossible, many Democrats invoked southern Unionists in the name of restraint. Others, more supportive of

⁴⁷ *Wells Papers*; Lowrey, "Political Career of James Madison Wells," 1025; Louis A. Bringier and Family Papers, Mss. 43, 139, 544, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La. Letters dated April 21 and 23, 1864. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ *Delaware (Ohio) Gazette*, April 29, 1864; Hunter, "The Politics of Resentment," 197; *M'Arthur (Ohio) Democrat*, June 4, 1863.

the administration, pointed to the undiminished loyalty and continued service of some white Louisianans to the Union cause. These southerners, at least, remained willing partners in the national effort to end the war and reunite the country, and they abided emancipation as a necessary part of that effort. “The Union men of the South are intensely Union,” reported the *Gallipolis Journal* of Ohio in early 1864. They accepted that slavery represented both the cause of, and its abolition the solution to, the rebellion, and “right in New Orleans, in that once seething cauldron of secession, we look for the strongest development of anti-slavery feeling that will sweep the state.” The *Burlington Daily Times* also reported that, “one hears . . . more sympathy with the proclamation of emancipation, more fierce denunciation of the iniquitous rebellion and its leaders among residents of New Orleans, wherever a group be found, than in New York.” The paper reassured its readers that “the Unionists of Louisiana, whether in affluence or poverty, have less fears for the ultimate results of emancipation than have the Union men of the North. They certainly evince threefold more readiness to accept with fortitude whatever temporary losses or inconvenience may be engendered by the removal of the incubus of slavery.”⁴⁹

In the summer of 1864, at the National Union Party nominating convention in Baltimore, the representatives of Louisiana confirmed their dual support for Hahn and the policies of the Lincoln administration. James’s son Thomas Montfort Wells, known as ‘Monk’ to his friends, commented that, “I am in favor of prosecuting this war under the present occupant of the White House.” The Wells family was as conservative as could be, but had crossed the Rubicon with the Union, favored seeing the war through to victory, and tolerated emancipation both as a means to that end and as a punishment for those who had instigated secession. “I am for immediate and

⁴⁹ *Ottawa (Ill.) Free Trader*, July 4, 1863; *Gallipolis Journal*, February 4, 1864; *Burlington (Vt.) Daily Times*, April 27, 1863.

unconditional emancipation,” he declared, but also “for compensating the loyal owners, provided the Federal authorities confiscate the property of disloyal owners to meet these payments.”

Robert W. Taliaferro, Bullard’s brother and James’s son, also travelled to Baltimore as a representative of loyal Louisiana. He wrote to his father on the eve of the convention, “Pa, I am going for Abe. I think he is a great and a good man and one who will crush out this unholy and uncalled for rebellion.” Robert vented his feelings to his father, predicting that “the scoundrels that infest Louisiana will soon have to succumb to the great Grant and Sherman and the nigger government of Davis & Stephens will vanish like smoke . . . I am of too much grit to be driven from my home by a set of devils that are nothing but murderous cowards.” Assessing the political situation that summer, Taliaferro concluded that, “There can be no middle or compromise ground. I consider them [secesh] now my most deadly enemies.”⁵⁰

A letter written at the end of September from Christian D. Koch, a loyal resident of the Louisiana gulf coast sheltered at Fort Pike, to his wife still at home sheds further light on the stakes of the election for the white Unionists of the Deep South, as they saw it. “It would be no place for us to live,” he judged, if Lincoln lost. “I think Lincoln will again be elected,” Koch concluded hopefully, and “if so perhaps we will yet have a home for our old age. If not we may as well make up our mind to lose everything we have, and move to the West, and begin the world again...”⁵¹

At the end of the year, prominent Unionists including Wells petitioned newly re-elected President Lincoln for greater public recognition of the contribution Louisiana had made to the cause. They asked specifically for a promotion for Harai Robinson, as the personification

⁵⁰ McCrary, *Abraham Lincoln and Reconstruction*, 272; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1019; R. W. Taliaferro to James G. Taliaferro, June 1, 1864. *Taliaferro Papers*.

⁵¹ C. D. Koch to Annette Koch, September 28, 1864. Christian D. Koch and Family Papers, Mss. 202, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

Louisiana's Union military contribution. "We beg leave," it read, "to call your attention to the fact that although our State has furnished one cavalry and two infantry regiments of white troops and large force of colored troops to aid in suppressing the rebellion, she has never been represented by a general officer." Though "there are in this department many gentlemen whose appointment would give satisfaction to our citizens," they wrote, "among them we take the liberty of suggesting Colonel Harai Robinson." Louisiana's Unionists wanted to see their sacrifices and accomplishments honored and appreciated, and could think of no exemplar more fitting than the leader of the First Louisiana Cavalry. Louisiana represented a crucially important battleground of the Civil War, militarily as well as politically. Prominent Unionists there such as Robinson and the men that comprised regiments like the First Louisiana Cavalry, explains Frank J. Wetta, were "living indexes of a latent Union sentiment in the state," and represented proof of the existing foundation for reunion. With many increasingly willing to believe that Union victory was in sight, the importance of these men only grew.⁵²

Union leadership, even in late 1864, continued to seek out white southerners for military service against the Confederacy, which increasingly took the form of guerrilla and irregular troops wreaking havoc in the countryside. That fall, the First Louisiana Cavalry added Company K, raised entirely from among the Cajun population, to help maintain order. Many Francophone Acadians had followed Louisiana into the Confederacy, but others had laid out until the arrival of Union forces. One Union officer reported that "many of them say they have not been home or inside of a house for eighteen months, but have been hiding in the swamps to avoid the conscription . . . there is now already near three hundred of them mounted, and acting as scouts, and they are found to be very useful, as they are acquainted with every part of the country."

⁵² Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 62; "Petition of the Governor & Lieut Governor & members of the legislature of the State of Louisiana to President Lincoln that Col. Harai Robinson be commissioned Brig Genl of Vol." December 25, 1864. *Harai Robinson Papers*.

Numa Pomponeau, of Napoleonville, received an appointment to Second Lieutenant in Company K, because he “would be a great benefit to the service in the District knowing the country as he does.” Jules Masicot also received additional responsibilities because he “speaks French very well,” and became provost marshal of Plaquemine. Union military and political leaders remained committed to self-reconstruction by loyal white southerners in their own communities, and the deployment of Company K typified their efforts.⁵³

While Company K pacified the countryside, the rest of the regiment left the state for the first time, joining in the overland campaign against Mobile in early 1865. As the war drew to a close, the First Louisiana helped finish the job with their advance into Alabama, and displayed both its best and its worst qualities. On March 20, members of the regiment – including a 14-year-old bugler – broke into the Union supply ship “George B. McClellan” near Pensacola, Florida and made off with “syrup, pickles, dried tongues, bacon, wine, sugar, and cheese” worth more than two hundred dollars. A court-martial found six men guilty and sentenced them to a year’s hard labor. The group – which included a Prussian, four New Orleans natives, and a New Yorker – offers a useful snapshot of the regiment’s demography. A little over a month later, with the regiment near Montgomery, Private Patrick Dolan and Private Thomas Glynn were censured for “entering the house and putting a gun to the head of Madam W. L. Yancey . . . putting her in fear of her life.” It is unclear from the service records whether the two men were aware at the time that the woman they accosted was the widow of notorious Fire-Eater William Lowndes Yancey. In addition to such iniquitous behavior, however, the regiment also produced instances of conspicuous valor. In April, the *Chicago Tribune* reported the “gallant and irresistible” charge of “the 1st Louisiana Cavalry (loyal)” in the sweep toward Mobile, and during the assault on Fort

⁵³ Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 24-25, 32-33; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 7, RG94, NARA, “Pomponan, Numa A” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/259888554>]; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 6, RG94, NARA, “Masicot, Jules A” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260019246>].

Blakeley, Private Thomas Riley captured a Confederate battle flag, for which he earned the Medal of Honor. Even Riley had found himself subject to disciplinary measures at one point. A veteran of the regiment from its organization, he suffered a demotion from corporal to private during in the war, but that did not preclude him from risking his life, exhibiting courage under fire, and striking a powerful symbolic blow against the rebellion in the war's final days.⁵⁴

The First Louisiana Cavalry returned to its home state after the Confederate surrender at Citronelle, Alabama. The troopers garrisoned various posts in Louisiana before marching across Texas to Austin, where they officially mustered out later that year. Many men let themselves out of the service early, deserting in increasing numbers as the unit moved west. Their war was over, and they appeared desperate to return to their homes and families. When the fighting had completely ceased, Lieutenant Colonel Algernon Sidney Badger wrote to Governor James Madison Wells, who had assumed the governorship after Michael Hahn's election to the Senate. "Governor," he wrote, "I have the honor to transmit herewith the colors borne by the First Louisiana Cavalry since its organization as a regiment." After listing the engagements the regiment and the flag had served through, he concluded, "the First Louisiana Cavalry are now about to be mustered and discharged from the U.S. service, and I have the proud satisfaction of returning the colors to the State of Louisiana, conscious that they have been carried honorably through the great struggle for our national existence, trusting that they will be preserved and placed in an honorable position among the archives of the state."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Rein, "Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army," 26-27; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 7, RG94, NARA, "Pollens, William" [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/259888542>]; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 3, RG94, NARA, "Dolan, Patrick" [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/260001360>]; *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1865; *CSR, Louisiana, First Cavalry*, M396, roll 8, RG94, NARA, "Riley, Thomas" [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/263155514>].

⁵⁵ Rein, "Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army," 27; *New Orleans Times Democrat*, December 27, 1865.

A week later, Wells's reply to Badger appeared in the New Orleans papers. "I assure you, sir," he wrote,

It is no less my pleasure than my duty to receive these colors and have them preserved as a memento of the patriotic motives and gallant services of the men composing the First Louisiana Cavalry. Unstimulated by the reward of large bounties, you responded to the call of your country from a sense of duty, and the record of the different engagements in which the regiment participated, shows you performed your part nobly and faithfully.

It is one in which not only the men composing the regiment have a right to feel a pride, but every citizen of the State who reveres and cherishes the Union of these States. I hope the day is not far distant when the State will be in a condition to make a more substantial acknowledgment of the valuable services rendered by the First Louisiana Cavalry in defending the integrity of the nation...

Wells and Badger would both go on to play vitally important roles in Louisiana during Reconstruction, but that still lay well in the future. In these letters, they simply hailed one another as partners in the joint effort to end the rebellion and reunite the country. Both politically and militarily, the unconditional Unionists of Louisiana had emerged victorious in 1865.⁵⁶

VII—Conclusion

In the fall of the year, a ball was held for the officers of the First Louisiana Cavalry. A "handsome affair," declared the *New Orleans Times Democrat*, "the occasion was favored with the beauty of our city, and we have no doubt will long be remembered." Colonel Badger was there, and reflected on the remarkable transformations the war had wrought. "I wear the eagle on my shoulder strap now," he wrote to his father, "rather a higher rank than I ever expected to attain in the U. S. Army when I shouldered my musket." More importantly though, "it was really gratifying to see the apparent good feeling that pervaded the entire throng—a mingling of those who but a short time since were arrayed against each other in deadly strife." Badger noted that "the officers of the 1st Louisiana Cavalry were present in full uniform, mingling socially among

⁵⁶ *New Orleans Times Democrat*, December 27, 1865.

many officers and soldiers of the late Confederate army who were present.” The celebratory atmosphere, however, belied the fragility of the Louisiana Unionist coalition that had come together during the war. Indeed, the easygoing fraternization of former foes at the ball in late 1865 reflected the conditions of the era of Presidential Reconstruction—gratifying to some white southern Unionists but galling to others.⁵⁷

The group of white Louisianans that had coalesced around their shared, unconditional commitment to the Union during the war began to fracture almost immediately afterward. The issues of civil rights for African Americans and the standing of former Confederates sharply divided Unionists in the postwar period. Nevertheless, victorious after three long years of war, the First Louisiana Cavalry and those connected with it had still attained a historic, symbolic status – both to the state and to the nation – as white residents of the Deep South who had passed the toughest test of loyalty and helped save the Union. That, from the beginning, had remained their solitary goal.

Bullard Taliaferro, for one, still with the regiment, shared the indignation he still felt toward the Confederates with his father. “The curtain has rolled down on the drama of rebellion,” he wrote, and “considering the advanced state of civilization, it will be termed the most outrageous act on the part of those who began it, and the most damning tyranny that ever existed since the beginning of creation. We cannot appeal to the dark ages for a parallel, because men were not then civilized. ‘Intelligent traitors,’ men who have brought such ruin upon the country, and brought the people to such a humiliated condition, I could witness gibbeted with patriotic pleasure.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *New Orleans Times Democrat*, October 30, 1865. Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, October 10, 1865. *Badger Papers*.

⁵⁸ H. B. Taliaferro to James G. Taliaferro, July 7, 1865. *Taliaferro Papers*.

A close examination of the history of the First Louisiana Cavalry as a unit—the men who made it up, why they fought, the circumstances of their enlistment, and their experience on the front lines—sheds valuable light on the various facets of Unionism in a crucial Deep South state. Roughly half of the regiment consisted of foreign born, mostly working class, immigrants to New Orleans who retained their loyalty to the United States after secession and reaffirmed it by joining upon the arrival of Union forces in 1862. Most of the other half consisted of native Louisianans and refugees from various points in the Deep South who went against the grain of their society and unequivocally rejected the Confederacy. For both, an unconditional Unionism led them to don the Federal blue uniform – an act of no small courage for a white southerner during the Civil War – and to serve through all of its uncertainty. Over the course of the conflict, they came to signify a great deal both in Louisiana and throughout the United States as the men who could form the bedrock of future reconstruction, and gained a reputation out of proportion to their contribution in the field. Nothing proved unconditional loyalty more conspicuously than service to the Union in the nation’s hour of greatest need. More than perhaps any other institution, units like the First Louisiana Cavalry embodied the United States’ attempt to harmonize the military and political efforts to piece the country back together. The fifteen hundred men who served in the regiment, and more than six thousand white Louisianans who fought for the Union during the Civil War, held a symbolic importance to contemporaries largely unrecognized by historians. The First Louisiana Cavalry, in particular, would also go on to become an important touchstone of wartime loyalty during the increasingly tortuous political unraveling of Reconstruction.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Rein, “Trans-Mississippi Southerners in the Union Army,” 15; Hunter, “The Politics of Resentment,” 190.

Chapter Three

“The Acid Test of True Unionism”: The First Alabama Cavalry (U.S.), 1862-1865

*“Yes and there were Union men who wept with joyful tears/
When they saw the honored flag they had not seen for years”
--Henry Clay Work, “Marching Through Georgia,” 1865.*

In late October 1863, Confederate Brigadier General Samuel W. Ferguson set out from Cane Creek, Alabama with a provisional mounted force to “intercept a regiment of native Alabamians that had enlisted in the service of the U.S.” They were looking for the First Alabama Union Cavalry, formed in late 1862 and led by Colonel George E. Spencer. Before long, near the Mississippi border, they found them. After a short but apparently intense fight had ended, Ferguson paused to reflect on the “curious sight” that had materialized before him. “In the very center of the Confederacy,” he wrote, he was astonished to see “men wearing the enemy’s uniform, killed – as some were – within [a] half mile of their own houses.” Ferguson proudly, though wrongly, reported to his superior Major General Stephen D. Lee that he had “succeeded in effectually destroying the First Alabama Tory Regiment.” Why, he wondered, were these white Alabamians wearing Union blue? What could have motivated these “Tories” to go to such lengths to thwart the independence of the Confederacy?¹

The exploits of this Union regiment of white Alabamians also raised eyebrows in the United States. The *Soldier’s Journal*, for example, a weekly paper printed for Union

¹ Samuel Wragg Ferguson Papers, Mss. 1416, 1576, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge; Samuel W. Ferguson to S. D. Lee, October 31, 1863, *OR*, I, v. 31, pt. I, 38; *North American and United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), November 5, 1863.

forces in the field in Virginia, commented in February 1864, “it is not generally known, perhaps, that we have a cavalry regiment composed wholly of loyal Alabamians. The regiment was raised in Corinth, Mississippi, and is made up of refugees.” The paper affirmed that, “since the organization of the regiment it has been in constant and active service. It has captured over nine hundred prisoners. It has lost . . . killed and wounded, upward of one hundred men.” Its recruits, the *Journal* noted, had endured trying circumstances to make their way into the lines and enlist, and their colonel, “has asked leave to raise a brigade, believing that he can raise three or four regiments in a short time.” The promise, ultimately unfulfilled, of an additional “three or four regiments” like this one, possibly still to emerge from among Alabama’s white population, augured well for the prospects of Unionism and future cooperation with federal authority even in the heartland of the Confederacy.²

To the Confederate General Ferguson, the regiment of Alabama “Tories” represented a “curious” anomaly, one that he hoped had been swept aside for good. To the *Soldier’s Journal*, they represented the mere tip of the iceberg of long-stifled Unionist sentiment among the white population in the seceded states. Neither assessment ultimately proved accurate. Neither, though, could miss the singular significance of a regiment such as the First Alabama Union Cavalry in the sectional conflict at hand. During the war, the regiment took on a symbolic importance to both sides out of proportion to its actual numbers. Unlike with the First Louisiana Cavalry, Confederates could not attempt to explain them away as a foreign element comprised of apathetic urban recruits. The First Alabama was comprised almost entirely of native white southerners who undertook severe risks to enlist and serve, passing what historian Bessie

² *The Soldier’s Journal* (Rendezvous of Distribution, VA), February 24, 1864.

Martin called the “acid test of true Unionism.” To Confederates, they represented Tories, traitors to the political ideals of the Confederate South, and became the subject of scrutiny from politicians and enmity in the press. To northerners, they represented the ever loyal citizens swept away by the tide of secession and a tangible nucleus of Union support within the rebelling states on which Reconstruction policies could be built.³

The story of the First Alabama Cavalry sheds light on numerous elements of the phenomenon of white Unionism in the Deep South. Many of the men who joined the regiment arrived motivated by a marked hostility toward the secessionist planter class that had brought on the current crisis and arrogated to themselves the lion’s share of political and economic power in the state. Many had already suffered serious depredations at the hands of Confederate partisans before the appearance of Union forces and took a measure of revenge whenever they had the opportunity—most notably when they rode in the vanguard of Sherman’s March to the Sea. They condoned emancipation as a necessary war measure, just punishment, and future check on the Slave Power—but retained a deep-seated antipathy toward African Americans the war did nothing to alter. For these atypical white Alabamians, the salvation of the Union – with or without slavery intact – subsumed all other concerns over the course of the war.

In all, 2,066 soldiers enlisted in the First Alabama Cavalry between 1862 and 1865, representing about two-thirds of the estimated total of Alabamians who took up arms for the Union.⁴ They forged a creditable military record over the three years of its existence and possessed a political significance to contemporaries on both sides largely

³ William Stanley Hoole. *Alabama Tories: The First Alabama Cavalry, U. S. A., 1862-1865* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Confederate Pub. Co., 1960), 16-17; Bessie Martin. *Desertion of Alabama Troops from the Confederate Army* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 101.

⁴ The First Florida Cavalry (U.S.) also contained a substantial number of Alabamians. See Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 122.

overlooked by current scholars. As Alabama historian William Stanley Hoole noted, “the very *existence* of the First Alabama Cavalry entitles it to special consideration.” His own history of the regiment, however, is a rather boilerplate military history. Deeper investigation of the formation, career and legacy of the regiment, as well as these stories of the men who comprised its both leadership and rank and file, illuminates many of the complex facets of white Unionism in the state and in the Deep South as a region.⁵

I—Alabama Unionists Before Federal Occupation

During the more than a year between secession and the first arrival of Federal troops in northern Alabama, life for Unionists in the state had become increasingly fraught and precarious. Accounts of future soldiers and their family members recorded in diaries, letters, Southern Claims Commission files and other forms almost universally attest to the dire situation they faced as a result of their national allegiance. Confederate partisans attempted to enforce fealty to the new nation through intimidation and violence; especially after the institution of the Confederate draft in April 1862, even an outwardly neutral stance became untenable. As John Terry, a Cherokee County Unionist later testified, “things got . . . hot about the time the conscript law passed.” Men of military age could either report for Confederate service or face immediate forced conscription. The prospect induced many who still refused to fight against the Union to seek refuge in the woods. Women, non-military age men, and at times even enslaved people helped to develop and sustain support networks for these “lie-outs” which allowed Unionists in northern Alabama to carry on a dogged resistance to the draft. They soon earned the

⁵ Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 103-107; Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 15.

colloquial epithet of “mossbacks” for hiding so thoroughly, and for so long, that they managed to gather moss.⁶

Confederates sometimes resorted to the tactic of “burning out” those who continued to resist the conscription act. Jesse V. Tiara of Marion County, for example, became known as a “lie-out” determined to avoid serving, and associated with a group who “sought to protect Union men in that section of the country from being forced into the rebel army.” As a result, Confederates set fire to his house, destroyed “thirty bushels of oats, fifteen hundred bundles of fodder, a wagon,” and “cut the ears off” two of his horses. Other Alabama Unionists suffered similar depredations, well documented by sympathetic contemporaries and historians alike. The pressure to submit to Confederate authority, at least outwardly, became too much for many to bear.⁷

William McGough of Walker County experienced the turmoil acutely. Appealing to the Southern Claims Commission after the war, McGough claimed he had always supported the Union, and attested that his pro-Confederate neighbors had repeatedly threatened his life. “They said they would kill me,” he wrote, “and let the buzzards pick my bones. They tried at one time to burn me out . . . said that we were dangerous men to the Confederacy and that we ought to be hung.” Two of his sons would later join the First Alabama Cavalry, but four ended up in the Confederate army. Attempting to defend his family’s Unionist bona fides, he averred that his four sons in the Confederate army had not joined willingly, but “were all of them forced into the army by the Conscript Act.”

⁶ Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 57, 74-82; Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy*, 3; Moore, *Conscription And Conflict In The Confederacy*, 148; Martin, *Desertion of Alabama Troops*, 100; Approved Case files of Claims Submitted to the Commissioners of Claims (known as the Southern Claims Commission) from the State of Alabama, 1871-1880, M2062, roll 2, RG217, NARA, Claim 6813: “Ferguson, Aquitta” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/34/211986952>]. Hereafter cited as SCC.

⁷ Claim 7552: “Tiara, Jesse V.” SCC. [<https://www.fold3.com/image/27/234980770>]. For more on the ordeals of Alabama Unionists, see Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 75-76, 82-83; Williams, *Bitterly Divided*, 126.

One died less than a month after “they took him off,” and another deserted to Union lines at Petersburg, he explained. He conceded, however, that of his four sons forced into Confederate service, only “three of them were true Union men.” From within this one Alabama family, then, came two Unionists who managed to enlist in the Federal army, three *alleged* Unionists impressed into the Confederate army, and one true neutral who remained – by his father’s own account – neither an avowed Union man nor a Confederate volunteer. The war ruined and dismembered the McGough family, leaving them impoverished and carrying their sons off to fight on different sides. William McGough received \$270 from the government after the war.⁸

As efforts to enforce conscription escalated, some Unionists presented themselves for Confederate service only to desert at the first opportune moment. Looking back after the war, one prominent southern Unionist remarked that, “if they had a right to conscript me when I didn’t want to fight the Union, I had a right to quit when I got ready.” John Roberts Phillips of Fayette County, who later enlisted in the First Alabama Cavalry, recalled when he first “was put in Roddey’s [CSA] army at Tuscumbia.” Once in camp, he saw “many Union men that I knew, more especially Cal Miles from New River.” Together, they determined to make their escape. “The first night they put me out on picket,” wrote Phillips, “Cal and I were put on the outpost. He and I neither loaded our guns, but prayed for the Yankees to come, for we were going to surrender and go with them.”⁹

Some future Union soldiers even claimed to have joined up with Confederate forces as a way of intentionally making their way closer to Union forces in order to

⁸ Claim 2071, “McGough, William,” SCC. [<https://www.fold3.com/image/34/273535042>].

⁹ Victoria E. Bynum, “Telling and Retelling the Legend of the ‘Free State of Jones’” in Sutherland ed., *Guerrillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front*, 24; Phillips, *Autobiography*, 33.

defect. David R. Snelling, who enlisted as a private before rising to first lieutenant in command of Company I of the First Alabama Cavalry, adopted this strategy. He “volunteered” for the Fifty-Seventh Georgia Infantry in May 1862 but defected as soon as it became feasible. Major General Grenville M. Dodge later testified on Snelling’s behalf, explaining that “he only used his deployment as a means of getting closer to Federal lines . . . enlistment in the Rebel regiment was done as a pretext, in order to put the soldier in a position where he could desert, and enlist in a Union Army regiment.” Almost three years later, as the war came to a close in the Western Theater, Snelling and the First Alabama would meet his old regiment at Bentonville and accept their surrender.¹⁰

Before Federal occupation became firmly established, though, most of those individuals and families who maintained a positive attachment to the Union continued to risk – and frequently to endure – severe reprisals from Confederates. In one infamous incident in Marion County on October 1, 1862, recalled Pinckney D. Hall, Confederates hanged sixty-five-year-old David Stephenson Kennedy for “no offense whatever but that of being a Union man.” For Hall, just seventeen, the hanging of “old man Kennedy” became a formative event and soon afterward he set out through treacherous terrain with the intent of enlisting in the Union army. Hall, as well as Kennedy’s sons William and James eventually managed to reach Corinth and enlist in the First Alabama Cavalry. Rather than encourage submission to Confederate authority, Kennedy’s executioners had created three new Union soldiers. Looking back, one veteran judged that Confederates “were conscious of a sentiment inherent in certain classes among them that could only be

¹⁰ James C. Bonner, “David R. Snelling: A Story of Desertion and Defection in the Civil War.” *Georgia Review*. 10 (Fall 1956), 280; Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900, RG 15, NARA, “Snelling, David R.” No. 971,684. [<https://www.fold3.com/image/249/99716>].

overcome by the most stringent and arbitrary methods, and in the execution of which they did not scruple in the adoption of means that, at least in some sections, defeated the object sought by the cruel and despotic manner of their execution.” Confederate attempts to inspire patriotism and, perhaps more important, to stifle dissent frequently seem to have backfired.¹¹

Persistent Unionism in the parts of the state that had expressed opposition to secession does not appear to have surprised Confederate leaders. Before the arrival of Union troops that might offer them protection many anti-Confederate residents continued to adopt a supposedly neutral stance, but Confederate leaders believed they saw through such ambivalence to the treason it masked. Assessing the situation in early 1862, Confederate Brigadier General Bushrod R. Johnson bluntly reported that “the northern counties of Alabama, you know, are full of Tories. There has been a convention recently held in the corner of Winston, Fayette, and Marion Counties, Alabama, in which the people resolved to remain neutral; which simply means they will join the enemy when they occupy the country.”¹²

The arrival of Union forces thus represents a critical turning point in the history of Unionism in Alabama during the Civil War because it created an outlet for those like Hall, the Kennedys, and many others who found themselves increasingly backed into a corner. As in Louisiana and throughout the Confederacy, Gary W. Gallagher explains, “the impact of Union military forces likely played a significant role in shaping behavior and attitudes among people hoping to maintain some type of neutrality.” In the spring and

¹¹ Todd, *First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A.—Homage to Patriotism*, 274; *The National Tribune*, December 14, 1899; *Nashville Daily Union*, March 4, 1863; *The National Tribune*, October 21, 1886; Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*, 127.

¹² *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 10, pt. 2, 431.

summer of 1862, the Union army and navy won a string of significant victories in the Western Theater and began to occupy parts of west and central Tennessee, as well as sections of northern Mississippi and Alabama. For Unionists and enslaved African Americans, the presence of the army represented the possibility of protection and freedom as well as the opportunity to join the war on the side of their choosing. As General Johnson had predicted, those hostile to the Confederacy soon began filtering into Union lines at places such as Memphis, Corinth, and Huntsville, often at great hazard to themselves, offering their services to the fight against the rebel government. Before the official creation of the First Alabama Cavalry, groups of Unionists desiring to enlist were often split up and separated into different northern regiments. This policy, which derived from northerners' skepticism of the motives of white southerners, diminished the overall visibility for historians of white residents of the Deep South in the Union ranks.¹³ Alabamian Henry Rikard, for example, enlisted in the Sixty-fourth Illinois Infantry in August and fought with the regiment at the Battle of Iuka in September.¹⁴

The arrival of the Union army also prompted the defection of Jeremiah Clemens, one of Alabama's high profile politicians, who had publicly argued against secession in the fall and winter of 1860 but ultimately acquiesced and gone with his state. As soon as the opportunity presented in 1862, however, Clemens went over to the Union side. In May, the Camden *Confederate* reported that "the numerous admirers of the gifted Alabamian will learn with feelings of deepest regret that he has forsaken the Confederate cause, and given in his allegiance to the Lincoln government." The prewar Democrat now

¹³ Gallagher, "Disaffection, Persistence, and Nation," 352; Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 217; *The National Tribune*, June 20, 1889.

¹⁴ Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 83; Claim 43912: "Rikard, Henry," SCC. [<https://www.fold3.com/image/34/234981285>].

positioned himself as a figurehead of the white Unionists of his state and began to correspond with President Lincoln and others in Washington over policy and wartime reconstruction. His characterization in the Confederate press became steadily less polite. The *Wilmington Journal* soon declared Clemens “a drunkard, a traitor . . . [and] a contemptible wretch,” while the Fayetteville, North Carolina, *Weekly Intelligencer* concluded, “he is a worthless sot and no loss to the Confederacy.”¹⁵

William Hugh Smith, another Alabama Unionist and prewar Democrat, also welcomed Union forces with open arms. Born in Georgia, he had moved across the border to Randolph County, Alabama in his youth and, from 1855 to 1859, served in the State House of Representatives. Smith had opposed secession on the grounds that it would threaten slave property and never abandoned his unconditional loyalty to the Union. In 1862, he fled along with his father Jephtha to Union lines. For the rest of the war, Smith lent his support to efforts to organize and mobilize the loyal white men of his state. Among many others, Smith recruited three of his brothers into the First Alabama Cavalry—his older brother David became a captain and his younger brother Dallas a lieutenant.¹⁶

While the arrival of the Union army certainly represented deliverance to the loyal residents of the Deep South, it also proved something of a mixed blessing. Union forces offered protection and heralded a prospective end of Confederate ascendancy, but they also brought the war well and truly home to northern Alabama and created new hardships

¹⁵ Joseph W. Danielson, *War's Desolating Scourge: The Union's Occupation of North Alabama* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 30; William Stanley Hoole, “Jeremiah Clemens, Novelist” *Alabama Review* 18 (January 1965), 26-27; *The Camden (S.C.) Confederate*, May 30, 1862; *Wilmington (N.C.) Journal*, June 23, 1864; *The Weekly Intelligencer* (Fayetteville, N.C.), April 19, 1864.

¹⁶ Baggett, *The Scalawag*, 73; J. M. K. Guinn, “History of Randolph County,” *The Alabama Historical Quarterly*, 4 (Fall 1942), 397; Wiggins, *The Scalawag In Alabama Politics*, 38.

for those who lived there. As historians Stephen V. Ash, Joseph W. Danielson, Margaret M. Storey, and others have shown, Union forces touched off a desperate and chaotic situation in north Alabama beginning in 1862. In addition to the threat of violence and destruction inherent to warfare, Union forces appropriated large amounts of food and other life-sustaining supplies from the denizens of the country – disloyal or not – often leaving them destitute in exchange for an I.O.U. from the federal government. The decision to enlist became a difficult one for some Unionists because it threatened to leave their families and dependents in a precarious position. “Loyal Alabamians,” explains Storey, “struggled between their desire to serve the cause they identified as their own and their fear of losing all ability to feed and shelter themselves and their families.” Nevertheless, many made the decision to do so. Whenever possible, they brought their families with them into camp as a short-term solution. In order to enlist, many Alabama Unionists had to become refugees.¹⁷

The stories of white Unionists who managed to make their way through to Union lines both captivated contemporary readers and formed an important part of the shared experience of many of the soldiers of the First Alabama Cavalry. The obstacles they faced and overcame in order to enlist became a testament to the depth of their Unionism and featured prominently in many contemporary descriptions of the regiment and its men. In stark contrast to those in the North who squirmed at the prospect of the draft, these southern Unionists took enormous risks just to volunteer. They had to lie out in the woods, travel by night, and avoid roads, bloodhounds, and Confederate cavalry all for the opportunity, the press emphasized, to put their lives on the line for the Union. Women

¹⁷ Storey, “Southern Ishmaelites,” 153, 167, 171-172; Ash, *When The Yankees Came*, 76, 130; *The National Tribune*, November 26, 1908.

often helped pilot recruits through the hostile territory. On one occasion, wrote Union Colonel Abel D. Streight in July 1862, “Mrs. Anna Campbell volunteered to ride thirty-five miles and return, making seventy miles, with about thirty recruits, inside of thirty-six hours.” He noted that, “when it is taken into consideration that these people were all hid away to avoid being taken by the rebels, and that the country is but sparsely settled, this case is without a parallel in American history.” Streight concluded with a call to help Alabama Unionists: [I]f there could be a sufficient force in that portion of the country to protect these people, there could be at least two full regiments raised of as good and true men as ever defended the American flag . . . They have been shut out from all communication with any thing but their enemies for a year and a half, and yet they stand firm and true.”¹⁸

As Union leadership approached the massive task of subduing the rebellion, they consistently sought white southern volunteers to aid in the fight against the Confederacy and take the lead in the reinstitution of federal authority. Over the course of the summer and early fall of 1862 hundreds of Alabama Unionists had managed to step forward—enough to constitute a regiment. Recognizing the importance of these potential recruits and happy to report the news to the administration, Major General Don Carlos Buell wrote to Washington from Huntsville on July 19 requesting official sanction to “organize and muster Alabamians into service in companies or regiments as they present

¹⁸ A. D. Streight to William A. Schlater, July 16, 1862, in Frank Moore ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry Etc.* vol 5: May 62-Oct 62. (New York: Putnam, 1868), 281-84; *The National Tribune*, December 14, 1899; *New York Post*, February 1, 1864; *Janesville (Wisc.) Weekly Gazette*, October 23, 1863.

themselves.” Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton duly approved the request two days later, laying the groundwork for the formation of the First Alabama Cavalry.¹⁹

II—The Career of the First Alabama Cavalry

Officially organized in October 1862, the First Alabama Cavalry mustered into service at Corinth, Mississippi, on December 18. Over the course of the war, more than two thousand men eventually enlisted in the regiment, an estimated three quarters of whom resided in Alabama at the outset of the conflict. Of those soldiers whose service records contain a birthplace, 781 were native to Alabama, 271 Georgia, 150 Tennessee, 76 North Carolina, and 65 Mississippi. The regiment even boasted at least 98 South Carolina-born volunteers, among the rarest of all white southern Unionists. The majority of the Alabamians came from the northern counties of Walker, Morgan, Marion, Fayette, Franklin, and Winston. In stark contrast to the First Louisiana Cavalry, the First Alabama had only eight known foreign-born enlistees: two from England, two from Ireland, and one each from Canada, France, Germany, and Norway. Together, the men of the First Alabama Cavalry represented the most substantial cluster of native white Unionism in a Deep South state. Recruits filtered in from Huntsville, Memphis, Corinth, and elsewhere as the regiment added to its ranks constantly. Most signed on for three years, and “once in uniform, mounted, well armed and equipped with everything we needed,” wrote J. R. Phillips, “one cannot imagine how happy and brave we all felt . . . we felt like we could whip the whole Rebel Army.” The enlistees had suffered under Confederate rule and seized their chance to demonstrate their loyalty and fight back on behalf of the United States. Part of a larger re-organization resulting in the creation of the XVI Corps, the

¹⁹ *OR*, ser. 3, vol. 2, pt. 1: 233, 235; Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 21-22.

newly minted First Alabama Cavalry fell under the command of Brigadier General Grenville M. Dodge as 1863 opened.²⁰

Fresh from receiving both a wound and a promotion at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Dodge had arrived in Corinth in mid-1862 and helped spearhead the organization of Alabamians and other white southerners entering Union lines. He considered them an especially valuable asset to the Union cause. “These mountain men,” he claimed, “were fearless and would take all chances.” Dodge appears unusually proactive, even cavalier, in his efforts to mobilize anti-Confederate southerners, black and white, throughout the war. For example, “at Corinth,” he wrote, “I established the great contraband camp and guarded it by two companies of Negro soldiers that I uniformed, armed, and equipped without any authority, and which came near giving me trouble. Many of the Negro men afterwards joined the First Alabama Colored Infantry and other Negro Regiments that I raised and mustered into the service.” Dodge recognized the value of deploying the Confederacy’s own manpower against it and did not hesitate to act. He steadily built an information network, in part through these pet units, that stretched throughout the Deep South. Acknowledging his energy and ability, Ulysses S. Grant – in overall command of Union forces in the Western Theater – made Dodge his intelligence chief in 1863, telling him, “you have a much more important command than that of a division in the field.” Dodge, in turn, relied on units such as the First Alabama Cavalry, which he singled out for special praise during and after the war. He explained, “my method of having the spies communicate with me was to have them send their reports to some one of the family of a member of this regiment, then a member of the family (generally a woman) would come into my lines on the excuse of seeing their people who had joined the 1st Alabama cavalry

²⁰ Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 16; Phillips, *Autobiography*, 35.

and others who were refugees in Corinth.”²¹ As a measure of the First Alabama’s importance to him he placed his chief of staff, Colonel George E. Spencer, whom he called “a very competent officer who was a genius in getting inside of the enemy’s lines,” at its head.²²

Born in the North Country region of New York State in 1836, Spencer had attended college in Canada before moving to Iowa, where he enlisted at the outbreak of hostilities. In the early stages of the war he formed a close relationship with Dodge, five years his senior, who had also migrated west and volunteered for an Iowa unit. Markedly ambitious, Spencer requested a transfer from Dodge to command the First Alabama Cavalry, which his superior readily obliged. As the regiment’s commanding officer, Spencer most often speaks for the unit in the dispatches and reports in the *Official Records*, and he gained a national reputation as a leader of the Union men of the Deep South. The *New York Times*, for example, noted in late 1863 that the “commander of the First regiment of Alabama cavalry is in this City, on a brief leave of absence. The regiment . . . is composed entirely of Alabamians and Mississippians . . . men who know by experience what the rebel tyranny is, and are willing to spend their life exterminating it. They are a noble body of soldiers, and have a most accomplished and gallant leader.”

²¹ Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 85; Grenville M. Dodge, “The Secret Service in the Civil War,” p. 3, Box 43, File 99:2, Dodge Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa.

²² Grenville M. Dodge. *The Battle of Atlanta: And Other Campaigns, Addresses, Etc.* (Council Bluffs, IA: The Monarch Print. Co., 1911), 116-117; William B. Feis, “Finding the Enemy: The Role of Military Intelligence in the Campaigns of Ulysses S. Grant, 1861-1865” PhD Dissertation, the Ohio State University, 1997, 218; John Y. Simon et al., eds., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 32 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967). vol. 7: 15.

Just twenty-six years old when he assumed command, Spencer aimed to make a name for himself at the head of this noteworthy unit.²³

The northern press expressed considerable interest in the new regiment of white Alabamians. As early as August 1862, for example, the Urbana, Ohio, *Union* informed its readers that “a large number of Alabamians have arrived in camp, mainly from points south of the Tennessee, with the intention of fighting for the Union, and the organization of the First Alabama Volunteers is rapidly progressing.” Wisconsin’s *Janesville Weekly Gazette* described the regiment as “having been formed from union refugees, driven from their homes by their traitorous southern brethren,” and reported that “they are used to a good advantage in scouting and bushwhacking, for they are well acquainted with the country they operate in. Their families have been provided with good comfortable quarters and are kept at the expense of the government.” The First Alabama Cavalry made news in the North because of the unusual circumstances of its origin before its career in the field had begun in earnest.²⁴

Initially, the First Alabama Cavalry engaged in typical cavalry assignments such as reconnaissance and short-range raids. Union leadership often subdivided the regiment and assigned various companies to a variety of duties in concert with other units. One of the first references to fighting by Alabama Union troops came in the Chicago *Tribune* in December 1862, describing a skirmish near Little Bear Creek. The “Alabama volunteers, in our service, fought nobly,” it recorded, adding that “the Alabama men fought with a will against their old rebel neighbors and acquaintances, relieving us of many fears and

²³ Terry L. Seip, “Of Ambition and Enterprise: The Making of Carpetbagger George E. Spencer,” in Kenneth W. Noe ed., *The Yellowhammer War: The Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 191-220; *New York Times*, August 15, 1863.

²⁴ *Urbana (Ohio) Union*, August 20, 1862; *Janesville Weekly Gazette*, October 23, 1863.

doubts.” In the spring of 1863, the regiment received its collective “baptism by fire” against Colonel Phillip D. Roddey’s Confederates south of Tuscumbia. The official report records that “after charging to within short musketrangle of the enemy, [the men] halted for some cause I cannot account for, and the enemy escaped to the woods.” Immediately thereafter, “Captain Cameron was killed . . . when the enemy turned and poured a perfect hail of lead into our ranks.” The First Alabama Cavalry could lack for discipline but not, reportedly, for bravery. Writing to Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut, Dodge praised his men, affirming that “the charge of the Alabamians with muskets only, and those unloaded, is creditable, especially as they are all new recruits and poorly drilled.” Then, “after four days marching, during which time nothing worthy of note occurred,” they made their way back to Corinth, thus ending what Hoole called “the first brief but inglorious foray of the First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A.”²⁵

In April, several companies of the First Alabama participated in Streight’s Raid, an ill-fated cavalry operation aimed at destroying portions of the Western & Atlantic Railroad that ran between Atlanta and Chattanooga. Poorly planned and executed (the men rode mules), it ended in embarrassment. The episode and its fallout offer a valuable window into the place of white Alabama Unionists in the thinking of both sides. Colonel Streight hoped to draw support from the Unionists he believed remained in the countryside. Near Blountsville, he wrote, “we are now in the midst of devoted Union people. Many of Captain Smith’s men (Alabamians) were recruited near this place, and many were the happy greetings between them and their friends and relatives.”

Unfortunately for Streight, the outpouring of Unionist support that he had expected and

²⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, December 20, 1862; *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 23, pt. 1, 251-258; *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 23, pt. 1, 246-250; Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 27-28.

planned on never fully materialized. While the raid evidently produced a few happy returns, it did not turn out substantial numbers of new Union recruits. Four regiments of Confederate cavalry led by Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest quickly caught up with Streight and pursued him and his men across Alabama. Through a clever piece of deception typical of Forrest, the Confederates tricked Streight into thinking he was outnumbered and induced him to surrender his command near the Georgia border. Among those taken prisoner, the Alabamians became some of the first white residents of the Deep South captured in action fighting for the Union, and their situation initiated an unprecedented discussion at the highest levels of Confederate government.²⁶

Less than a week later, on May 8, Alabama Governor John G. Shorter contacted Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon about the incident. Shorter reported with alarm that the prisoners “have been captured on the soil of Alabama not only levying war against the State but instigating the slaves to rebellion.” The prospect of domestic insurrection of this sort represented the most disquieting form of subversion. Shorter framed his letter as a discussion of jurisdiction and policy as to how to proceed with the Unionists now in custody. He hoped “to arrive at just and correct conclusions as to the proper course to pursue not only in relation to the present but to future captures of our own citizens willingly serving in the ranks of the enemy.” The position of the First Alabama Cavalry, Shorter judged, “has been volunteer treason, openly avowed and boastingly vindicated, their attack upon the State premeditated, their violence wanton and malicious.” Legally, he continued, “they stand as citizens levying war as well as giving aid and comfort to our enemies.” For Shorter, their situation contained little ambiguity. “It cannot be alleged for them,” he concluded, “as it might be for traitorous citizens of

²⁶ Sledge, *These Rugged Days*, 83-92; Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 25; *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 23, pt. 1, 292-95.

border States, that there are conflicting claims of hostile governments.” Because they had chosen to remain in the state after President Davis’s August 1861 proclamation had gone into effect, Shorter argued, the Alabamians could not claim to have retained their United States citizenship. Confident that the captured men would receive their just deserts, Shorter’s principal concern in writing to Seddon was determining who would have the honor to mete out the punishment. He requested that the secretary of war remand the prisoners to his state for trial, adding as a *nota bene* that “it may become expedient in order to satisfy the public mind now much exercised on these questions to publish our correspondence.”²⁷

The same morning that Shorter wrote to Seddon, an article had appeared in the upper left corner of the *Montgomery Daily Advertiser* titled “The Traitors.” Containing the news that white Alabamians had been captured in Union service, the piece clearly illustrated the state of public opinion in Alabama’s capital city regarding the homegrown Unionists. “No punishment is too great for such wretches,” the paper declared, “and if justice has her own they will speedily grace the gallows.” Despicable as they undoubtedly seemed, the writer argued, northerners “are angels of light as compared with the craven scoundrels who have turned against their own mother, and engaged in the work of robbery and outrage on their neighbors.” As the legitimate soldiers of a now-foreign entity, the *Advertiser* suggested that the “troops from the North should be paroled” but added that, “the tories should be turned over to the civil courts of the Confederacy, to be tried for treason.” The captured Alabamians in blue had not merely retained their loyalty to the Union, but by remaining nestled within its borders they actively had betrayed the

²⁷ *OR*, ser. 2, vol. 5, pt. 1, 946-947; Malcolm C. McMillan. *The Disintegration of a Confederate State: Three Governors and Alabama’s Home Front, 1861-1865* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 62-63.

Confederacy and committed treason against the new nation. The paper suggested that the government make an example of them. Their crime took on civil, as well as military, significance.²⁸

After communicating with General Braxton Bragg, Forrest's commanding officer, about the Alabamians, Secretary of War Seddon replied to Governor Shorter on May 23. He informed the governor that "this communication has been submitted to the President and has been the subject of advisement and grave consideration." Though he had "been instructed to inform you that while on the statement of facts presented the offenses of these parties against the laws and dignity of the State are recognized," he believed that "considerations of public policy in his judgment make it more advisable that the cases should be brought under the cognizance of the tribunals of the Confederacy and remain subject to the final determination of its Executive." Agreeing with Shorter that such treason deserved a conspicuous response, Seddon grimly concluded that "some of the officers of these companies . . . will suffice perhaps to . . . serve as exemplars of the punishment which will be visited on such crimes." Though the captured Alabamians ultimately eluded Confederate justice, mistakenly paroled before Seddon could order their remand, the conversation itself appears significant. It represents Confederate officials' attempts to come to terms with uncompromising dissent from its own white population.²⁹

The punishment of treason represents a fundamental assertion of national authority. Any aspirant nation state had to appear in control of those residing within it. In this way, the First Alabama Cavalry had presented not only a problem but also an

²⁸ *Montgomery (Ala.) Daily Advertiser*, May 8, 1863.

²⁹ *OR*, ser. 2, vol. 5, pt. 1, 952, 955-56.

opportunity to Confederate officials. The escaped Alabamians in this case represented a missed chance to, in Seddon's words, "exhibit the determination of the government." Alabamians in blue constituted the most unambiguous form of resistance to Confederate nationalism and deserved specific treatment. Governor Shorter, for one, asserted that "in avowing themselves Alabamians and as such serving with marauding bands of the enemy within the borders of our State . . . [they] are not entitled to the privileges of prisoners of war." Seddon agreed. A forceful public response appeared appropriate to reiterate that loyalty to both Alabama and the United States could no longer coexist. None took place, though the Fort Pillow Massacre in 1864 would later demonstrate Confederate enmity toward white Unionists in league with African Americans on the national stage.³⁰

While Confederates described these Unionists as the epitome of toryism and treachery, northerners held them up as paragons of patriotic virtue. In the Deep South, explained one paper, "it costs something to be a Union man . . . and he who is true to his colors, notwithstanding the storm that is breaking around him, is a patriot indeed." Both political parties in the North claimed to have the best interests of white southern Unionists at heart, and both rhetorically enlisted Unionists into their arguments as the embodiment of embattled loyalty. Republicans contrasted Democrats' ambivalence with Unionists' bravery and sacrifice. "If the Copperheads and rebel sympathizers were treated to a little of the kind of medicine the rebels visit upon loyal Union men at the South," wrote the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, "we should have less blatant treason among us. The mere expression of Union sentiments has cost the lives of thousands of liberty loving patriots at the South. And yet these cut-throats are the special pets of our Copperhead fraternity." Brattleboro's *Vermont Phœnix* pointed out that the "sufferings and sacrifices

³⁰ *OR*, ser. 2, vol. 5, pt. 1, 946-47; Quigley. *Shifting Grounds*, 158.

of the Unionists of the South [are] almost beyond the conception of the Northern mind,” and “when contrasted with the murmurings and complainings of the people here, about *high prices* and *taxes*, it must have made many a cheek tingle with shame.” The *Christian Recorder* similarly opined that, “if Northern people could only look for one day at the sufferings of Unionists in these States, there would be no further different of opinion amongst them as to the war.” Another paper expressed itself “perfectly willing to exchange Northern Copperheads for Southern Unionists.”³¹

The Democratic press, by contrast, frequently criticized the Republican administration on behalf of southern Unionists. The *Hancock Jeffersonian*, for example, argued in early 1863 that Lincoln “took more care of the niggers of southern rebels than he did of the lives of southern loyal men.” Convinced that the administration’s policy of emancipation would both endanger and permanently alienate southern Unionists, many northern conservatives urged Republicans to reconsider the decision if for that reason alone. “The great issue which divides the loyalists from the disloyalists at the present time is slavery,” reasoned the *Alexandria Gazette*, “and on that issue the pro slavery Unionist is in sympathy with the rebels . . . all things are possible with God, of course, but we repeat, it is hard [now] for a pro slavery man to be loyal.” Northern Democrats contended that Unionists shared their views. The *East Saginaw Courier* declared, “there are Union men in North Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas. Their hands would have been strengthened by a Democratic victory in the North . . . now, however . . . the radical policy has been endorsed by the Northern people. We shall hear no more from influential Unionists in the South. They have never endorsed emancipation

³¹ *Potter Journal* (Coudesport, PA), July 25, 1861; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 7, 1863; *Vermont Phœnix* (Brattleboro, VT) April 2, 1864; *Christian Recorder*, March 21, 1863; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 23, 1863.

and they never will.” The southern Unionist response to emancipation became a key focal point as both parties sought to position themselves as the representatives of that unassailably loyal contingent.³²

In at least one case, the Democrats correctly forecasted the reaction to emancipation. Robert S. Tharin, the prominent Alabama Unionist who had spoken out publicly against secession before fleeing north, broke with the Lincoln administration beginning in 1863 over the issue. The Nashville *Daily Union* classed Tharin as “one of those Southern Union men, who are in danger of being forced into rebellion by the radicalism of the Administration.” In May, they noted that Tharin “is traversing the Northern States, making violent speeches against the Administration at the Conservative Copperhead meetings.” At one Cincinnati gathering, reported the *The World* in New York, Tharin decried Lincoln as a tyrant bent on the destruction of the constitution and praised Clement Vallandigham, arguing that “the only way to save the Union is to restore nationality to the Democratic party (Cheers) . . . there is no Lincolnism in the South.” In the case of the First Alabama Cavalry and the upcountry Unionist community they represented, however, Tharin and other conservative Democrats proved mistaken. As with most northern Union soldiers, the men of the First Alabama appear to have tolerated, though not exactly celebrated, emancipation as a necessary measure.³³

In the spring of 1863, the *Nashville Daily Union* made note of a letter it had received from an “Alabama Union soldier, who joined the army over a year ago, and who preferred seeing all his worldly goods destroyed by the rebels, rather than give up the

³² Varon, *Armies of Deliverance*, 105; *The Hancock Jeffersonian* (Findlay, OH) March 20, 1863; *Alexandria (Va.) Gazette*, January 30, 1864; *The Spirit of Democracy* (Woodsfield, OH) November 11, 1862; *East Saginaw (Mich.) Courier*, November 18, 1863.

³³ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 29, 1863; Degler, *The Other South*, 230-31.

good cause.” In contrast to Democrats’ predictions, the paper reported, this soldier “approves of the Emancipation Proclamation, and is for sustaining the Administration. These Southern loyalists, who have felt the rage of the rebellion, and who have shouldered their muskets in the ranks, are never afflicted with Conservative impotency.” Another spoke directly to “his former Democratic brethren of the North,” asking them “not to doom him and all other Southern Unionists to death by attempting to restore the Union as it was.” The writer reported himself in favor of emancipation, “being convinced that slavery is the cause of the war.” Those in the North who supported the Lincoln administration’s aggressive prosecution of the war made a great deal of southern Unionists who accepted emancipation. In April, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* re-printed a letter from a Unionist in which the writer affirmed that “the loyalty of the Union men of the South is made of nobler stuff than such men . . . suppose, who act and speak on the supposition that the patriotism of the Southern Unionists will last until their property is touched, and no longer.” For these white southerners, particularly those who continued to serve in Union ranks, their unconditional attachment to the Union trumped their distaste for emancipation and indicated to the North that a foundation remained on which the process of reconstruction could build. “The cause of the present civil war is very well understood by those who live in the theater of the rebellion,” judged the *Daily Union*, “and it is gratifying to see that the cure is clearly apprehended by judicious and positive Southern loyalists.”³⁴

Alabama’s Jeremiah Clemens, in his public appearances and correspondence with members of the Lincoln administration, reaffirmed that the unconditional Unionists of his

³⁴ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 6, 1863; July 22, 1863; March 3, 1864; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 6, 1863; *New York Times*, October 5, 1862; *Cleveland (Ohio) Morning Leader*, November 23, 1863.

state had come around to a position of support for emancipation, an almost unthinkable prospect at the outset of the war. In 1864, he wrote to Andrew Johnson that the “Secessionists deserve [it] as a punishment for their guilt, & the Union men would rather part with [slavery] now & forever.” Clemens also corresponded with General Benjamin F. Butler and Secretary of State William H. Seward regarding the organization of white Alabama troops. To Seward, Clemens echoed Lincoln’s words when he described the men as a “nucleus...around which others may rally” in restoring the state to its normal relationship with the federal government. Returning to Huntsville, a city where he once had been hanged in effigy, Clemens spoke at numerous Unionist gatherings and took the political temperature. As the war neared its end, Clemens wrote to Lincoln describing conditions in the state and offering his political insight. After praising the loyalty and service of the First Alabama Cavalry, and promising that they were representative of the communities in the northern portion of the state, he concluded: “[E]verything I have, & all I hope in the future for myself or my children depends upon the restoration of Alabama to the Union—let me see that done, & slavery abolished throughout the Union, so that nothing will remain which can stir up another civil war, & I shall die contented.”³⁵

The Alabamians’ reported acceptance of emancipation did not indicate any increased sympathy for African Americans. Members of the First Alabama Cavalry evinced racial attitudes typical of white southerners. On one occasion, wrote J. R. Phillips, “a regiment of Negroes were camped about a miles from our camp.” Their presence, as well as the fact that “their officers were white men,” created a stir in the

³⁵ Harris, *With Charity for All*, 159; *Cecil Whig* (Elkton, MD) April 2, 1864; *Memphis Daily Appeal*, October 15, 1862; Jeremiah Clemens to Andrew Johnson, Nov. 19, 1864 in Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 16 vols. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-1969) 7: 303-4; Jeremiah Clemens to William Seward, May 5, 1864; Clemens to Benjamin Butler, November 16, 1864; Clemens to Abraham Lincoln, January 21, 1865. *Lincoln Papers*.

ranks. Remarkably, recorded Phillips, “some of the boys who didn’t like Negroes any too well for some cause got to shooting into their camp, and it almost terminated in a serious battle.” The fact that they now wore the same uniform created no camaraderie; in fact, it barely sufficed to restrain outright hostility. In February 1864, Francis Wayland Dunn, second lieutenant of Company H, wrote in his diary: “[F]ound a negro asleep in the woods. Edwards made a good deal of amusement for his company by making him sing and dance.” The First Alabama Cavalry’s apparent antipathy toward African Americans did not preclude support for the emancipation proclamation, however. As with many northern and western Union soldiers they understood it primarily as a war measure designed to weaken the enemy’s base of support, and as unconditional Unionists condoned its application against those who had instigated the rebellion. The fact of their continued service, especially with desertion seemingly a more feasible option for them than for northerners, signaled that they backed the course the war for the Union had taken. Most convincing of all, in March 1864 the *New York Herald* announced with satisfaction that seven hundred soldiers of “the First Alabama Cavalry have unanimously reenlisted.”³⁶

III—Sherman and Hard War

Prior to the summer of 1864, when they joined Major General William Tecumseh Sherman’s command in Georgia, the First Alabama Cavalry continued to act as scouts, escort men and supplies, forage, and occasionally skirmish with the enemy in Alabama and Mississippi. As the war took its hard turn, the men increasingly targeted the property

³⁶ Phillips, *Autobiography*, 40; [Diary fragments: Civil War 1863-1864], February 8, 1863: Box 1, Francis Wayland Dunn papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; *New York Herald*, March 31, 1864.

of the planter class that they blamed for instigating the conflict. On December 28, 1863, recorded Dunn in his diary, the regiment “rode to within four miles of Holly Springs [MS] . . . it is the richest part of the state, most of the planters having held 80 or a 100 negroes each. Our cavalry burned all the houses.” Three days later on New Year’s Eve he wrote, “I went over to Mr. Purdue’s, an old gentleman, rich once owning over 100 negroes. He was very much down in the mouth, the boys having taken all his corn, hogs, and meat.” On another occasion, according to Dunn, Colonel Spencer informed a “rough” pro-Confederate Alabama woman that “we were the children of Israel bringing the plague on them.”³⁷

The First Alabama cut their teeth on their Sherman’s hard war tactics and honed their notorious reputation in the Confederate press during the campaign against Atlanta in 1864. In May the “1st Alabama Tory Battalion,” as the Rome, Georgia, *Tri-Weekly Courier* called them, occupied the town. A year earlier, Confederates had imprisoned some of the men captured in Streight’s Raid in Rome. The local *Courier* had described them then as, “villainous whelps,” “thieves and murderers,” and hoped that the authorities would “bring the traitorous wretches to a punishment befitting their crimes.” Now, the First Alabama had arrived as conquerors, and at times acted the part. “Boys got to Jayhawking,” recorded Francis Dunn that summer. “One man in Company L stole a watch the colonel made him give up.” Among Confederates and Unionists alike, the First Alabama Cavalry began to cement their reputation as men out for revenge.³⁸

³⁷ Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4; Francis Wayland Dunn Papers, Diary: October 26; December 28, 31, 1863.

³⁸ *Weekly Courier* (Rome, GA), May 15, 1863; *Tri-Weekly Courier* (Rome, GA), May 9, 1863; February 18, 1864. Dunn Diary, August 15, 1864.

Over the course of the Atlanta Campaign, the First Alabama Cavalry saw action at Resaca, Dallas, Kennesaw Mountain, and Jonesboro, establishing their pedigree as a reliable and effective cavalry unit. By the time that Sherman captured the city and helped secure Lincoln's reelection in November, they had earned a reputation in the press of both the Confederacy and the United States. They had attained a symbolic importance – North and South – out of proportion to their numbers, and that fall they sealed their place in history when Sherman chose the Alabamians as his headquarters escort on the March to the Sea. William Hugh Smith would also accompany the expedition as an advisor to the general. Never one to miss an opportunity to send a pointed message, Sherman placed white southerners in the vanguard of his declaration of total war on the Confederacy. They would be, to borrow a phrase from historian John Hammond Moore, "Sherman's fifth column."³⁹

In addition to the unmistakable symbolism of surrounding himself with loyal white southerners—that he made war on treason, not the South—Sherman picked the First Alabama Cavalry to help lead the march for practical reasons as well. Setting out on November 15 with less than three weeks' rations, Union forces would rely on forage for sustenance. The men of the First, one Union officer commented, "enjoyed a special faculty of divining the most likely locality that a southern rebel would choose for secreting provisions." Union commanders expected southern soldiers to possess a certain familiarity with the country and its people. The men and officers of the regiment anticipated a memorable operation. "We are all bustle and excitement here just now being

³⁹ Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 997; William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*. Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton, 1876), 178; Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Ambrester eds. *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 87; John Hammond Moore, "Sherman's 'Fifth Column': A Guide to Unionist Activity In Georgia." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 3, 1984, 382.

on the eve of another campaign,” wrote Colonel Spencer from Atlanta, adding that he thought he could, “make some reputation on this trip.” Thought to possess a superior knowledge of the country, they often spearheaded Major General Francis P. Blair Jr.’s column of the march. A common refrain of Blair’s orders placed “the First Alabama Cavalry . . . moving in advance,” and the regiment consistently led the XVII Corps on the march to Savannah.⁴⁰

Making up the vanguard, the First Alabama Cavalry most often received orders to secure towns, ferries, bridges, and railroads in advance of the main host. In a typical dispatch, on November 21 one officer reported that at Milledgeville, the Alabamians “destroyed the depot and some 75 or 100 boxes of ammunition and the telegraph office . . . [and] replenished mules and horses.” The men often seemed to take special glee in the destruction and seizure of Confederate property. Given license to vent their frustration toward their late countrymen, they sometimes overindulged their desire for retribution. In one particularly egregious case, a member of the First Alabama Cavalry was caught with his revolver pointed at a Georgian’s temple, demanding his valuables. The conduct of Spencer’s men even earned the colonel an official sanction. “The major-General commanding directs me to say to you,” read the reprimand, “that the outrages committed by your command during the march are becoming so common, and are of such an aggravated nature, that they call for some severe and instant mode of correction. Unless the pillaging of houses and wanton destruction of property by your regiment ceases at once, he will place every officer in it under arrest, and recommend them to the

⁴⁰ Edward D. Neill, *Glimpses of the Nation's Struggle: [1st]-6th Series. Papers Read Before the Minnesota Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States [1887]-1903/08*, 6 vols. (St. Paul, MN: St. Paul Book and Stationery Company, 1887-1909) vol. 5, 191; Spencer to Dodge, November 1, 1864, in Dodge Papers; Seip, “The Making of Carpetbagger George E. Spencer,” in Noe, ed. *The Yellowhammer War*, 205.

department commander for dishonorable dismissal from the service.” The First became notorious on the March to the Sea, writes Joseph T. Glatthaar, because they “felt they had a right to retaliate for the way pro-Confederate southerners had pillaged their family homes, imprisoned family members, and drove them from their communities.”⁴¹ In contrast, notes historian Anne S. Rubin, Sherman gave explicit orders during the march to protect the property of the few known Unionists.⁴²

For Lieutenant David R. Snelling, commander of Company I, the campaign represented a homecoming. Employed as a colporteur in central Georgia before the war, Snelling “knew every stream and cross-roads, and kept by the side of ‘Uncle Billy’ all the way, to post the old man.” In his youth, Snelling’s uncle had forced him to work in the fields side-by-side with his slaves, engendering a deep hatred for both planters and slavery in the young man that resulted in a dedicated Unionism. Faced with conscription in 1862, Snelling, like a number of his comrades, had initially entered the Confederate army before deserting and joining Union forces that summer. Enlisting as a private, he rose to the rank of lieutenant. On the March to the Sea, in Baldwin County near Milledgeville, he took his opportunity for revenge, and went out of his way to lead a raid against his uncle’s plantation. Sherman later recalled the episode in his memoirs:

Lieutenant Snelling, who commanded my escort, was a Georgian, and recognized [an] old negro, a favorite slave of his uncle, who resided about six miles off; but the old slave did not at first recognize his young master in our uniform . . . his attention was then drawn to Snelling’s face, when he fell on his knees and thanked God that he had found his

⁴¹ *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 44, pt. 1, 509-510; *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 44, pt. 1, 504-5; Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman’s Troops In the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns*. (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 147-149; Noah Andre Trudeau. *Southern Storm: Sherman’s March to the Sea* (New York: Harper, 2008), 163-64.

⁴² Anne S. Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman’s March and American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 17. Rubin interestingly omits any mention of the Unionists participating in the march itself.

young master alive and along with the Yankees. Snelling inquired all about his uncle and the family, [and] asked my permission to go and pay his uncle a visit, which I granted, of course.

Leading a detail to the site of his pre-war suffering, Snelling had his men make off with as many provisions as they could carry and pointedly destroyed the cotton gin. “The uncle,” wrote Sherman, “was not cordial, by any means, to find his nephew in the ranks of the host that was desolating the land.”⁴³

In the end, Sherman did not punish the First Alabama Cavalry for their seemingly vindictive destruction. In general, it fit his policy. “The fact is,” writes historian Terry L. Seip, “Spencer and his men were pretty much doing what Sherman wanted done, he knew Spencer and the Alabamians were capable of doing it, and the regiment remained in the vanguard.” Leading the line could carry risks. On December 8, as they approached Savannah, a “torpedo” – or mine – exploded in its path leaving Lieutenant Francis W. Tupper’s horse dead and his leg “blown to pieces.” Tupper survived the wound, but lost his leg. Sherman arrived on the scene quickly, where he ascertained that “a torpedo trodden on by [Tupper’s] horse had exploded, killing the horse and literally blowing off all the flesh from one of his legs.” Still troubled by the incident when he wrote his memoirs, Sherman declared: “[T]his was not war, but murder, and it made me very angry.” Sherman then ordered forward a group of Confederate prisoners who he forced to act as minesweepers, “so as to explode their own torpedoes, or to discover and dig them

⁴³ *The National Tribune*, January 24, 1889; Williams, *Bitterly Divided*, 151-52; James C. Bonner, “Sherman At Milledgeville In 1864.” *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1956, 276-77; Bonner, “David R. Snelling,” 275-82; Sherman, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, 186-87; George Ward Nichols, *The Story of the Great March: From the Diary of a Staff Officer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 60-61.

up. They begged hard, but I reiterated the order, and could hardly help laughing at their stepping so gingerly along the road.”⁴⁴

This one incident notwithstanding, the First Alabama Cavalry faced only sporadic opposition and relatively little danger on the March to the Sea. Confederate Brigadier General Samuel W. Ferguson, who believed he had destroyed the “Tory regiment” in October 1863, led some of the cavalrymen who feebly harassed the Union forces, but by the winter of 1864 the tables had turned. After securing the surrender of Savannah around Christmastime, Colonel Spencer wrote to General Dodge, now commanding the Department of Missouri in St. Louis, informing him that “we have had a delightful trip & all enjoyed it.” Without a hint of modesty, he added that he had “done all the fighting that was done by our Column (the 17th Corps) & have made a reputation for both myself & Regiment.” On December 27, when Sherman formally reviewed the troops, Blair placed the First Alabama Cavalry at the head of the line—in a hard earned place of distinction and source of pride for the loyal men of the Deep South.⁴⁵

At the end of the year, a short profile of the regiment appeared in the *New-York Daily Tribune*. “Let me say a few words in behalf of the gallant First Alabama,” began the correspondent, “for it has seldom, if ever, received credit for its valuable services.” The paper recounted its contributions in the Atlanta Campaign and the March to the Sea when it had “rendered signal service” and praised Colonel Spencer as a “distinguished [and] efficient” commander. “In the ranks of this regiment are to be found some of the original true blue Southern Unionists,” the writer concluded, and “it is needless for me to

⁴⁴ Seip, “The Making of Carpetbagger George E. Spencer,” in Noe, ed. *The Yellowhammer War*, 206; Sherman, *Memoirs*, 2, 194; Trudeau, *Southern Storm*, 387-89; CSR, *Alabama, First Cavalry*, M276, roll 9, RG94, NARA, “Tupper, Francis W” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/119318094>].

⁴⁵ Spencer to Dodge, December 16, 1864, *Dodge Papers*.

speak of the intelligence and patriotism of this patriotic body of Alabamians, for their severe denunciation of the rebellion and McClellanism is the best proof of that, but their stainless military record I deemed worthy of more than passing notice. All honor to the First Alabama Cavalry, and may their lives be spared to reap the rich reward of their unadulterated loyalty.”⁴⁶

IV—1865 and the End of the War

In January 1865, Union leadership reorganized the men. The First Alabama Cavalry became part of the Third Brigade, under Colonel Spencer, of the Third Cavalry Division commanded by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick. Crossing the Savannah River into South Carolina in February, the regiment continued to take an active role in helping Sherman finish off the Confederacy and “laid the town of Barnwell in ashes.” A few days later, near Williston on February 8, Spencer’s men routed the enemy. Major Sanford Tramel, Company L, described it as “the most complete [rout] I ever witnessed. Guns, sabres, canteens, haversacks, saddle-bags, hats, and everything which would impede the flight of the affrighted and flying enemy were abandoned and completely strewn on the ground.” In addition, noted General Kilpatrick, “Colonel Spencer brought back as trophies from the fight five battle flags.” Spencer himself noted that the regiment had faced their Confederate counterparts, the First Alabama Cavalry (CSA), and bested them.⁴⁷

After further fights in North Carolina at Monroe’s Crossroads, Averasboro, and Bentonville, the regiment watched as General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered the last

⁴⁶ *Sacramento (Ca.) Daily Union*, December 28, 1864.

⁴⁷ Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 43-45.

major Confederate force still in the field in April 1865. The war over, the First Alabama Cavalry returned to Huntsville where, along with the Fourth Alabama Colored Infantry, they remained as a peacekeeping force until October before mustering out of service. By that time, only 397 men remained with the regiment. Many did not wait for official dismissal, departing of their own accord to return to what remained of their farms and their families. In the course of the war, 345 men died in service with the First Alabama Cavalry—50 in battle, 228 of disease, the rest as prisoners or as the result of “non-battle causes”—and 279 deserted. No accurate count exists for the number of wounded. Eighty-eight became prisoners of war, falling into the hands of their Confederate neighbors. Of the twelve men taken to the Andersonville prison camp, all died—a striking figure even by its notorious standards.⁴⁸

Some veterans of the First Alabama Cavalry believed they could not stay in the South after the war. As ex-Confederate soldiers returned home, a number of former members of the regiment migrated west to Nevada and the Dakota Territory, worried that their families could not safely remain in the state with their wartime allegiance publicly known. When Lieutenant Snelling returned to Milledgeville after mustering out, he “was allowed to remain only six hours there. He was mobbed in the streets . . . and was charged with being responsible for everything that Sherman’s whole army did in Milledgeville. His friends and relations made him leave to save his life.”⁴⁹ After the war, fifty-year-old Private Billington S. Hurst, whose son had sided with the Confederacy,

⁴⁸ Hoole, *Alabama Tories*, 14, 18.

⁴⁹ Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 196; Testimony of George Spencer, Jan. 26, 1866, in US Congress, “Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction,” 39th Congress, 1st Session, Part II, 8-9.

“returned home to Alabama, gathered his belongings and left, never to be spoken of again by his family.”⁵⁰

Though he hoped to play a central role in the reintegration of his home state and his former neighbors into the Union, Jeremiah Clemens died of natural causes in May 1865. Having spent “more than three years in the very heart of this Titanic contest,” he retired to Philadelphia where he succumbed to a persistent illness. His novel *Tobias Wilson* became one of the first pieces of Civil War fiction. Its subject was the struggles of northern Alabama Unionists during the war, and it struck a chord with northern audiences. In the novel, the title protagonist joins Union forces after the murder of his grandfather at the hands of Confederate soldiers. Captured by conscription agents, Wilson makes his escape and joins the Union army near Chattanooga. “It is impossible for any one who has not witnessed them,” Clemens wrote in his preface, “to appreciate the wrongs, indignities and outrages to which the Southern Union men have been subjected. Their property taken or destroyed, their persons constantly threatened with incarceration, if not assassination, and their sons dragged to the slaughter pen.” These, he averred, “were common occurrences, whose frequent recurrence deprived them of half their horror.” The novel ended on a brighter note, however. The “old Union will never be restored,” Clemens concluded, “but a better Union will spring from its ashes”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Todd, *First Alabama Cavalry, U.S.A.*, 260; CSR, *Alabama, First Cavalry*, “Hurst, Billington” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/100495770>].

⁵¹ Jeremiah Clemens, *Tobias Wilson: A Tale of the Great Rebellion. 1st Ser.* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), v-vii, 25; Rhoda Coleman Ellison, “Propaganda in Early Alabama Fiction” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 7 (Fall 1945), 432-33; Christopher L. McIlwain, *1865 Alabama: From Civil War to Uncivil Peace* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2017), 137; Hoole, “Jeremiah Clemens, Novelist,” 30; Jeremiah Clemens was a second cousin of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, later known as Mark Twain: *The Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume One* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 205. For more on Clemens as a literary figure, see Wallace Hettle. *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 122-141.

Following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and just before his own death, Clemens wrote to new President Andrew Johnson. He hoped to have some final input into the decision of who would become provisional governor of his beloved state now that the war had mercifully ended. “Give us a Governor,” he pleaded to the best-known southern Unionist of the war, “who will not traffic with treason in any of its ramifications—who is not leagued with cotton speculators, or *with a worse gang*, who while claiming to be Union men, yet cling to the rotten system of slavery & stickle at any pacification except upon the terms of the Constitution *as it is*, & the Union *as it was*.”⁵²

Writing in the *National Tribune* in 1899, Private Pinckney D. Hall, who had enlisted in the First Alabama Cavalry in 1862 after witnessing the hanging of “old man Kennedy,” paid tribute to his old comrades. He argued that his regiment had “made a greater sacrifice for the Union than the men of the North,” and asked readers to “consider the loyal men of the South, especially as far south as Alabama, what they had to endure for their country. They were exposed and in danger every minute of their lives.” Unlike northerners, Hall wrote, “they had to leave their families to the abuse of the enemy; had to keep themselves closely concealed like the vermin in the woods until they could make escape through the lines, and then had to share the same hardships of soldiers life that the comrades of the North bore.” The dangerous stand taken by the First Alabama Cavalry deserved recognition, he argued. More than anyone else, Hall insisted, they had risked their necks in rejecting the Confederacy and taking up arms for the Union.⁵³

White residents of the Deep South like Hall represented a relatively miniscule portion of the overall Union war effort. As of 1900, the year after his article appeared,

⁵² McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 136.

⁵³ *The National Tribune*, December 14, 1899.

only 3,469 people – including northern transplants – drew a federal pension in Alabama. Memory of the First Alabama Cavalry faded, but the men of the regiment had meant a great deal to their contemporaries. The very existence of such a unit had presented an opportunity for both Union and Confederate authorities to make a symbolic nationalistic statement. To northerners, the regiment and its backers stood for the forcibly silenced loyal men of the Deep South who needed only the opportunity to exhibit their commitment to the Union. Refusing to acquiesce to the authority of the new Confederate nation, they had proven their allegiance with service to their country and could be counted on to begin the work of Reconstruction. Men such as George E. Spencer and William H. Smith, who both took on a significant role in shaping post-war policy in Alabama, held different ideas about how Reconstruction should proceed, but both based their credentials in part on their association with the First Alabama Cavalry. To Confederates who hoped to establish a new slaveholding republic, the First Alabama Cavalry embodied a traitorous refutation of that aim. If, for Confederates, the Civil War was the second American Revolution, then the First Alabama Cavalry were its Tories, and memory of their betrayal of the would-be nation – and indeed of the white race, for their role in effecting emancipation – would linger into Reconstruction.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Hugh C. Bailey, "Disaffection in the Alabama Hill Country, 1861." *Civil War History* 4.2 (June 1958), 191; Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction In Alabama*, 87.

Chapter Four

“A Terrible Retribution”: Bradford’s Battalion and the Massacre at Fort Pillow

In 1864, as the Civil War entered its most brutal year, white Unionists from the Deep South played a key part in the most notorious incident of the entire conflict. On April 12, forty miles north of Memphis on the banks of the Mississippi River, a battle devolved into an atrocity. After overrunning the Union fort, Confederate soldiers commanded by Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest proceeded to slaughter many of its defenders. Roughly half of the fort’s garrison of approximately six hundred soldiers were United States Colored Troops (USCT), mostly formerly enslaved African Americans. The other half were white southerners, mostly from western Tennessee, fighting for the Union. Forrest’s troops refused to accept their surrender and brutally executed scores in an unbridled frenzy of violence. The massacre occurred, ultimately, due to the emotional reaction of Confederate soldiers to what had been the animating fear of white southern society for two hundred years: slaves armed against their masters.¹ “The sight of negro soldiers,” explained a correspondent of the Confederate *Memphis Daily Appeal*, “stirred the bosoms of our soldiers with courageous madness.” Of the 305 black defenders of Fort Pillow, 195 were killed and 30 wounded— numbers clearly indicative of a bloodbath. In all, Confederates killed 277 of the 585 Union soldiers stationed at Fort Pillow and hauled away 202 as prisoners, staggering casualties by any

¹ Aaron Charles Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 273.

standard. The massacre at Fort Pillow quickly became one the most infamous episodes of the war. Less well known now is the role of white Unionists in the story.²

Among those who fell victim to the unprecedented outpouring of racial antagonism that day was Lieutenant John C. Akerstrom, a white Tennessean fighting for the Union. The Confederates killed close to one hundred white Unionists at Fort Pillow, the vast majority after they too had tried to surrender. Forrest's men took Akerstrom, helpless after having been wounded in the fighting, nailed him to the floor of a tent and then set the tent on fire. Though historians have written extensively about the events of that day, little attention has been paid to the white Unionists in the unfortunate garrison, the "Tennessee Tories" like Akerstrom. The significant role they played in the story of the massacre and its aftermath remains largely unknown and improperly understood.³

The intention of this chapter, devoted mainly to the events at Fort Pillow, is not to shift the focus away from the black victims or to argue that white Unionists were somehow the *real* victims. Rather, it aims to restore the white Unionists to the story and to correct misguided interpretations of their role in the incident. The evidence makes clear that the Confederates at Fort Pillow treated black soldiers more ruthlessly than they did the white Unionists. The numbers point irrefutably to that conclusion. According to the most recent study, 64 percent of the black soldiers became casualties as compared to 31-34 percent of their white comrades. But as the murder of Lieutenant Akerstrom demonstrates, Forrest's men also dealt with the white Unionists at Fort Pillow with an

² *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), May 2, 1864; John Cimprich and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., "The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Statistical Note." *Journal of American History*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1989, 837; John Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 80; John Cimprich and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., "Fort Pillow Revisited: New Evidence About an Old Controversy." *Civil War History*, vol. 28, no. 4, 1982, 296n11.

³ House Reports, No. 65, 38 Cong., 1 Sess., Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Fort Pillow Massacre* [Washington, D.C., 1864], hereinafter cited as *Fort Pillow Report*, 5.

extraordinary level of retributive fury. Fundamentally, historians have either ignored or failed to recognize the crucial role of perceived race betrayal on the part of white Tennessee Unionists in spurring the Confederates to their murderous rage.⁴

The final victim of the massacre was Major William F. Bradford, the commander of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry (U.S). A native Tennessean, Bradford had volunteered his services to military governor Andrew Johnson and raised a battalion of southern Unionists over the course of 1863. At Fort Pillow, in the spring of 1864, he became the single most prominent case of a white officer executed by Confederates for commanding African American soldiers during the war. Bradford's fate, however, remains frequently overlooked by historians largely due to a technicality. Though he had no official attachment to the USCT units stationed at the fort that day, he assumed command of the entire garrison when their leader – Major Lionel F. Booth – was killed during the assault. For this crime, as a white southerner captured in arms with African Americans, Forrest's Confederates murdered Bradford.⁵

Scholars have misunderstood Confederate attitudes toward the Thirteenth Tennessee, the regiment of white Unionists recruited from the western part of the state that composed half of the garrison of Fort Pillow.⁶ They consistently overlook the factor of race in their accounting of Confederate animus toward them. Richard L. Fuchs, for

⁴ Albert Castel, "The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Fresh Examination of the Evidence." *Civil War History*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1958, 46-47; Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., "A Statistical Note," 830, 835.

⁵ *Fort Pillow Report*, 3, 6.

⁶ Not to be confused with the other Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, organized in the eastern section of the state. As James A. Baggett explains, the Thirteenth Tennessee "never reached beyond battalion level (and it is referred to as Bradford's Battalion in its Compiled Service Records), nevertheless then and later, it was widely known as the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry. Since another Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry formed in East Tennessee during 1863 and reached regimental strength in 1864, the state changed the West Tennessee regiment's title in August 1864, five months after the battle at Fort Pillow, to the Fourteenth Tennessee Cavalry." (*Homegrown Yankees*, 212).

example, argues that, “they were despised for not only opposing the Confederacy but destituting the countryside and causing physical harm to Confederate sympathizers.” Offensive to Confederates because of their guerrilla tactics and their abnegation of sectional loyalty, Fuchs writes, these “home-made Yankees” alienated the local white population by joining forces with the invaders and preying on their erstwhile neighbors. Historian John Cimprich characterizes the feeling toward the Thirteenth Tennessee simply as, “political enmity,” while James A. Baggett echoes these explanations and elides the significance of the white Unionists’ alliance with African Americans, mentioning it only as a literal afterthought. In sum, historians have generally ignored the single most provocative aspect of white Tennesseans’ Unionism and the key to understanding their massacre: their betrayal—as Confederates saw it—of their race.⁷

By 1864, the Union army, and these soldiers in particular, represented far more than political differences.⁸ They represented to Confederates a war to kill slavery and upend the southern social structure. “The war is no longer waged for the Union,” explained the Confederate Abingdon *Virginian* in March 1863, “it is waged for the emancipation of the negroes, and . . . to massacre and exterminate, if possible, the women and children of the South.” The Little Rock *True Democrat* similarly lamented that “the enemy seems determined to drive us to it [race war] . . . they are organizing black regiments in Tennessee . . . and now, they declare a war for extermination, not only of men, but of women and children.” In the eyes of Confederates, the Thirteenth Tennessee embodied something both absurd and infuriating: white southerners fighting alongside

⁷ Richard L. Fuchs, *An Unerring Fire: The Massacre at Fort Pillow* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 66, 131; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 85; Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 226-227.

⁸ Sheehan-Dean, *The Calculus of Violence*, 132, 146.

African Americans against the cause of white supremacy. These men, writes Albert Castel, personified treason both “to the Southern cause and . . . to their race.” They had donned the blue uniform, declaring their allegiance to the government that threatened the Southland with racial upheaval and servile insurrection. That Confederates would have felt “political enmity” toward them seems an understatement. Indeed, the evidence indicates that many white southerners thought these “Tennessee Tories,” due to the nature of their betrayal, deserved no mercy. Though the men of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry had not taken their Unionist stand on behalf of the enslaved, they quickly became the focus of intense loathing from both local citizens and Forrest’s soldiers for just that, and suffered their wrath at Fort Pillow. By Confederate reckoning, they had allied themselves with former slaves against their neighbors and race compatriots, a perception that played a key role in the unfolding of the massacre and the murder of Major Bradford.⁹

Though certainly not the only massacre of the Civil War, Fort Pillow stands alone because of a unique combination of factors, most importantly the visible alliance of white and black southerners arrayed together against the Confederacy. Confederates massacred white Unionists and African American soldiers at different times and in different places and contexts during the war, but never together and in the manner that occurred at Fort Pillow. The incendiary combination of African Americans and white southern Unionists, together in arms, represents a central yet generally neglected element of what made the Fort Pillow Massacre a uniquely infamous event in Civil War history.

⁹ Gregory J. W. Urwin ed., *Black Flag Over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals In the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 6; Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 26; *Abingdon Virginian*, March 20, 1863; *True Democrat* (Little Rock, AR), April 22, 1863; Castel, “A Fresh Examination of the Evidence,” 47.

I—Background

On June 6, 1862, the United States Army captured the city of Memphis, Tennessee. Fort Pillow, hastily built by the rebels and three thousand slaves requisitioned from the surrounding neighborhood just a few months earlier, had failed to slow the Union advance downriver. The installation encompassed thirty acres with batteries overlooking the river, as well as four miles of outworks, and when not in active use included a trading post, a small hotel, and later a contraband camp. Once Federal authority became re-established in the Memphis area, and the Mississippi River made secure for Union naval traffic, the fort generally ceased to factor into military considerations. After rising to command of Union forces in the Western Theater at the end of 1863, Major General William Tecumseh Sherman ordered his subordinate, Major General Stephen A. Hurlbut, to evacuate it. A few months later, shocked upon hearing news of the massacre there, Sherman wrote to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, “I don’t know what these men were doing at Fort Pillow. I ordered it to be abandoned before I went to Meridian.” Instead, Hurlbut, a native of South Carolina, had maintained it as a recruiting site for local Unionists and as a shelter for refugees and escaped slaves.¹⁰

The arrival of Union military forces to Memphis, the urban hub of the Mississippi Delta, set in motion a series of far-reaching social consequences in the region. By the summer of 1862, following a series of hard-fought victories, the Union army had established a foothold in the Confederate heartland and could boast more than a hundred thousand soldiers in the home state of Jefferson Davis. Almost immediately, refugees

¹⁰ Robert C. Mainfort Jr., “A Folk Art Map of Fort Pillow,” *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 40 (1986), 73-74; Charles Fitch file, Personal Papers of Physicians, RG 94, *NA*. See John Cimprich and Robert C. Mainfort Jr., “Dr. Fitch’s Report on the Fort Pillow Massacre,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 44, No. 1 (Spring, 1985), 29-30; *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Part 3, 382; W. T. Sherman to Lt. Gen. Grant, Apr. 15, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Part 3, 367.

from the Confederacy, white Unionists and black slaves, began pouring into strongholds like Memphis and Corinth seeking sanctuary. The Union military presence offered anti-Confederate southerners a crucial outlet. For enslaved African Americans, it presented a singular opportunity to escape from their enslavers and offered a realistic chance of receiving protection. Deliverance, for some, suddenly appeared within reach for the first time in their lives. Unprecedented numbers of enslaved people freed themselves from bondage after mid-1862, taking advantage of the chaos that war inevitably brings with it wherever it goes. Especially after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863, the Union army enlisted African-American men en masse to fight for their own freedom in uniform. Naturally, this galled Confederate citizens. Two units of such recruits, the Second United States Colored Light Artillery and Sixth United States Colored Heavy Artillery, were stationed at Fort Pillow in the spring of 1864.¹¹

For white southern Unionists, the arrival of the Union army promised relief from depredations at the hands of their Confederate neighbors and the opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the government of the United States. Many individuals and families went to heroic lengths to reach the safety of Union lines. The presence of the army also offered Union men of military age the opportunity to enter the war on the side of their choosing. The formation of units like the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry only became possible with the establishment of a formidable Union military presence around places like Memphis, which allowed its enlistees to come out of the woodwork.¹²

¹¹ Bruce Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre: North, South, and the Status of African-Americans In the Civil War Era* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 42; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 417.

¹² Current. *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 147

The United States government, consistent with its policy throughout the South, utilized Fort Pillow as a base for the recruitment of both white and black southerners determined to fight against the Confederacy. A few months prior to the massacre, in the fall of 1863, a correspondent of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on the status of contrabands at the “large encampment” there. Describing his meeting with one man, whose “master carried him into Arkansas, from whence he escaped into the Union lines and made his way to Fort Pillow,” the writer opined that “when fighting, [he] will remember the past, and with him will rest severe retribution on the slaveholder.” Fort Pillow, and those within it, became a marker within West Tennessee of the hard war policies of Union forces.¹³

Local citizens of West Tennessee still loyal to the Confederacy hated the new Union occupiers of the fort— both for what they represented and for what they were doing. Confederates held that some of the Union soldiers stationed at Fort Pillow, for example, were deserters from the Confederate army. Whether forced into Confederate service against their will or having grown disillusioned with the rebel cause, a number of these men had taken their opportunity to defect to the Union side. Their former comrades still in Confederate service despised them not only as deserters, but also as turncoats and Tories. More than a few of the men who joined the Thirteenth Tennessee had absconded from Forrest’s own command, a fact of which Forrest and his lieutenants were keenly aware. Regardless of the circumstances of their enlistment, Confederates knew that white

¹³ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 30, 1863; Derek W. Frisby, “‘Remember Fort Pillow!’: Politics, Atrocity Propaganda, and the Evolution of Hard War,” in Urwin, *Black Flag over Dixie*, 108; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 53, 62-63; Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*, 41.

southerners fighting on behalf of the Union had participated in the despoliation of the countryside over the course of the war.¹⁴

Prior to the attack on Fort Pillow, Unionist units already had become notorious among Confederates. The Sixth Tennessee Cavalry (U.S.), for example, a forerunner of the Thirteenth Tennessee led by Lieutenant Fielding Hurst, had made itself particularly infamous in West Tennessee. Though a former slaveholder, Hurst displayed a fierce independence and remained a staunch Unionist. Supported by an extensive kinship network known locally as the “Hurst Nation,” Hurst offered his services to the Union early on. His bushwhacking tactics, however, quickly initiated a seemingly never-ending cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation that produced profound bitterness toward his command among his enemies. Officially organized in August 1862 in McNairy County, the Sixth Tennessee committed robbery, arson, and “blackmail disguised as legitimate military activity” all over the western part of the state.¹⁵ In February 1864, for example, Hurst demanded a ransom payment from the citizens of Jackson, or his men would burn the town. He collected more than five thousand dollars then set fire to the buildings anyway.

More seriously, the Unionists stood accused of murdering Confederate prisoners, including the “death by torture” of Lieutenant Willis Dodds. General Forrest harbored a well-documented personal enmity toward Hurst and the men he led. Historian Brian S. Wills goes so far as to say that Forrest “used Hurst as a moral counterpoint to what he understood as the legitimate methods of waging war.” Brigadier General James R.

¹⁴ Frank Moore, *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War: North and South, 1860-1865* (New York: Publication Office, Bible House, J. Porteus, Agent, 1867), 450-451; John Milton Hubbard. *Notes of a Private* (Memphis, Tn.: E. H. Clark and Brother, 1909), 90; Andrew Ward, *River Run Red: The Fort Pillow Massacre in the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2005), 150.

¹⁵ Sheehan-Dean, *Calculus of Violence*, 319.

Chalmers, one of Forrest's chief lieutenants, also accused Hurst of keeping black mistresses. In general, Confederate contemporaries characterized Unionists as the dregs of society, motivated not by principle but simple brigandry, an assessment that unfortunately survived into much subsequent historiography.¹⁶

Isaac R. Hawkins, another prominent white Tennessee Unionist, earned a measure of notoriety for himself and his men just prior to Fort Pillow. Hawkins, a veteran of the war with Mexico, had served as a delegate to the Washington Peace Conference in 1861 and, failing in that effort, returned to Tennessee and become the commander of the Seventh Tennessee Union Cavalry. Officially formed in August 1862, the regiment comprised mostly of white west Tennesseans from Carroll and Henderson counties, a region which Hawkins would later represent over three terms in Congress during Radical Reconstruction.¹⁷ Three weeks before Fort Pillow, on March 24, 1864 at Union City, Tennessee, Hawkins fell for a piece of deception typical of Forrest and embarrassingly capitulated five hundred men to an inferior Confederate force. For failing to call Forrest's bluff and offer a defense, Union higher-ups – particularly Hurlbut, who described the act as “pure cowardice” – heaped scorn on the Tennessean, and Hawkins's subordinates openly expressed their resentment.¹⁸ Indeed, evidence exists that Hawkins's ignominy directly affected Bradford's fateful decision to not surrender Fort Pillow less than a

¹⁶ Brian Steel Wills, *The River Was Dyed With Blood: Nathan Bedford Forrest and Fort Pillow* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 65-67, 71; Gary Blankinship, “Colonel Fielding Hurst and the Hurst Nation.” *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers* 34 (1980), 74, 83-84; Charles L. Lufkin, “Not Heard From Since April 12, 1864: The Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, U.S.A.” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer, 1986), 136; J. R. Chalmers to J. R. Strange, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 623; J. P. Strange to W. M. Reed, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 3, 118-119; N. B. Forrest, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 3, 119.

¹⁷ *The Christian Recorder* (July 14, 1866), praised Hawkins for his “gallant service” to the Union when he made his first bid for Congress.

¹⁸ U.S. Congress, *House Reports*, 38th Cong., 1st sess., No. 65:68; Charles L. Lufkin, “West Tennessee Unionists in the Civil War: A Hawkins Family Letter.” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), 34.

month later.¹⁹ The surrender at Union City, meanwhile, only added to Forrest's lore. One of his soldiers, William Witherspoon, later commented that as a Tennessean Hawkins had understood the depth of "hatred" they held toward him as "traitors to their State and the South" and been wise to surrender. Witherspoon, a member of the Seventh Tennessee Confederate Cavalry, wondered how any "West Tennesseans, raised as Southern men . . . neighbor boys of our boys" could ever sink to wearing the Union blue.²⁰

Perhaps most appalling to local Confederate citizens, Tennessee Tory regiments also stood accused of what the rebels called "Negro stealing." Major Bradford himself confirmed as much, noting in February 1864 that his men had "been on several scouts and captured a number of guerrillas . . . and lots of contrabands." The Union's enlistment of formerly enslaved men to fight against the Confederacy represented, for most white southerners, the most serious crime committed by the Yankee invaders. That white native Tennesseans would participate in such an act was all but incomprehensible to them. "Rebel Tennesseans," judged the *Franklin (Pa.) Repository*, "have about the same bitterness against Tennesseans in the Federal army, as against the negroes." The *Memphis Daily Appeal* cut to the heart of the matter when it stated that these "traitors to their race . . . have thrown off their disguise and now appear in their true light" as "wolves in sheep's clothing," while the *Raleigh Daily Confederate* declared that "these deceived and misguided" Tennesseans fighting for the Union had actually "fallen below the level of the negro, with *their Yankee masters*." One Tennessee paper finally

¹⁹ Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., "Dr. Fitch's Report," 38: "I saw Major Bradford at the Fort about 7 O[']clock P.M.[.] shook hands with him, asked him why he did not surrender, when the Flag of Truce came in demanding the surrender. He replied his name was not Hawkins. I did not see him afterwards. The rebels soldiers were frequently making the remark that Major Bradford ought to be killed."

²⁰ Lufkin, "West Tennessee Unionists in the Civil War," 34; Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 230; Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 34, 220; William Witherspoon, *Reminiscences of a Scout, Spy, and Soldier of Forrest's Cavalry* (Jackson, TN: McCowat-Mercer Printing Co., 1910), 102-104.

concluded that “George the Third waged no such war against humanity itself as is waged against the South by Abraham Lincoln, and the southern man who leagues with him is a traitor, not only to his country, but to the human race.”²¹

Forrest stoked this feeling of bitterness and betrayal in his men, informing them that “many of the Colored troops at the fort were runaway slaves from the area, and were now engaged in a campaign of terror against their former owners.” The locals looked to Forrest for relief. “Many of the citizens of West Tennessee, principally ladies,” recalled Confederate Theodore F. Brewer, implored Forrest “not to fail to take Fort Pillow before he left the state [because] the troops at Fort Pillow were principally negroes who formerly belonged to people that lived in West Tennessee.” The Canton, Mississippi *American Citizen* asked, “Where is the Marion of this war? We need a genuine ‘Swamp Fox,’ a real ‘Tory hunter’—a man who will not grow nervous and agitated at the sight of a tory mortally dangling gracefully at the end of a rope. Let him come forward and make himself known. There is work for him in Tennessee.” Forrest obliged. He resolved to “attend to” Fort Pillow and to teach its garrison, which he later characterized tersely as “niggers and deserters from our army—men who lived side by side with my men,” a lesson.²²

While Hurst and Hawkins had done a great deal to establish an execrable reputation, the white troops stationed at Fort Pillow in April 1864 served under the command of a different west Tennessee Unionist named William F. Bradford. Forrest’s

²¹ Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 213; Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath*, 2; Franklin (Pa.) *Repository*, April 27, 1864; Raleigh (N.C.) *Daily Confederate*, May 12, 1864; Memphis *Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), May 3, 1864; Athens (Tn.) *Post*, June 20, 1862.

²² Ward, *River Run Red*, 151; Theodore F. Brewer, “Storming of Fort Pillow,” *Confederate Veteran* 33 (December, 1925), 459, 478; *American Citizen* (Canton, MS) July 4, 1862; Frank Moore, *Anecdotes, Poetry, and Incidents of the War: North and South, 1860-1865* (New York: Publication Office, Bible House, J. Porteus, Agent, 1867), 450-451.

men drew little distinction. One described the Unionists at Fort Pillow as “a band of marauders about on par with Hurst’s men.” Bradford, born less than a mile from the home of the Forrest family near the Duck River in central Tennessee, had, unlike his former neighbor, maintained an unwavering allegiance to the Union. His family had deep roots in the history of the state. Bradford’s father, Theoderick, campaigned (unsuccessfully) against James K. Polk for Congress in 1833. Twenty-eight when the Civil War began, William received permission from Military Governor Andrew Johnson to organize a regiment of West Tennessee Unionists in the summer of 1863. Bradford, a fellow Union officer later wrote, “had been among the foremost of the few loyal men in his neighborhood in West Tennessee.” He slowly built up his force, which became known as the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, or Bradford’s Battalion, the following winter and spring.²³

Though the records appear inexact – the unit recruited constantly, suffered from desertions like any other, and had much of its paperwork destroyed at Fort Pillow – historians estimate that the rough strength of Bradford’s Battalion in the spring of 1864 approached 300 men. The average age of his soldiers was 23. More than twenty percent of the regiment signed up before they had reached the age of 19, though the oldest, Leander C. Vaught of Company C, was 47. The youngest, seventeen year old Fred Kelso, also of Company C, deserted the night before the massacre. Bradford also recruited his older brother, who left behind his wife and three young children, into the regiment. At least ten percent of the recruits, and probably more, had deserted from Confederate

²³ Derek William Frisby, “Homemade Yankees”: West Tennessee Unionism in the Civil War Era.” PhD Dissertation, University of Alabama, 2004, 229; Philip M. Hamer. *Tennessee, A History, 1673-1932* (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc. 1933), 285; Ward, *River Run Red*, 74-77; Mack J. Leaming, *The Battle of Fort Pillow, Tennessee: April 12th, 1864*. Unpublished Manuscript [1893], Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York, NY, 15.

service. “Many of the soldiers of this battalion,” wrote Lieutenant Mack J. Leaming, the only commissioned officer to survive the massacre, “were born and reared within a distance from Fort Pillow to which the reports of our cannon could plainly be heard.” Daniel Stamps of Company E, for example, lived with his wife and daughter on a small farm a few miles from Fort Pillow. He and his brother Jack enlisted in Bradford’s Battalion there in 1864. Many other recruits had become refugees along with their families earlier in the war and enlisted from the relative safety of Kentucky.²⁴

Contrary to the claims of many contemporary Confederates, and later Confederate-apologist historians, the recruits of Bradford’s Battalion—like those of Hurst’s Sixth and Hawkins’s Seventh Cavalry— came from a range of economic backgrounds and exhibited a dedicated Unionism that belied their dishonorable reputation as mercenaries or shirkers. Little other than their national allegiance separated them from their Confederate adversaries who served under Forrest, including their views on race. The preponderance were local farmers who hoped for as rapid a return as possible to the status quo antebellum. Most, if not all, were ambivalent at best about the prospect of emancipation, to say nothing of serving side by side with black soldiers. By 1864, though, these policies had become inextricably tied to unconditional Unionism. White southern Unionists like those of the Thirteenth Tennessee accepted emancipation as a necessary war measure, just punishment, and future check on the Slave Power which had brought on the crisis, but retained a deep-seated antipathy toward African Americans that the conflict did nothing to alter. Above all, the men recruited into Bradford’s Battalion

²⁴ Ward, *River Run Red*, 76, 409n4; Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., “A Statistical Note,” 836-387; “United States Census, 1860”, database with images, *FamilySearch*, “T F Bradford.” [<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M8TH-58X>]; Leaming, *The Battle of Fort Pillow*, 4; Lufkin, “Not Heard from Since April 12, 1864,” 138.

wanted to see the war over, and the Union victorious. On February 2, 1864, to that end, Bradford received orders to take his new command to establish a “recruiting rendezvous” at Fort Pillow. Living quarters would be strictly segregated. The white Tennesseans there fought for the Union, not on behalf of African Americans. Their motivations derived from an antipathy for secessionist slaveholders and positive attachment to the Union rather than any sympathy for enslaved people or concern over their future, a distinction much more readily apparent to the Unionists than their Confederate adversaries. This misperception played an important role in the unfolding of the massacre.²⁵

The Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, then, did not possess a long or particularly storied history when they arrived at Fort Pillow that winter. They largely inherited the nefarious reputation left by Hurst and his ilk. They did not need to do anything special, however, to provoke the ire of Confederate partisans. Though historian Bruce Tap describes Forrest’s men as merely “less than enamored” with Bradford’s, the composition of the garrison of Fort Pillow by the end of February 1864 – half emancipated slaves, half their traitorous southern abettors – represented something intensely offensive in and of itself. The three regiments manning the fort – the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, the Second U.S.C.L.A., and the Sixth U.S.C.H.A. – symbolized an utterly deplorable and eminently threatening presence, one that Forrest and his fellow Confederates could not allow to go unchallenged. Though he targeted the fort for the ostensible military purpose of seizing some artillery, the evidence makes clear that Forrest and his men meant for their capture of Fort Pillow to send a powerful sociopolitical message as well.

Confederate Private Achilles Clark, writing home to his sisters, emphasized that the fort

²⁵Lufkin, “Not Heard from Since April 12, 1864,” 144-146; Henry Weaver, April 22, 1864, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 538; Frisby, “Homemade Yankees,” 233.

was “said to be manned by about seven hundred renegade Tennesseans and negroes . . . Major Bradford of the 13th Tenn, U.S.V. being second in command.” Private Samuel H. Caldwell noted specifically that Fort Pillow “was garrisoned by 400 white men and 400 negroes.” Both soldiers emphasized that an even split of white Tennesseans and African Americans made up the notorious garrison, additional evidence that the Confederates attacked not so much the fort itself as those who stood arrayed side by side behind its walls.²⁶

II—The Assault on Fort Pillow

The attack began at first light on Tuesday, April 12. Driving the Union pickets back from their posts, a total of approximately 1,500 Confederates under General Chalmers quickly invested the fort, which began to respond with its artillery. Around 9:00 a.m., the commander of the U.S.C.H.A. and ranking Union officer, Major Lionel F. Booth, was struck by a sharpshooter’s bullet and killed instantly. The young and inexperienced Bradford assumed overall command of Union forces. The fight continued with sporadic casualties on both sides until Forrest, satisfied with the favorable position his men had gained, raised a flag of truce in the early afternoon. Around 3:00 p.m., Forrest sent forward a note addressed to Major Booth. Given the advantageous situation of his men, Forrest wrote, he demanded the “unconditional surrender of the garrison.” He also promised to treat the officers and men as prisoners of war should they accept his

²⁶ Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., “Fort Pillow Revisited,” 298-300; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 75; Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*, 47-48; Fuchs, *An Unerring Fire*, 14; Lufkin, “Not Heard from Since April 12, 1864,” 141; *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 608-9; Achilles Clark to Judith Porter and Henrietta Ray, April 14, 1864, Confederate Collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville; Samuel H. Caldwell to Mary R. Caldwell, April 15, 1864, Works Progress Administration, “Civil War Records,” 4:61, typescript in *TSLA*.

terms. If not, he concluded, "I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command." Bradford, signing Booth's name rather than his own, wrote back that he desired "one hour for consultation with my officers." Lieutenant Leaming delivered the message. Forrest replied that he had twenty minutes to make up his mind.²⁷

During this interlude, Forrest's men had a final opportunity to dwell on their opponents behind the fort's walls, as well as the fact that they might have to risk their lives assaulting them. "If you want the fort," one of the black artilleryists reportedly called out to them, "come and take it!" "Come on you dirty rebels!" others shouted. Lieutenant Leaming attested that the USCT would, "put their hats on the bayonets of their guns and hold them up for the confederates to shoot at, and also would make insulting remarks to their former owners. Forrest's men had never before faced black troops in combat. Race, as well as the perceived race betrayal of the white Unionist Tennesseans, was central to their understanding of the conflict at hand and now took a particularly acute form at Fort Pillow. Before the twenty minutes had elapsed, Bradford answered Forrest: "I will not surrender." With a rebel yell, the Confederates stormed the works. To Union soldiers, they seemed to rise "from out of the very earth." After a "weak, erratic" effort to repulse the attackers, most of the fort's defenders threw down their weapons, signaling their surrender. Then all hell broke loose.²⁸

Forrest's Confederates, suddenly face to face with armed African Americans side by side with white Tennesseans, flew into a murderous rage. Ignoring their opponents' attempt to surrender, the Confederates began to shoot them where they stood. "Kill the

²⁷ Report of Lieut. Mack J. Leaming, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 559-561; Report of Brig. Gen. James R. Chalmers, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 620-621; Leaming, *The Battle of Fort Pillow*, 8.

²⁸ *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), May 2, 1864; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 78; Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., "A Statistical Note," 831; N. B. Forrest, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 615; Report of Lieut. Mack J. Leaming, *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 561; Ward, *River Run Red*, 190.

damned niggers,” they shouted, “shoot them down!” As the Union soldiers broke and fled toward the riverbank, Confederates shot them in the back. Realizing they were to receive no quarter, many Federals plunged into the Mississippi, hopelessly attempting to swim to the other side or at least temporarily evade their pursuers. Forrest’s men took potshots at their heads bobbing up and down in the water. One Confederate participant noted unapologetically that, “the head above the water was a beautiful mark for the trusty rifle of our unerring marksmen. The Mississippi River was crimsoned with the red blood of the flying foe.” After the initial melee left them in clear possession of the fort, the Confederates proceeded to execute scores of wounded soldiers. The executioners made their reasoning clear: “Damn you,” exclaimed one, “you are fighting against your master!”²⁹

The exceptional cruelty of some of Forrest’s men quickly became evident. Corporal William Dickey of the Thirteenth Tennessee later testified that, “one poor fellow was shot as he reached the bank of the river. They ran down and hauled him out. He got on his hands and knees, and was crawling along, when a secesh soldier put his revolver to his head, and blew his brains out.” Dickey himself was shot and left for dead, “while I had my hands up begging for mercy.” Jason Souden, also of the Thirteenth Tennessee, saw the Confederates take Sergeant Leonidas Gwaltney’s revolver off him then shoot him twice in the head with it. Numerous men wounded with broken legs were forced onto their feet only to be shot down “like hogs.” More than a dozen witnesses attested to the fate of Lieutenant Akerstrom, whom the Confederates burned alive along with several others. Worst of all, alleged Union survivors, Forrest’s men murdered African-American women and children who had taken shelter at the fort. William F.

²⁹ *Fort Pillow Report*, 4, 25; *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), May 2, 1864.

Mays of the Thirteenth Tennessee later testified that, “there were also 2 negro women and 3 little children standing within 25 steps of me, when a rebel stepped up to them and said, ‘Yes, God damn you, you thought you were free, did you?’ and shot them all.”³⁰

Forrest’s exultant Confederates, in the midst of the carnage, vented their outrage at the stand taken by the white Unionists. When D.W. Harrison, a member of the Thirteenth Tennessee wounded in the fighting, begged a passing Confederate for water, the soldier replied, “Damn you; I have nothing for you fellows; you Tennesseans pretend to be men, and you fight side by side with niggers; I have nothing for you.” Another, also pleading in vain for mercy, was told “take that, you negro equality!” before being shot three times. James P. Meador of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry later testified that he, “heard an officer say, ‘Don’t show the white men any more quarter than the negroes, because they are not better, and not so good, or they would not fight with the negroes.’” Lieutenant William Clary, also of the Thirteenth, stated that Forrest’s men had “expressed the opinion that if we had not been fighting with black troops they would not have hurt us at all.” Private Eli Carlton, a survivor from the Sixth U.S.C.H.A., testified that he witnessed the following exchange:

They said, ‘Do you fight with these God damned niggers?’ they said, ‘Yes.’ Then they said, ‘God damn you, then, we will shoot you,’ and they shot one of them right down. They said, ‘I would not kill you, but, God damn you, you fight with these damned niggers, and we will kill you;’ and they blew his brains out of his head.³¹

Civilian photographer Charles Robinson also got caught up in the blind fury of the Confederates. “One of them soon came to where I was laying with one of [the] ‘Co. C’ boys,” Robinson later recalled. “He pulled out his revolver and shot the soldier right in

³⁰ *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 524; *Fort Pillow Report*, 34, 39, 114.

³¹ *Fort Pillow Report*, 29, 36, 46, 53, 105.

the head [,] scattering the blood & brains in my face & then putting his revolver right against my breast he said [,] ‘You’ll fight with the niggers again will you? You d—d yankee.” Miraculously for Robinson, his attacker had just used the last of his ammunition on the man next to him. The gun failed to discharge and he survived. “God damn you,” one Confederate declared with finality, “you fight with the niggers, and we will kill the last one of you!” As Confederate Achilles Clark unapologetically wrote two days after the massacre, the “white men fared but little better” than the “poor deluded negroes” in the bloodletting. “Their fort,” he added disdainfully, “turned out to be a great slaughter pen.”³²

Some of Bradford’s men tried, generally in vain, to maintain a distinction between themselves and their black comrades-in-arms even as the massacre unfolded. Daniel H. Rankin of Company C, already wounded, managed to find shelter behind a tree stump where he found two other white men huddled together. He later testified that soon after, “some darkeys came there and we told them to go away. We saw rebels shooting them and we allowed if they were not with us, we might get clear.” Their shared Union allegiance had not created anything approaching racial solidarity between these white and black Tennesseans. The white Unionists understood that it was their affiliation with African American soldiers that made their lives forfeit in Confederates’ eyes.³³

Within Forrest’s command, the sense of betrayal at the hands of these white southern soldiers who served the Union cause ran much deeper than their animosity toward northern Yankees. The latter’s actions appeared predictable if still unforgivable,

³² *Fort Pillow Report*, 42; Charles Robinson, George Bodnia ed., “Fort Pillow ‘Massacre,’ Observations of a Minnesotan.” *Minnesota History* 43 (Spring 1973): 188-189; Cimprich and Mainfort, “Fort Pillow Revisited,” 299.

³³ *Fort Pillow Report*, 52.

but the fact that southern men would fight on the side of emancipation represented an irredeemable sin in their eyes. In the days after the battle, the Memphis *Daily Appeal* – a Confederate paper –reported that General Chalmers had declared his “intention to show no mercy to home-made Yankees—meaning Southerners serving in the Union army—and negroes, but genuine Yankees would be treated as prisoners of war.” Colonel Tyree H. Bell, a number of whose Seventh Tennessee (C.S.) cavalrymen had defected to the Thirteenth Tennessee (U.S.), echoed these sentiments. Only one of the ten former members of the Seventh identified by Bell’s officers, John Scoby, survived the massacre, only to die a few months later at Andersonville.³⁴

During the fighting itself, Union doctor Charles Fitch managed to appeal directly to General Forrest, who replied to him, “you are the surgeon for that damned Nigger Regiment.” Fitch explained that he actually served with the Thirteenth Tennessee, which did nothing to move Forrest. After a tense back-and-forth, Fitch finally managed to convince Forrest that he was a northerner, and not in fact a Tennessee Unionist. Only then did Forrest agree to spare Fitch. Major Bradford’s brother Theodorick, on the other hand, a native Tennessean and well-known Unionist, did not escape the wrath of Forrest’s men, and was found among those murdered by the rampant Confederates. Forrest previously had described white Tennessean Unionists as “a disgrace to the Federal army, to the state and to humanity,” and he and his underlings consistently maintained a clear distinction between northern invaders and southern traitors. Of the white victims, Forrest’s Confederates targeted the southerners in particular. Francis

³⁴ Memphis *Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), April 23, 1864; Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*, 48; Ward, *River Run Red*, 214; Tennessee Civil War Centennial Commission, *Tennesseans in the Civil War: A Military History of the Confederate and Union Units with Available Rosters of Personnel* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 357, 579; Wills, *The River Was Dyed With Blood*, 123.

Alexander, a member of Bradford's Battalion, later testified that, "when our boys were taken prisoner . . . if anybody came up who knew them, they shot them down."³⁵

As the sun rose on April 13, the Confederate flag flew over the fort and the massacre came to an agonizing conclusion. "The polluted 'star spangled banner' was torn from its fastenings and trampled in the dust," reported a correspondent with Forrest's army, "and high above the ramparts of the conquered fort, proudly floated our own [l]oved ensign." Forrest's soldiers strode about the ruins finishing off some of the survivors who had managed to live through the night. "The hot exasperation of the charge had not yet worn away," recalled Lieutenant Leaming, "but was still calling for fresh victims." The final atrocity committed by Forrest's troops, the live burial of dozens of wounded men, underscored their commitment to their grim work. A number of hospital workers later testified that the Confederates had buried some of their patients while they were still alive. Indeed, contemporary Confederate accounts do not deny the accusation. Medical personnel who attended to the few wounded survivors extracted from the fort unanimously affirmed that the victims had been subjected to an unprecedented level of ferociousness. "The sabre cuts," stated one, "are the first I have ever seen in the war yet." Horace Wardner, a Union surgeon working at a hospital in Mound City, Illinois, attested that the Fort Pillow victims, "were the worst butchered men I have ever seen . . . I have been in several hard battles, but I have never seen men so mangled as they were." Only the arrival of the Union gunboats *Silver Cloud* and *Platte Valley* ended Confederates' free

³⁵ Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., "Dr. Fitch's Report on the Fort Pillow Massacre," 36-37; *Fort Pillow Report*, 43; United States Civil War Widows and Other Dependents Pension Files, 1861-1934," Theodorick F Bradford in entry for Mary L Boardman Bradford, 1861 - 1934; from "Case Files of Approved Pension Applications of Widows and Other Dependents of Civil War Veterans, ca. 1861- ca. 1934," database, *Fold3.com*, citing military unit 13 Tennessee Cavalry, company A, application number WC34800, NAID identifier 300020, NARA.

reign in the fort and the paroxysm of violence. As burial details went about their morbid task and the few lingering wounded went aboard the ships for transportation to hospitals upriver, Forrest and his men, along with their prisoners, stole away into the countryside. They had lost only 14 men killed and 86 wounded in the fighting. When they reached a secure position, General Chalmers congratulated his men on their successful campaign. They had, Chalmers assured them, “taught the mongrel garrison of blacks and renegades a lesson long to be remembered.” West Tennessee, he concluded, “is redeemed.”³⁶

III—Aftermath

The Confederates did not completely annihilate the garrison of Fort Pillow. Some survived their wounds, a few escaped during the fighting, and 202 men became prisoners of war. Alfred Coleman, one of the handful of survivors from the Sixth U.S.C.H.A., recalled that at a certain point, “General Forrest issued an order not to kill any more negroes, because they wanted them to help to haul the artillery out.” He also told “some negro men there that he knew them; that they had been in his nigger yard in Memphis.” The Confederates took a total of 51 African American soldiers prisoner and quickly shipped them south to Mississippi, suffering them to live so they could return to their status as slaves. Less than a month later, the Memphis *Daily Appeal* reported that, “the small-pox has appeared at Tupelo, Miss., among the negroes captured at Fort Pillow, some fifty in number. They were promptly removed from town, and the quarters they occupied burned.” The report added, “they declare themselves tired of Mr. Lincoln’s freedom and willing to abide the fate of Dixie.” The devastation suffered by the Second

³⁶ *Mobile (Ala.) Advertiser and Register*, April 26, 1864; Leaming, *Battle of Fort Pillow*, 12; *Fort Pillow Report*, 13-14; Castel, “A Fresh Examination of the Evidence,” 46; *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 622-623.

U.S.C.L.A. and Sixth U.S.C.H.A. at Fort Pillow and its aftermath has few equals in the annals of the Civil War. In total, only 29 out of the 305 United States Colored Troops stationed at Fort Pillow managed to escape from Forrest and his men that day.³⁷

Also among those taken prisoner by the Confederates was Major Bradford, the commander of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry and archetypal Tennessee Tory. Shouting, “Boys, save your lives . . . it is of no use anymore,” he had, like many of his men, jumped into the river during the battle in order to escape the carnage. Forrest’s men shot at him in the water, telling him he “could not surrender.” Somehow, though – somewhat miraculously by all accounts – Bradford had survived the massacre, and on April 13 came into the custody of Colonel W. L. Duckworth. The colonel recognized Bradford, placed him in the charge of the Seventh Tennessee Cavalry (C.S.), and made preparations to send him to General Forrest. One of Bradford’s fellow prisoners, W. R. McLagan, later testified that before the group left Duckworth called five of the men guarding Bradford back to his headquarters. “Those five guards,” McLagan recollected, “seemed to have received special instructions about something.” About five miles outside of Brownsville, the traveling party halted. Bradford “seemed to understand what they were going to do with him.” Duckworth’s men took him at gunpoint, marched him fifty yards from the road, then shot him three times. “One shot struck him about in the temple,” McLagan recalled, “a second in the left breast, and the third shot went through the thick part of the thigh.” They left his dead body hanging by the side of the road.³⁸

When McLagan escaped two days later and made his way back toward Memphis, traveling by night, he passed by the site of the murder. He saw Bradford’s corpse, “yet

³⁷ *Fort Pillow Report*, 18, 96; *Memphis Daily Appeal* (Atlanta, GA), May 8, 1864.

³⁸ *Fort Pillow Report*, 102, 105; *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 557, 566.

unburied. The moon was shining brightly, and it seemed to me that the buzzards had eaten his face considerably.” Though Forrest’s apologists later claimed Bradford had been killed trying to escape, Duckworth admitted years afterward that his men had murdered the major. Edward B. Benton testified before the Congressional committee that, “it was reported by very reliable persons that Bradford was shot and hung near Covington, in Hatchie River bottom . . . darkey evidence is very correct there.” Forrest’s men made little effort to conceal the fact that they had executed Major Bradford, the leader of the Tennessee Unionists at Fort Pillow, in cold blood while he was a prisoner of war. It was, for all intents and purposes, the massacre’s coup de grâce. Bradford thus became perhaps the single most infamous example of a white officer killed for leading black troops during the war. Historians have tended to overlook his case because he possessed no official connection to the USCT units stationed at Fort Pillow that day. After the death of Major Booth, however, Bradford had assumed command of the entire mixed garrison and fought side by side with his African American charges. For this crime Forrest’s Confederates executed him, and sent an unmistakable message to the white community of west Tennessee and the nation.³⁹

Word of the events at Fort Pillow quickly spread. On April 14 the Memphis *Bulletin* became the first paper to break the story, but most northerners learned of the massacre the next day when the dispatch went out on the Associated Press wire. From the first, descriptions of the carnage made it clear that the events at Fort Pillow went well beyond the bounds of civilized warfare. On the 16th, the St. Louis *Missouri Democrat*

³⁹ *Fort Pillow Report*, 122; *OR*, Vol. 32, Ser. 1, Pt. 1, 557, 562; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 88. For more on white officers killed for leading black troops, see James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., “The Execution of White Officers from Black Units by Confederate Forces during the Civil War,” in Urwin, ed., *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 52-64.

published the first comprehensive account, concluding that Forrest's men had clearly sought to send a political message and exhorting its readers: "when going into battle remember that with him it is victory or death, and when called upon to surrender, let him 'Remember Fort Pillow.'" One of the earliest sources of information mentioned by correspondents was Private Daniel W. Harrison of Bradford's Thirteenth Tennessee. The northern public reacted to the news with shock and horror. The New York *Herald* luridly described how at Fort Pillow, "insatiate as fiends, bloodthirsty as devils incarnate, the rebels commenced an indiscriminate butchery of the whites and blacks, including those of both colors who had been previously wounded." Newspaper accounts initially emphasized the fact that Confederates had executed white and black soldiers alike. The Cincinnati *Gazette* wrote that the massacre represented, "one of the most horrible that has disgraced the history of modern warfare." For similar savagery, wrote the Chicago *Daily Tribune*, comparing Forrest's men to the Sepoy rebels, "the English blew the East Indians to atoms from the muzzles of their guns. What are we to do? The blood of four hundred United States soldiers, shot down after they had surrendered as prisoners of war, and their bodies hacked and slashed to pieces, is crying to us from the ground." The feverish reporting also led to the erroneous assertion that Major Bradford "of the First Alabama Cavalry," whose "death was fully determined upon before the assault was made" went down fighting, taking three rebels with him. Calls for retributive action began to be heard almost immediately, and the northern public demanded an inquest.⁴⁰

Republican newspapers and politicians in particular seized upon Fort Pillow as an example of the moral degradation and thinly veiled barbarism endemic to slavery-based

⁴⁰ Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 89-90; *St. Louis Missouri Democrat*, April 16, 1864; *New York Daily Herald*, April 16, 1864; *Chicago Daily Tribune* April 16, 1864; *Hartford (Ct.) Courant* April 22, 1864.

southern society. “The whole civilized world will be shocked by the great atrocity at Fort Pillow,” wrote the *Chicago Tribune*, “but in no respect does the act misrepresent the nature and precedents of slavery.” Such “atrocities,” opined the *Springfield Illinois State Journal*, “men have been educated by slavery to commit.” Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* editorialized that, “it has long been clear to us that the Rebel leaders meant to impress upon this struggle every possible feature of cruelty.” The *Boston Journal* declared “strict vengeance is out of place, but an increased determination to suppress these monsters of cruelty and to annihilate the cause which breeds them, ought to fire the heart of . . . every man amongst us.” The massacre, it appeared to many northerners, represented the inevitable product of a culture devoted to slaveholding and violent domination. *The Liberator* contended that “the mass of the rebel force at Fort Pillow, officers and soldiers, did ‘with alacrity’ the infernal work required of them, and enjoyed the torturing and butchery of prisoners as much as the victory which gave them the opportunity.” Not only had Forrest’s men transgressed the veneer of civilization, Garrison’s paper charged, they had done so with evident enthusiasm.⁴¹

Rage at the rebels’ actions reached a fever pitch across the Union. President Lincoln commented on the rumors swirling around the events at Fort Pillow and promised to take appropriate action after determining all the facts. Speaking at the Sanitary Commission Fair in Baltimore, Lincoln stated that “we are having the Fort Pillow affair thoroughly investigated . . . If there has been the massacre of three hundred there, or even the tenth part of three hundred, it will be conclusively proved; and being so proved, the retribution, shall as surely come.” The next day, exactly a week after the

⁴¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune* April 16, 1864; *Springfield Illinois State Journal*, April 16, 18, 1864; *New York Tribune*, April 15, 23, 1864; *Boston (Ma.) Journal*, April 15, 1864; *The Liberator*, May 13, 1864; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 90.

massacre, on April 19, Senator Benjamin F. Wade and Congressman Daniel W. Gooch left Washington, D.C. to conduct an official government investigation.⁴²

The Confederate press, meanwhile, exhibited no indication of a guilty conscience. Fort Pillow fit the Confederacy's stated policies.⁴³ The Camden *Confederate* in South Carolina reported unvarnished casualty figures, noting matter-of-factly that, "the fort ran with blood." The Lancaster *Ledger* stated simply that the Confederates had put the enemy garrison "to the sword," and the *Daily Chattanooga Rebel* delighted that Forrest had taught its defenders a lesson "by forcible deeds and the terror of his name." General Chalmers, when asked by a newspaper correspondent about the treatment of the "home-made Yankees . . . and negroes" at Fort Pillow, replied flatly that he "believed it was right." Southern diarist Catherine Edmondston, eagerly reading early accounts at home in North Carolina, wrote, "very likely it is all *true* & I hope it is. If they will steal our slaves & lead them on to murder & rapine, they must take the consequences!" Confederates, the evidence indicates, felt little compunction over the measures taken by their soldiers to reinstate social order by putting emancipated slaves and their white southern collaborators in their place. The most straightforward admission came from one Confederate participant who, writing in the *Atlanta Appeal* on June 14, stated: "you have heard that our soldiers buried Negroes alive at Fort Pillow. This is true." The writer added that, "the whites who led them on and incited them . . . deserve a more terrible punishment."⁴⁴

⁴² Bruce Tap, "'These Devils Are Not Fit to Live On God's Earth': War Crimes and the Committee On the Conduct of the War, 1864-1865." *Civil War History*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1996, 127; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 7 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), 302-303.

⁴³ Sheehan-Dean, *Calculus of Violence*, 275-76.

⁴⁴ Cimprich and Mainfort, "Fort Pillow Revisited," 296; *Camden (S.C.) Confederate*, April 20, 1864; *Lancaster (S.C.) Ledger*, April 26, 1864; *Daily Chattanooga Rebel* (Griffin, GA), July 19, 1864; *Memphis*

The justification for the actions taken by Forrest's men, in most Confederates' eyes, appeared self-evident. In an article titled "The Slave Soldiers," the Washington, Arkansas *Telegraph* stated simply, "we *cannot* treat negroes taken in arms as prisoners of war, without a destruction of the social system for which we contend. In this we must be firm, uncompromising, and unfaltering." And in explicit contrast to the rallying cry of "Remember Fort Pillow" beginning to circulate in the North and among Union troops, Richmond editorialist Basil Gildersleeve urged Confederates to "*Repeat* Fort Pillow." Only then, he contended, would they "bring the Yankees to their senses." After learning the details of what the rebels had done, one Republican Congressman wondered aloud whether it would ever be possible to reconcile such people back into the Union, or if it was even desirable.⁴⁵

Senator Benjamin Wade and Congressman Daniel Gooch traveled to Cairo and Mound City, Illinois, where some of the wounded victims of the massacre were convalescing, as well as to Fort Pillow and Memphis, on a fact-finding mission. They interviewed surviving witnesses and the hospital workers who had admitted them. Their report ultimately relied heavily on the recollections of the southern Unionists of Bradford's Battalion. The committee interviewed twenty-one members of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry in total. Their testimony helped confirm that the rumors did not appear greatly exaggerated. The Confederates had brutally slaughtered the mixed garrison after they had tried to surrender. Most of the survivors interviewed had been

Daily Appeal (Atlanta, GA), April 23, 1864; Beth G. Crabtree and James W. Patton, eds., "*Journal of a Secesh Lady*": *The Diary of Catherine Ann Devereux Edmondston, 1860-1866* (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1979), 549-550; Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, Etc.* Vol. 11 (G.P. Putnam, 1868), 525-526.

⁴⁵ *Washington (Ark.) Telegraph*, June 8, 1864; *Richmond (Va.) Examiner*, April 25, 1864; Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*, 71.

presumed dead, not deliberately spared. In their investigation, Wade and Gooch, among other things, sought to determine whether Forrest's men had made distinctions between the Tennessee Unionists and the USCT in their bloodletting. "So far as you could see," they asked paymaster William B. Purdy for example, "was any discrimination made between white and black men, as to giving no quarter?" No, he answered, "I should think not." They asked this question repeatedly, and received the same answer, from both white and black respondents. The men of the Thirteenth Tennessee interviewed by Wade and Gooch believed, rightly, that the Confederates had deliberately targeted them for punishment. Dr. Chapman Underwood of Bradford's Battalion testified that Forrest's men "had been hunting me . . . I knew all of them." The Tennessee Tories had been sadistically tortured, summarily executed, and a few buried alive along with their African American comrades. Their testimony provided the bulk of the material for the report that Wade and Gooch eventually produced.⁴⁶

On May 5, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War released its findings. It caused a sensation. Congress printed sixty thousand copies, indicating an unusual degree of public interest, and many northern newspapers carried excerpts. The committee had concluded, based largely on the interviews with survivors from the Thirteenth Tennessee, that "the atrocities committed at Fort Pillow were not the result of passions excited by the heat of conflict, but were the results of a policy deliberately decided upon and unhesitatingly announced." This policy, they explained, had resulted in "a scene of cruelty and murder without a parallel in civilized warfare, which needed but the tomahawk and scalping-knife to exceed the worst atrocities ever committed by savages . . . an indiscriminate slaughter, sparing neither age nor sex, white or black, soldier or

⁴⁶ *Fort Pillow Report*, 1, 84, 89.

civilian,” adding that, “no cruelty which the most fiendish malignity could devise was omitted by these murderers.” The unrepentant tone adopted by Confederates following the massacre, they determined, “proves most conclusively the policy they have determined to adopt.” In the wake of the damning report, Lincoln and his cabinet, along with the preponderance of the northern public, discussed just what would constitute a properly commensurate response. Lincoln asked his cabinet to submit recommendations in writing.⁴⁷

Only when word of possible retaliation, and the prospect of collective punishment, started to circulate among northerners did any Confederates begin to appear defensive about what had gone on at Fort Pillow. Denials that the Confederates had slaughtered the garrison at Fort Pillow emerged later, in altered circumstances. Nothing ever came of the threatened reprisals, however, and before long the crimes committed by Forrest and his men became obfuscated and softened by time.⁴⁸ Though “Remember Fort Pillow!” became a rallying cry for the USCT such as at Petersburg later that summer, most white Americans began to forget, if not forgive.⁴⁹

Fort Pillow was by no means the only episode of violence during the sectional conflict that contemporaries contended went beyond the bounds of civilized warfare. At Poison Spring, Arkansas, for example, the very same week as Fort Pillow, Confederate soldiers – mostly Choctaw allies – murdered and mutilated African American soldiers after the battle had ended. At the Shelton Laurel Massacre, in the mountains of North Carolina in 1863, Confederates summarily executed white Unionists in a grim

⁴⁷ *Fort Pillow Report*, 1-4; Tap, *The Fort Pillow Massacre*, 70-71.

⁴⁸ Sheehan-Dean, *Calculus of Violence*, 164.

⁴⁹ Cimprich and Mainfort Jr., “A Statistical Note,” 837; Tap, “These Devils Are Not Fit to Live On God's Earth,” 131.

culmination of the guerrilla warfare racking the area. Perhaps most infamously, at the Battle of the Crater, Confederates slaughtered many of the African American troops caught in the disastrous fallout of the failed attempt to breach their lines. Fort Pillow, however, stands alone. The presence of white southern Unionists, many known to the perpetrators of the massacre, fighting side by side with formerly enslaved African American soldiers set it apart during the war and represents the key factor that had spurred Forrest's men to a level of ferocity that made Fort Pillow a byword for brutality for years to come.⁵⁰

Historians in the decades after the end of the Civil War and well into the twentieth century mostly discounted the idea that the engagement at Fort Pillow had actually constituted an outright massacre at all. Lost Cause defenders of the moral rectitude of the Confederate soldier, as well as the cult of personality that developed around General Forrest, refused to admit that either lowered themselves to such savagery. In these accounts, explains Richard Fuchs, "the very prejudices that inspired the massacre become the basis for purported scholarly analysis." Though not as dismissive as Forrest's fawning biographers, titans of Civil War history James Ford Rhodes, James G. Randall, T. Harry Williams, and Allan Nevins all treat the events at Fort Pillow tentatively. E. Merton Coulter fervently denied that any sort of crime had taken place. African-American historians W. E. B. DuBois and John Hope Franklin both argued that testimony supporting the idea of a massacre at Fort Pillow did not appear exaggerated, but their work had a limited impact. In a 1958 article, Albert Castel soberly re-examined the

⁵⁰ Gregory J. W. Urwin, "'We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . As Prisoners of War': Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in Civil War Arkansas," in Urwin, *Black Flag Over Dixie*, 134-137; John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 117-120; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 760.

evidence related to Fort Pillow and concluded unequivocally that the Confederates had carried out the deliberate slaughter of the garrison. Castel's findings have become the scholarly consensus. To maintain otherwise, writes Fuchs, "is to give succor to the principles of a cause that has long ago lost the battle with common decency and nobler ideals." Much of the historiography now concerns Forrest's personal degree of culpability or esoteric debates about whether or not his men violated a flag of truce during the battle. Most recently, Derek W. Frisby has written on the credulousness of the investigative committee and the political hay Radical Republicans made of the massacre. While his assessment of the final report as "atrocious propaganda" overstates the case, no serious scholar denies that Forrest's men ultimately butchered their enemy that day. In virtually all that has been written about Fort Pillow, however, the white southern Unionists that constituted half the garrison have remained relegated to the background.⁵¹

IV—Conclusion

Fort Pillow is a story of racial atrocity. In addition to their African-American victims, Forrest's Confederates also massacred white Tennesseans because they saw them as traitors to their race. Contemporary evidence spells this out clearly. Previous scholarship has emphasized the political enmity Confederates felt toward the Tennessee Tories and a sense of grievance at their guerrilla tactics. But Confederates did not

⁵¹ James G. Randall. *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Company, 1937), 507; T. Harry Williams. *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941), 343-346; Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union: The Organized War to Victory, 1864-1865* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 25; E. Merton Coulter, *The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 264; W. E. Burghardt Du Bois. *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935), 114-115; John H. Franklin. *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1947), 289; Fuchs, *An Unerring Fire*, 13, 157; Frisby, "'Remember Fort Pillow!'" in Urwin, *Black Flag over Dixie*; Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*, 118.

slaughter white Union soldiers in the manner they did at Fort Pillow on any other occasion during the war. From the point of view of Forrest's men, what the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry did at Fort Pillow – fight with black soldiers against fellow white southerners – had itself constituted something like an atrocity.⁵² Historians have not sufficiently acknowledged this crucial aspect of the massacre. The field of Civil War history, in general, needs more research into what white southern Unionists represented to both sides, especially their former compatriots. At Fort Pillow, Forrest's men murdered almost a hundred Tennessee Unionists, some with extraordinary cruelty, because they represented an internal threat to white supremacy. They had abdicated their birthright as white southerners. The men of the Thirteenth Tennessee threatened to unleash what Confederates had always dreaded most, and they were butchered for it.⁵³

A few months later, in August 1864, Tennessee's Unionist Governor Andrew Johnson consolidated the survivors of Bradford's Battalion into company A of the Fourteenth Tennessee Cavalry. Its officers included Leaming and Captain John L. Poston, a Haywood County, Tennessee farmer who had absconded from a Confederate prison. It then merged with Company E of the Sixth Tennessee Cavalry, Fielding Hurst's regiment, early in 1865. Insufficient numbers remained in the ranks for Bradford's old unit to stand on its own. Two months later, the war would end and Johnson would ascend to the presidency. For southern Unionists in particular, the ascension of the single most famous Unionist in the country to the highest office in the land represented a propitious development. As they looked ahead to a period of great uncertainty, they hoped that their wartime loyalty and unbroken claims to citizenship would magnify their voice in the

⁵² Sheehan-Dean, *Calculus of Violence*, 272.

⁵³ Colin Edward Woodward, *Marching Masters: Slavery, Race, and the Confederate Army During the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 113, 147.

debates over postwar policy, and that the new chief executive would not forget them, their contributions to Union victory, or the depth of their sacrifice at the hands of the now defeated yet still defiant Confederates.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Lufkin, "Not Heard from Since April 12, 1864," 133n3; Baggett, *Homegrown Yankees*, 225-226; Susanna Michele Lee, *Claiming the Union: Citizenship In the Post-Civil War South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 8.

Chapter Five

Losing the Peace: White Unionists in the Deep South during Reconstruction, 1865-1885

During Reconstruction, white southern Unionists became key figures that shaped the profound social and political fluctuations of the era in important ways. The experiences of former Unionists in that crucial and contentious period – their motivations, aims, and expectations – illustrate some of Reconstruction’s key dynamics for contemporary scholars. Unionists’ mistreatment by former Confederates helped galvanize the North to embrace Congressional Reconstruction, and many played notable political and civic roles on the back of their war record. They became judges, legislators, and governors and moved in the highest circles of power; they were also called traitors to their race and became the victims of mob violence and the Klan. Some, finding common cause, allied themselves politically with newly emancipated African Americans; others refused to do so. Prominent Unionists, because of the stand they had taken and the risks they had run during the late conflict, expected a seat at the table in the postwar decision-making process, and some did indeed go on to make a substantial impact on their states and on the nation. Former Unionists remained an important, distinct group even after the crisis of the Union had come to an end.¹

To many observers, white southerners who had stood by the Union at all hazards appeared the first and most natural component of a potential Republican constituency in the postwar South. Their wartime unity of purpose, however, proved illusory and

¹ Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 9-13; Mark W. Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 78; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (Harper & Row, 1988), 215, 297.

evaporated with the reestablishment of peace. The nucleus of unconditional Unionism that the administration had attempted to cultivate in the Deep South during the conflict failed to mature into a reliable base of white support during Reconstruction. Unionists for the most part remained deeply unpopular and greatly outnumbered among the white population. Divergent prewar political leanings among them reemerged and, critically for the party, the region, and the nation, white southern Unionists split in the postwar period over the disenfranchisement of former rebels and civil rights for African Americans. The sole foundation of their past cooperation had been their uncompromising Unionism, and with the integrity of the Union no longer at issue, that foundation quickly gave way to conflicting visions for its future. “Unionism . . . could not shape itself into a unified party,” explains historian Mark W. Summers, because elements within it simultaneously “longed to go back to the way things used to be—and [were] determined to change society so that things could never be that way again.” The postwar dismemberment of the wartime alliance of white southern Unionists, which took place amid the larger ruptures among scalawags, carpetbaggers, and freedmen, represents one of most important reasons for the failure to establish a viable constituency capable of countering Democratic hegemony in the South, and is crucial to understanding the era of Reconstruction.²

Tracing the disparate postwar careers of those associated with the white Union regiments organized in the Deep South provides a useful starting point for an examination of the era’s complex history. At each stage of Reconstruction, former

² Kenneth M. Stampp. *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York: Knopf, 1965), 162; Degler, *The Other South*, 203-204; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 62; Richard White, *The Republic for Which It Stands: The United States During Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, 1865-1896* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3; Michael W. Fitzgerald, "Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction, 1865-1868." *The Journal of Southern History* 54.4 (November 1, 1988), 586.

Unionists appear at significant junctures. In the period known as “Presidential Reconstruction,” some of the more securely situated and conservative Unionists embraced Johnson’s policies, endorsed his stance on racial issues, and hoped for a rapid return to something approaching *status quo antebellum*. Others found themselves on the outside looking in, dismayed at the rapid social rehabilitation of impenitent former Confederates and distraught at the widespread mistreatment of Unionists who had risked and suffered so much. Many were driven to take action and helped prevail upon Congress to enact Radical Reconstruction. During those remarkable years, former Unionists enjoyed a tenuous ascendancy and attempted to enact various visions for reform. Their wartime association with the Union military provided evidence of unassailable loyalty to the federal government, personal courage, and legitimated their claims to a place in postwar political arena. For most white residents of the Deep South, however, that association continued to represent an unforgivable betrayal of their state, the South, and, increasingly, the white race, “an odium,” explains Eric Foner, “that persisted in the morality play of traditional Reconstruction historiography.” Over the course of the 1870s, former Unionists and Republicans steadily fell from power, their coalition succumbing to overwhelming social pressure, mutual distrust, and the persistent threat of Democratic violence. Old alliances that had held together through the crucible of war came apart for good. Understanding the different postwar aspirations and actions of white Unionists in the Deep South helps explain the social and political realignments that proved crucial in determining the final course of Reconstruction. In the end, former Unionists – faced with the triumph of the “Redeemers” – left their homes, reconciled themselves to the revanchist regime, or resigned themselves to silence and political impotence.³

³ George C. Rable. *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction*

I – Presidential Reconstruction: 1865-1867

As a state of peace finally returned to the Deep South in the summer of 1865, the white Unionists in the region braced for the return of former Confederates. Neither group knew exactly where they stood with the new administration or what policies it would adopt toward them. Unionists did have reason to be hopeful, though. New president Andrew Johnson, perhaps the most famous southern Unionist of all, had famously avowed that “treason must be made odious,” and most Unionists believed they had a powerful advocate and ally in the new chief executive. In Winston and Walker counties in Alabama, postwar meetings of white Unionists expressed their hopes and expectations for their postwar future. “We have the highest confidence in his excellency Andrew Johnson,” the Winston County meeting resolved, “and we believe he is an instrument raised up by an all-wise Providence to vindicate the rights and honor of the laboring man, and secure the integrity and glory of this great country against all its foes, internal and external.” Enumerating the grievances they had accumulated through four years of civil war, the meetings’ attendees beseeched the new administration not to let former rebels off the hook. “It would be a crime,” they declared, “and shame heaven’s justice to bestow mercy on such a God-forsaken set” and called on the new president “to take the proper measures to have the Union men of this county and this State protected against the villainous machinations of the secessionists.” The country would not be safe, they attested, “until the secession leaders of the rebellion are removed from among the people, and their pernicious influence is utterly eradicated and destroyed.” They looked to

(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 1; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 62, 78; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 224-225, 269, quote on 294; Degler, *The Other South*, 207; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 162; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 596.

Johnson to take their side against the architects of disunion in the precarious months ahead. Finally, the Walker County meeting communicated its hope that the government would tread lightly on the issue of slavery. “As a principle it is doomed, and must fall with secession,” they explained, “but rash and precipitate action upon it may greatly delay the peace we so much need.” The new administration, they believed, ought to direct its energies first and foremost toward the needs of white Unionists trying to rebuild their communities and states and recoup their wartime losses.⁴

Many former Unionists expected to reap the rewards of their wartime loyalty. White southerners of unquestionable fidelity to the government appeared pivotal to the stewardship of any transitional period, and those associated with Unionist regiments initially held important civic appointments. In June, the *New York Herald* reported that President Johnson had “given a significant indication of his policy towards Alabama, and of the course he is likely to pursue to secure her *bona fide* reinstatement in the Union,” gleaning much from the fact that “in making appointments of assessors and collectors of internal revenue, all but one thus far appointed are officers of the First Alabama (loyal) cavalry.” In Louisiana, James Madison Wells – who possessed unimpeachable Unionist credentials and had recruited several companies’ worth of white soldiers into the Union army – ascended to the governorship of his native state in March 1865 after Michael Hahn’s election to the Senate. And in New Orleans, noted the *Alexandria Gazette*, former “Jayhawker” Robert W. Taliaferro, “son of the Taliaferro whose opposition to secession excited so much comment in Louisiana at the outbreak of the war,” and Thomas M. Wells, “son of Gov. Wells,” – both delegates to the 1864 constitutional convention –

⁴ Annette Gordon-Reed, *Andrew Johnson* (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2011), 98-99; McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 111-113; White, *The Republic For Which It Stands*, 25, 35; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 126; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 171; *Nashville Daily Union*, June 22, 1865.

served as Postmaster and naval officer, respectively. Much would depend on the relationship between former Unionists and returning former Confederates in the initial postwar period.⁵

In June 1865, Louisiana Unionist James G. Taliaferro wrote to his daughter Elizabeth that, “the political cauldron is beginning to bubble and seethe rapidly.” Statewide elections would be held in the fall, and in the meantime there were positions to be filled and appointments made. Though slavery had ended for good, much else remained to be decided and legislated, and former Confederates unabashedly launched themselves back into local politics. Taliaferro looked with suspicion at efforts by former rebels seeking positions and influence in the unsettled postwar political climate to ingratiate themselves with the new administration. “The rebel party it is clear have hopes of governing again,” he reported in mid-July, “their affrontery is astonishing . . . and [they] claim their ‘right’ etc. as loyal citizens having taken the oath as they say and intend to be staunch Union men for the future.” Wary of such an abrupt about-face, many former Unionists contended that former Confederates’ newly discovered loyalty to the government amounted to mere lip service. “The quondam rebels would be Union men,” wrote a friend of Taliaferro’s, “they dress like Union men, look like Union men, talk like Union men, and have ears like Union men, but they don’t smell much like Union men.” Taliaferro and many Unionists like him remained distrustful of those who had so recently tormented them and attempted to drive them from their homes, but now claimed to share loyalty to the national government. Such a turnaround seemed superficial and flagrantly self-serving. A few staunch Unionists, however, including – crucially – Governor Wells,

⁵ *New York Herald*, June 11, 1865; *Alexandria Gazette*, March 22, 1865; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 387.

appeared eager to accept the change of heart in good faith and to resume their prewar associations with their former Confederate neighbors.⁶

Wells occupied a position of tremendous significance at the opening of Reconstruction, and because of his stoic adherence to the Union initially bore a reputation as a Radical. His marked silence, however, concealed his fundamentally conservative nature. Confounding many of his wartime allies, Wells almost immediately began to make overtures to former Confederates in an effort to expand his base of support. Of his initial appointments, almost none could have honestly taken the ironclad oath, and many expressed open hostility to the Free State Constitution of 1864. Wells replaced New Orleans mayor Stephen Hoyt, for example, an old friend and political ally of Nathaniel Banks, with Hugh Kennedy, a secessionist newspaper editor. He also removed Judge Ezra Hiestand, a prominent wartime Unionist whose son had become a captain in the First Louisiana Cavalry, from his position on the first district court. Wells sought, Mayor Kennedy later explained, to draw upon “representative men of the old parties of the pre-rebellion times; men of irreproachable integrity, of suitable age, social importance, and proper educational qualifications” to form his coalition. A prewar planter of substantial means, he aimed to return the state as close as possible to the *status quo antebellum*, albeit with the integrity of the Union secured beyond question. He had no qualms about courting former Confederates in order to do so. Wells and his former Confederate foes’ wartime allegiances may have been poles apart, but in terms of their postwar priorities – principally retaining social control over the emancipated African-American population which comprised half the state – they rapidly realigned. General Banks attempted to

⁶ James G. Taliaferro to Elizabeth Taliaferro, June 24, 1865; July 15, 1865; “Hawkins” to James G. Taliaferro, September 22, 1865. *Taliaferro Papers*.

overrule some of Wells's appointments, alarmed that the governor's actions would "re-establish in power men of the old system of slavery," but on May 17 President Johnson removed Banks, thus sanctioning the course taken by Wells. "Tell the boys," Wells wrote his wife Mary Ann a week later, "they shall not be again troubled with further Yankee adventurism. Banks is the last and he is forever killed off. This is as it should be with all wretches who will take their [honor?] and dance with negroes at their balls as has been proven to be the case with this miserable man." He concluded, "I am highly pleased with Pres. Johnson . . . I am sure the South will never regret his being President." Many Louisiana Unionists, though, grew increasingly distraught at Wells's – and Johnson's – seemingly abrupt conservative and conciliatory turn.⁷

Dennis Haynes, like Wells a resident of Rapides Parish before the war, had served in the Union Cavalry in Louisiana but felt betrayed by the governor's political metamorphosis and quickly became disillusioned with the former "king of the jayhawkers." Haynes, who had become well acquainted with Wells during the Red River campaign the previous year, was also no ally of freed people. He evinced typical white rural Louisianan attitudes toward African Americans, writing of the need to "rectify the refractory negroes . . . and loose darkies [who] were continually stealing" and cared little for their welfare. His concern centered chiefly on the fact that Wells now appeared not only eager to collaborate with former rebels, but also to have turned his back on his fellow Unionists. In September, Haynes wrote to Wells to express his misgivings. "I

⁷ *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, OH), April 27, 1865; Michael Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction, 1865-1868* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 119; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 182-183; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 78; Summers, "The Moderates Last Chance," 54-55; Hollandsworth, *Pretense of Glory*, 218-219; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 95-96; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 140; Lowrey, "The Political Career of James Madison Wells," 1032; J. Madison Wells to Mary Ann Wells, May 23, 1865. *Wells Papers*.

would respectfully inform you,” he began, “that your policy with regard to appointing notorious rebels to office has given great dissatisfaction to your old Union friends.” How could it be, asked Haynes, “as in the case of appointing John R. Williams sheriff of Rapides parish, a captain of cavalry in the rebel army, and who, as you well know, fought against the United States Government till the close of the war . . . how is it, I say, that you made such a man the chief officer of the parish? Was there no Union man in the parish you could trust with such an office?” None could deny, Haynes told him, “that you have done a great deal for the State . . . and none is prouder of your success in your mission to Washington than your humble servant,” yet he wondered what had “so changed your nature?” It remained a sad fact, Haynes remarked, “for those Union men to contemplate, who were your companions and defenders in your time of greatest need, how in your prosperity, when you could assist them in many ways, not one, scarcely, to whom you have given the least assistance.” In conclusion, he wrote pithily, “we little thought the plain old farmer would turn out a demagogue.” The following year, Haynes published an account of his experiences during the war entitled *A Thrilling Narrative of the Suffering of Union Refugees, and the Massacre of the Martyrs of Liberty of Western Louisiana*. He hoped to draw national attention to struggles of Unionists in the Deep South during the war, as well as the difficulties that they now faced in its aftermath.⁸

Carl Schurz, who travelled to Louisiana in the late summer of 1865 at the behest of President Johnson, for the most part corroborated Haynes’s assessment. He wrote the president that the “disloyal and pro-slavery element” had regained ascendancy, Unionists

⁸ Dennis E. Haynes and Arthur W. Bergeron, ed. *A Thrilling Narrative: The Memoir of a Southern Unionist* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), xii, 69, 87-89, 92; Arthur W. Bergeron, “Dennis Haynes and his ‘Thrilling Narrative of the Sufferings of . . . the Martyrs of Liberty of Western Louisiana’” *Louisiana History*, 38 (1997), 41-42; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 97.

“feel like the conquered people, and men who stood by the rebellion until the hour of its final downfall, act like conquerors.” In many respects, Wells’s tenure as governor in the summer and fall of 1865 reflected the national leadership of President Johnson. Even contemporaries remarked that Wells “had been to Louisiana what President Johnson had been to the South.” Both adopted a placatory approach toward former Confederates and appeared more eager to work with the familiar “natural leaders” of the South – regardless of recent participation in rebellion – to maintain order and build support than with established Unionists. Both sought to preserve the “purity of the ballot” in racial terms, condoned the Black Codes, and strongly disapproved of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which also provided aid to white refugees. Treason, it seemed, had become less odious than the unbridled growth of federal authority and the perceived Radical threat to the established racial caste system. To many observers the situation appeared downright regressive. Schurz observed that in Louisiana they “study, not how to build up and develop a true system of free labor, but how to avoid it.” The African-American daily *New Orleans Tribune*, published by Louis Charles Roudanez, summarized: “the spirit—pro-slavery; the loyalty—null; the status—States rights above the National Constitution.” With Wells as chief executive, Louisiana in 1865 represented a microcosm of Johnson’s Presidential Reconstruction, embracing reactionary policies and individuals and creating conditions that began to alarm the rest of the country.⁹ Wells, summarized the African-American *New Orleans Advocate*, had become an “apostle” of Johnson’s.¹⁰

⁹ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 95-97, 100-101; Carl Shurz to Andrew Johnson, September 4, 1865. *Johnson Papers*, LOC; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1036-1037; Hollandsworth Jr. *An Absolute Massacre*, 31-32; White, *The Republic For Which It Stands*, 41, 50, 62; *New Orleans Tribune*, June 17, 1865; J. Madison Wells to Andrew Johnson, September 23, 1865. *Wells Papers*.

¹⁰ *New Orleans Advocate*, February 2, 1867.

What was more, Johnson's leadership and lax attitude toward former Confederates and Confederate sympathizers started to have more serious consequences for Unionists across the Deep South than insufficient patronage. His administration fostered an atmosphere that allowed unrepentant white southerners to once again ostracize people they still viewed unforgivingly as "Tories." As historian Michael Perman has explained, Johnson operated with "an assumption that a real reunion demanded reconciliation at the expense of reconstruction." In practice, one contemporary observed, this approach more nearly resembled "no reconstruction at all." Johnson's misapprehension allowed for the resumption, in places, of conditions that at times resembled those of the secession winter. In Louisiana, Alabama, and throughout the Deep South, arrests, harassment, and violence toward former Unionists ramped up. Unionists felt a visceral sense of betrayal, and missed no opportunity to throw Johnson's words back at him. William Miller, a loyal Alabamian, wrote "I thot [the president] declared Emphatically that he will put the government in the hands of its friends make treason odious & that the leaders in the Rebellion must take back seats. [But] he then commences pardoning all the worst & most bitter enemies of the Government." Writing in to the *Huntsville Advocate*, "Causidicus" declared that "secession and treason cannot be rendered odious by continuing their favorites in the offices which were earned by their zeal for the rebellion, and their avowed hatred for the federal Union . . . [such men] are not the proper agents to be employed in rekindling the fires of patriotism in the hearts of the people."¹¹ One Unionist Louisianan, disgusted with both Wells and Johnson, remarked, "Loyalty in New Orleans was made odious; liberty was disgraced, and the

¹¹ McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 171; *Huntsville (Ala.) Advocate*, August 17, 1865.

Union leaders and reformers were marked for rebel vengeance.”¹² An Alabama Black Belt Unionist similarly warned that former rebels had boasted that, “so soon as the federal soldiers leave, they will kill the Union men.”¹³

Certainly African Americans, whose recent emancipation remained intensely offensive to most white southerners, became the most frequent targets of vengeful former Confederates in the second half of 1865, but white Unionists – whom former Confederates naturally associated with that emancipation and its portents – did also fall victim. In October, the Raleigh *Journal of Freedom* – a short-lived “universal suffrage paper” founded by a former Union prisoner of war – related a piece of news from Alabama that “deserves more than passing notice.” In Jackson County, the sheriff had overseen the arrest of “fifteen discharged Union soldiers, of the First Alabama Cavalry,” whom he had “placed on trial for murder, that is for killing rebel soldiers, guerrillas and bushwhackers, while soldiers of the United States and in the line of their duty.” Union military authorities, led by a General Kryzyanowski, managed to intervene – with the help of African-American troops – but as soon as the general had left, the sheriff reportedly “rose up in the court room and said publicly—‘Those d—d Dutch are not running this thing now. We are running this machine.’” The situation reached such a point that Major General Benjamin H. Grierson had to formally order that “civil authorities . . . will not be permitted to arrest, imprison, or bring to trial any person or persons who have been in the service of the United States as soldiers or scouts during the

¹² Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 13; Perman, *Reunion without Compromise*, 7; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 225; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 172, 178; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1037; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 95; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (University of Chicago Press, 1961), see chapter 3.

¹³ McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 169; Anthony W. Dillard to Andrew Johnson, August 14, 1865, Bergeron, *Papers of Andrew Johnson*, 8:582-83.

late rebellion, for acts committed by them while in such service.” A week earlier, the *Journal of Freedom* had reported the murder of a former Union scout at the hands of former Confederates in northwest Georgia. Also that summer, “parties of marauders” had burned houses and murdered Unionists in already-devastated northwestern Alabama. “Is it any wonder then,” it concluded, “that the Union men of the land are afraid to trust too far those who have lately been in rebellion against the Government?” If former rebels persisted in their present course, the paper finally warned, “they will certainly defeat the President’s benevolent confidence now reposed in them. We shall weep,” it added sarcastically, if this “should be the . . . result of unprecedented clemency.”¹⁴

Incidents in Louisiana mirrored those in Alabama. Henry Bullard Taliaferro, who had only recently mustered out of the First Louisiana Cavalry, wrote to his sister that, “Pa has got to learn the rascality of mankind.” With jarring alacrity, former Confederate Louisianans vengefully turned on former Unionists. In August, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that in Opelousas, “two heroic and fearless Union men, who had served in a loyal Louisiana regiment, were treacherously murdered by a mob,” demonstrating, it noted bitterly, “to what extent the tender mercies of the South may be relied upon.” Governor Wells did nothing to stop the depredations. Dennis Haynes wrote to him that, “the same hostility, bitter and bloody, exists against the Union returned refugees which drove them out of the country . . . Your friends looked to you and hoped you would use your influence with the military authorities to have those bloody murderers arrested and tried by court martial. If you have done anything in the premises we have heard nothing

¹⁴ *Journal of Freedom* (Raleigh, NC) October 21, 1865; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 171; Michael W. Fitzgerald, “‘He Was Always Preaching the Union’: The Wartime Origins of White Republicanism during Reconstruction,” in Noe, ed. *The Yellowhammer War*, 234; George W. Howard to Brig. Gen. R. S. Granger, July 1, 1865, *OR*, Ser. I, vol. 49, pt. 2, 1057.

of the result.” He wrote to President Johnson as well, lamenting the sad irony that “for the Union men of the South . . . now that the blessings of peace [have] dawned upon the country, they find themselves persecuted by their enemies and abandoned by their friends.” In September, Confederate sympathizers in Alexandria badly beat Haynes, but he could receive no legal redress from civil authorities. Instead of experiencing vindication, as the momentous year of 1865 drew to a close Unionists more often experienced abuse, arrest, and assault at the hands of the people they had helped defeat.”¹⁵

The results of fall elections augured poorly for white Unionists in the Deep South, further exacerbating the tense situation locally and nationally. Unlike in the Upper South, where Unionists fared tolerably well, in the cotton states like Alabama, Louisiana, and others, only a Confederate war record and unmitigated hostility to Republicans, Unionists, and African Americans seemed to suffice to qualify one for elected office. In fact, some candidates explicitly attacked their opponents as having been disloyal to the Confederacy during the war.¹⁶ Recently emancipated African-American men still could not vote, but many recent Confederates could, leaving Unionists and Republicans with an impossibly narrow political base. William Hugh Smith, for example – the former slaveholder and native of the Deep South who became a stalwart Unionist and recruiter for the First Alabama Cavalry, not to be confused with William Russell Smith – lost out in his bid for the Governor’s nomination early on in the process, while two former Confederate officers and a wartime Confederate state legislator earned election to the

¹⁵ Henry Bullard Taliaferro to Elizabeth Taliaferro, March 1, 1866. *Taliaferro Papers*; *Opelousas (La.) Courier*, July 22, 1865; *Chicago Tribune*, August 24, 1865; Haynes, *A Thrilling Narrative*, 88, 109-112; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 78; Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), xlii.

¹⁶ McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 190.

U.S. House of Representatives. One newspaper lamented the irony that Alabama conservatives considered Smith “as having been too good a Union man in the past to hold so prominent a position now” though his appointment would “gratify nearly the entire loyal element of that State.”¹⁷ Alabama’s new governor, Robert M. Patton, had worked as a Confederate financier during the war and lost two of his sons in its service. “Not a single county in the State,” exulted one conservative, “had returned a ‘tory’ . . . to the legislature.” The defeated Smith testified before the Congressional Joint Committee on Reconstruction that former rebels, “have been very bold, very intolerant, and manifest the most perfect contempt for a man who is known to be an unequivocal Union man; call him a ‘galvanized Yankee,’ and apply other terms and epithets to him.” Smith also lost his ability to command authority as an appointed judge, explaining that, “I found I could not hold court without being insulted by the rebel lawyers in their speeches,” who, he said, declared themselves “in favor hanging Union men” and continued to “glory in . . . the rebellion.” The state appeared to belong once again, for all intents and purposes, to the Confederacy. The new Alabama legislature, remarked one contemporary observer, now consisted “3/4 of officers & privates from the Confederate Army.” Given the proverbial inch under the relatively lenient terms of Presidential Reconstruction, former rebels in the Deep South took a mile.¹⁸

In Louisiana, William Mithoff, a German-born Louisiana Union volunteer who had risen to state adjutant-general, lost his Congressional race to secessionist former Governor Robert C. Wickliffe. “What has all this hesitation (by Wells) to punish treason

¹⁷ McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 137-38; *Charleston (S.C.) Courier*, June 14, 1865.

¹⁸ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 196; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reconstruction*, 72; *The Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, WV), June 9, 1865; Webb and Armbruster, *Alabama Governors*, 81, 87; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 179-181; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 569-570; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 163-164.

done?” he raged. Less than six months after the close of the war, Mithoff reported, “undisguised rebeldom I found ruling outside New Orleans—and here it is progressing finely.” Northern correspondents despaired at the returns. As in Alabama, one Republican recorded, it seemed that “every member elected . . . was either a confederate civil or military officer, or at least a man who never acted obnoxiously to the secessionists.” Another commented that the newly elected Louisiana House perfectly resembled a “second Secession legislature.” Following the results of the elections, Judge Hiestand summarized that, “the whole political power of the state, almost without exception, is in the hands of those who were in rebellion.” Governor Wells, consummating the political betrayal of his wartime allies, secured his own election that fall by running as a revanchist conservative appealing to his white, largely former Confederate base of support.¹⁹

As he had in 1864, Wells appeared simultaneously on two tickets—this time as both a Democrat and as a Conservative Unionist. On the Democratic ticket he appeared with Albert Voorhies, “an able jurist and a polished gentleman” who had sided with the Confederacy during the war, as his running mate. Where before it had been Wells’s unconditional Unionism that made him the pick of two separate political factions, now it was the evident strength of his commitment to white supremacy and home rule. The Democratic platform that fall affirmed defiantly that “we hold this to be a government of white people, made and to be perpetuated for the exclusive benefit of the white race; and . . . that people of African descent cannot be considered as citizens of the United States.”

Wells also headed the Conservative Union ticket alongside James G. Taliaferro, who

¹⁹ Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 43; Summers, “The Moderates Last Chance,” 64-65; CSR, *Louisiana, First New Orleans Infantry*, M396, roll 31, RG94, NARA, “Mithoff, William” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/261242466>]; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 196.

emerged (unsolicited) as the Conservatives' pick for lieutenant governor. Though it lacked such an explicitly racist plank in its platform, the Conservative Unionists as a group also firmly opposed suffrage for African Americans and differed from the Democrats primarily in their attitudes toward former Confederates, the legitimacy of secession, and the 1864 Free State Constitution. At a Conservative Unionist meeting in October, the New Orleans *Daily Times* reported that the entreaty "God forbid the negro should ever be elevated to our equal" elicited enthusiastic applause from the crowd. "The Negro of Louisiana," explained historian Walter McGehee Lowrey, thus "found himself without a friend in either of the two big parties in 1865." In November, Wells the Democrat won in a landslide, with four times the votes of his nearest opposition. He and his fellow Democrats comfortably triumphed over the Conservative Unionists as well as the cadre of Radical Unionists centered in New Orleans who advocated universal suffrage. His transformation – or reversion – complete, Wells was the exception that proved the rule when it came to the political fortunes of white former Unionists in the Deep South.²⁰

Wells's Democratic honeymoon lasted only a matter of weeks, however. The mostly former Confederate legislature distrusted him for his past Unionism and quickly moved to limit the governor's power. In early 1866, over Wells's veto, they moved up municipal elections in order to sweep away his appointees and ensure his political impotence in New Orleans. The installation of the prewar mayor, John T. Monroe, and chief of police, Thomas E. Adams, set the stage for violence later that summer. James Taliaferro, then living in New Orleans, wrote to his daughter in March that the "political

²⁰ Summers, "The Moderates Last Chance," 53, 58; Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 33-34; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 196; Lowrey, "The Political Career of James Madison Wells," 1060-1061.

cauldron ever since I came down here has been boiling and bubbling as strongly as that of the Witches in Macbeth by which they invoked ‘toil and trouble’ and raised the dead for their purposes.” Too late, Wells realized he had made a “Faustian bargain” with the Democrats and former Confederates, who dispensed with the governor and plowed ahead with their unapologetically regressive agenda. With remarkable candor, Wells acknowledged his mistake. “I frankly own,” he said, “that my views of the conciliatory policy, in winning back to allegiance those who have engaged in a war to destroy the Union, have undergone a change.” Now, Wells conceded that “the intolerant spirit engendered by slavery still exists; the loss of property and failure of all their hopes can never be forgiven, and . . . I am convinced they would renew the rebellion tomorrow if they saw a prospect of success.” Wells informed President Johnson that reconciliation had failed.²¹

He soon went even further, cementing his reputation as a political chameleon for the ages. In the early summer of 1866, as the Fourteenth Amendment gained momentum nationally, Wells joined with the Radical faction in Louisiana and endorsed the enfranchisement of African-American men – concurrent with the disenfranchisement of former Confederates – as the only possible means of ensuring the establishment of a truly loyal state government. “I believe the extension of universal suffrage to the black race, and the disfranchisement of those who aided and abetted the rebellion,” Wells now stated, “would place the loyal people of the south in a majority.” Congress possessed the authority to dictate the terms of Louisiana’s readmission, he declared, “and unless they

²¹ Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, 66; James G. Taliaferro to Elizabeth Taliaferro, March 3, 1866, *Taliaferro Papers*; Warmoth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction*, 47; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1075-1079; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 103, 111; Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 35.

adopt constitutions republican in form, and guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens, regardless of color, I am in favor of their being kept in a territorial condition until they do.” In a desperate move that Democrats viewed as nothing less than a coup, Governor Wells then connived with the Radicals to reconvene the 1864 constitutional convention, which could grant African-American men the vote and deliver a new state government. The entire Democratic press of New Orleans, including the *Bee*, the *Crescent*, the *Daily Picayune*, and the *Times*, assailed the “convention conspiracy.” As the delegates gathered for their meeting in New Orleans at the end of July, tensions in the city seethed.²²

The specter of violence loomed for days before it finally transpired. Delegates were threatened by name. Unionist Ezra Hiestand, for example, found a written notice that read “Judge Ezra Hiestand: Beware! Ten days. Duly notified. Begone!” signed, he testified, “with some cabalistic characters, and below were rough representations of a pistol, a bowie-knife, and a dagger.” William Mithoff, the former Union volunteer and convention member, testified later that on July 27 his young son had asked, “why they were going to kill all the Union men and negroes in the city on Monday,” and told him that “the children were talking about it at school.” Sometime after noon on July 30, amid a Freedmen’s demonstration, Mayor Monroe ordered the city police force to break up the controversial convention, precipitating a full-scale riot in which the police ultimately joined white conservatives in a brutal attack on the assembled African Americans and white Unionists. The violence spilled into the convention hall and over several city blocks as rioters murdered African Americans indiscriminately and targeted notorious

²² Gilles Vandal, “The Origins of the New Orleans Riot of 1866, Revisited.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1981, 141; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 46; Degler, *The Other South*, 156; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 1079; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 263; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 144; Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 37; Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War*, 67.

white Radicals. Senator-elect Michael Hahn was wounded and A. P. Dostie, a well-known Radical who Wells had earlier removed from his post because of his advocacy of universal suffrage, was killed – stabbed and shot – by the mob. The police either stood by or, according to many accounts, actively participated. One reportedly yelled, “we have fought for four years these god-damned Yankees and sons of bitches in the field, and now we will fight them in the city.” By the time Federal troops arrived on the scene and dispersed the crowd around 3 p.m., rioters and police together had killed thirty-four African Americans, several of the white delegates, and left well over a hundred seriously wounded. One witness described seeing four furniture wagons stacked with dead and wounded men “thrown in like sacks of corn.” Major General Philip Sheridan, writing to Grant two days later, described it as an “absolute massacre by the police which was not excelled in murderous cruelty by that of Ft. Pillow.” News reverberated nationally and, following as it did on the heels of a similar incident in Memphis earlier that summer, convinced many in the North that more stringent measures had become necessary to rein in the remorseless white South. More than one historian has written that the New Orleans Massacre of July 30, 1866 marked the nadir of Presidential Reconstruction.²³

Governor Wells, over the previous year, had tried to walk a middle road between racial conservatism and (at least future) loyalty to the federal government, but by the summer of 1866 found that none existed. His mismanagement and vacillation as chief executive of Louisiana ultimately led to the New Orleans massacre, a disaster that registered on a national scale. Following the debacle, and having burned every bridge

²³ Wetta, *The Louisiana Scalawags*, 105; Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 208; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 104-107; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 263; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reconstruction*, 96-97; White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 72-73; Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 43-44; Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, 67; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 146.

imaginable, Wells became a total lame duck. The New Orleans *Times* judged that, “a Governor without a single supporter in the legislature is without precedent in the political annals of this country.” Impeachment proceedings had already begun when Philip Sheridan, commanding general of the Gulf District, summarily removed him from office in June 1867. “All’s Well that ends Wells” read a headline in the *Times*. Sheridan called him a “political trickster,” and declared “his conduct has been as sinuous . . . as a snake,” an assessment generally echoed in subsequent historiography. William McGehee Lowrey, in his foundational article on Wells’s political career published in 1948, began his study by stating that, “perhaps no governor in the state’s history has been more hated and reviled.” “Mad” Wells would return to a position of some prominence (and notoriety) during the waning years of Reconstruction, as president of Louisiana’s state returning board.²⁴

Wells’s disastrous tenure forced Unionists in Louisiana to look outside the state for relief and protection. As 1866 drew to a close, white Unionists throughout the Deep South continued to suffer at the hands of rampant and vengeful former Confederates, and northerners became increasingly agitated on their behalf. In September, a typically plaintive article in the Republican *Delaware Gazette* (Ohio) reported: “At Harville, Louisiana, on Saturday, a Union soldier was hung by a mob, and his wife and three small children driven from the country. The perpetrators of the outrage are, of course, unknown, as usual.” The conservative Richmond *Daily Dispatch* deemed one Louisiana

²⁴ Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise*, 252; *New Orleans Times*, February 8, 1867; Summers, “The Moderates Last Chance,” 67; Hollandsworth, *An Absolute Massacre*, 152; *New Orleans Times*, June 4, 1867; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 95; Lowrey, “The Political Career of James Madison Wells,” 995.

Unionist's entreaty "in behalf of Louisiana—that all the Federal offices there be filled by her own true and loyal citizens" simply "naïve."²⁵

Claiming to speak for many of his fellow veterans, a former surgeon of the First Alabama Cavalry and native Alabamian wrote disconsolately to his old colonel George E. Spencer the tidings of Presidential Reconstruction. "The rebels here are rebels yet," he reported, and "Union men are scarcely safe in the country. They [former rebels] have arrogated to themselves a great deal, and are very sanguine of another revolution, which shall, somehow, end in the re-enslavement of the negroes." As a result, he announced, many of his fellow Unionists had begun to contemplate their last recourse: the extension of the vote to African Americans. Democrats "threaten me with death," he wrote, "because I am known as the consistent friend of the Government and the Freedmen." A level of wanton brutality, unmatched in the days of slavery, now prevailed. Without outside help from Congress, he concluded, he and his fellow veterans "are all expecting to be obliged to make up a party and leave the country for a home somewhere in the West."²⁶

Unremitting Democratic violence had fostered a dire situation that seemed to offer white former Unionists residing in the Deep South only two solutions. One was a broader and more meaningful disfranchisement of former Confederates. William H. Smith, would-be Unionist Governor of Alabama, asserted that state and local government must belong to loyal men at all costs. "If there are only half a dozen true men in a county," he wrote, "they should be appointed to office in preference to the secessionists."

²⁵ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 68; *Delaware (Ohio) Gazette*, September 14, 1866; *Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), January 26, 1867.

²⁶ Bella Zilfa Spencer, *Tried and True: Or Love and Loyalty: A Story of the Great Rebellion* (Springfield, MA: W. J. Holland, 1866), vii-viii.

The other was the previously unthinkable enfranchisement of African-American men. Because many in the North balked at the scope of Unionists' proposed disfranchisement, a political alliance in the South between white Unionists and African Americans increasingly gained cautious acceptance. "A biracial coalition," explains historian Michael W. Fitzgerald, "was the only way to power." As with emancipation, southern Unionists almost never couched their support for universal suffrage in terms of justice for African Americans, but rather as a check on unrepentant former Confederates that would loosen Democrats' political stranglehold on the Deep South. In Louisiana, an acolyte of Governor Wells explained that "I love my country and hate disloyalty . . . and if disfranchising traitors, and enfranchising loyal intelligent Negroes will save my country, then I favor the measure, and it seems extremely doubtful if anything else will save Louisiana." As the Alabama Union League succinctly put it in early 1867: "shall we have him [the freedman] for our ally, or the rebel for our master?" However tepid, these white southerners' embrace of black suffrage signified the extraordinary changes afoot.²⁷

Thomas Haughey, Alabamian and former Union soldier, endorsed the right of African-American men to vote, but explained that other civil liberties, like jury service, would remain functionally delimited. White Unionists expected African-American men to vote against former rebels, their mutual enemy, but not to lead. Some, like C. C. Sheets, supported enfranchisement but incredibly still sought the "colonization of the colored race when such a measure shall become practical." For a segment of white former Unionists, however, black suffrage remained a bridge too far, and their racism ran too deep to condone it. Such a concession, writes Mark Summers, "would provide no

²⁷ Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 162; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 215; Summers, "The Moderates Last Chance," 65; R. King Cutler to Senator Lyman Trumbull, December 6, 1865; Fitzgerald, "Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction," 577-578.

solace, cultural or spiritual—nothing but a sense of their own personal isolation.” F. T. C. Sommerland, for example, a resident of Tallapoosa County, Alabama, attested that he was a “Union Constitutional man,” but feared that universal suffrage would lead inexorably to “a war of Races,” and refused to countenance “any more blood Shed in this unfortunate & undone Section.” Sommerland and others defected from the nascent Republican Party, but a remarkable number of white Unionists in the Deep South went along. Former Union Soldiers, more than the general populace, tended to vote Republican. The *Boston Daily Advertiser* explained that, “the fact that there returned to their homes in that region, several hundred members of the 1st Alabama Cavalry Regiment, is in the main the cause of Alabama republicanism being so far advanced.”²⁸ The level of white Unionists’ approval of African American enfranchisement surprised contemporaries and, writes Eric Foner, “underscored the extent of the political revolution that swept across the South in 1867.”²⁹

In May of that year, a meeting of the Unionists of Washington Parish, Louisiana, assembled at Mount Hermon Church and issued a remarkable address on the political situation then developing in the state. In the speech, re-printed in the African American weekly journal the *New Orleans Advocate*, the area’s white Unionists spoke directly to their “colored friends who have so suddenly and unexpectedly been clothed with the privilege of the elective franchise,” and made their case for a political alliance. In spite of the fact, they explained, that “we are frank to admit that the prejudices of our birth and education induced us to be opposed (not to your freedom) but to your enfranchisement,”

²⁸ *Boston (Mass.) Daily Advertiser*, June 15, 1867.

²⁹ Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 196, 203; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 577-578; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 62; Perman, *Reunion without Compromise*, 285; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 303.

they conceded that, “the thing is accomplished” and now sought to solicit their their votes. Their strikingly direct appeal deserves to be quoted at length. “We do not say we will do everything for you,” they frankly conceded,

But we do promise to respect your rights, and will labor for your political and educational promotion. The same power that strove to eternize your bondage, sought also our degradation. We are identified in principle with that great and powerful party that has emancipated you. As we have ever fought against the power who strove to keep you slaves, we surely have larger claims upon you than the opposite party. Born upon the same soil, and raised to labor under the same burning sun with yourselves, and having, like you, been relieved by federal success from a position of great peril, we can quite fully appreciate your condition . . . It is now our collective duty to aid in the formation of a new party that will secure you from insult and oppression, and will raise your race up from the degradation that slavery imposed on it.

Their shared political adversary had, by the end of presidential Reconstruction, created strange bedfellows. Whether that constituted enough of a foundation to sustain Republicans in the Deep South, however, remained unknown.³⁰

From 1865 to early 1867, the ordeals of white Unionists and African Americans at the hands of unrepentant former Confederates in the Deep South had the decided effect of turning much of the North in a more socially and politically Radical direction. “Every shade of Unionist,” Summers writes, “now looked to Congress to act,” which it soon did. Ex-Confederates had only themselves to blame. Paradoxically, it was the intransigence of Democrats that brought the full force of Congressional Reconstruction, and all the social engineering they had arrayed themselves against, down on their heads in the end. As

³⁰ *New Orleans Advocate*, May 4, 1867.

James Taliaferro told his daughter Elizabeth, the “southern people are reaping the bitter fruits of their wanton, reckless folly.”³¹

II—Congressional Reconstruction, 1867-1870

Over the course of 1866 and into 1867, the Radical wing of Congress wrested control of Reconstruction from the President and his allies and began to implement measures that fundamentally altered the political environment in the former Confederacy. That spring and summer, over Johnson’s veto, Congress passed the first Reconstruction Acts, which gave the military sweeping new powers over civil authorities, temporarily disfranchised influential former rebels, and made readmission contingent upon ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment and the enactment of new state constitutions that would give the vote to African-American men. During the period of Congressional (or Radical) Reconstruction that followed, carpetbaggers, scalawags, and African Americans in the Deep South came together in an attempt to find the common ground necessary to create a lasting political coalition. The conventions that assembled in the various states to write new constitutions in 1867, comprised entirely of delegates elected under the new Congressional stipulations, signified the inception of a new phase in the history of Reconstruction.³²

Unconditional Unionists again played a central role. In Louisiana, James Taliaferro chaired his state’s constitutional convention, a remarkable body in which African Americans made up more than half the representatives. William Henry Hiestand,

³¹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 225-227; Trelease, *White Terror*, xxiv; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reconstruction*, 80; Vandal, "The Origins of the New Orleans Riot of 1866, Revisited," 135; White, *The Republic for Which It Stands*, 73; McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 203; James G. Taliaferro to Elizabeth Taliaferro, March 19, 1869, *Taliaferro Papers*.

³² Foner, *Reconstruction*, 276-277, 316.

former captain of Company E, First Louisiana Cavalry, participated as the delegate from Natchitoches Parish, alongside a number of other white Louisianans whose fidelity and service to the Union during the war anticipated their postwar Republicanism. The convention met at the Mechanics' Institute, epicenter of the 1866 riot, and together the assembly of former Unionists, carpetbaggers, and African-American representatives produced, according to historian Joe Gray Taylor, "probably the most radical of any of the constitutions which resulted from the Reconstruction Acts." Taliaferro, for his part, continued to lean conservative but remarkably voted in favor of public school integration. Approaching seventy and old enough to remember the first Battle of New Orleans in 1815, the former slave-owner now presided over the pinnacle of Radical political ascendancy in the state during the nineteenth century. Largely on the strength of the African American turnout, registered voters in Louisiana ratified their new constitution in early 1868.³³

In Alabama, more so than in Louisiana, white Unionists predominated at the convention. African Americans accounted for less than a fifth of the delegates. A number of former Alabama Union soldiers, including Thomas Haughey, Joseph H. Davis, J. R. Walker, and John W. Wilhite, represented upcountry districts and brought a distinct set of priorities with them to Montgomery. Above all, they hoped to keep former rebels disfranchised and secure their constituents the political power they had long been denied in the state. Haughey moved that any Confederate above the rank of captain, and anyone who had "ever held a seat in any pretended legislature, or held any executive, judicial, or

³³ *Official Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention, for Framing a Constitution for the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans: J. B. Roudanez & Co., Printers to the Convention, 1867-1868); Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 151; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 318; Wetta, *The Louisiana Scalawags*, 125-126; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 197, Tunnell *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 117, 128.

ministerial office under any . . . pretended government in hostility to the government of the United States” lose his right to vote until 1875. He told the Montgomery *Daily State Sentinel* that the Morgan County voters who elected him “demanded the disfranchisement of nearly all who participated in the rebellion.” African-American delegates, however, did not share upcountry whites’ zeal for disenfranchisement. Far more important than denying the vote to others was ensuring the vote for themselves. “I have no desire to take away the rights of the white man,” explained convention member and formerly enslaved man Thomas Lee; “all I want is equal rights in the court house and equal rights when I go to vote.” Republicans in Congress also expressed their discomfort with widespread disenfranchisement and, rather than risk a national rebuke, white delegates eventually backed down from their most radical demands. Unionists’ concessions unsettled many upcountry would-be Republicans, some of whom refused to support the document the convention eventually produced because it contained few material benefits and did not do enough to hobble former Confederates. Though fewer people ultimately voted to ratify the new constitution than had voted for the convention itself, Congress accepted Alabama back into the Union under the terms of the Fourth Reconstruction Act in March 1868.³⁴

The new state constitutions, and the newly empowered political constituencies that had produced and approved them, provided the platform necessary to elevate a number of prominent former Unionists to high office. Perhaps no one so effectively navigated the surging tide of Congressional Reconstruction as George E. Spencer, former colonel of the First Alabama Cavalry and prototypical carpetbagger. Historian Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins concluded of Spencer that he “provided a memorable model for the

³⁴ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 316, 324; Degler, *The Other South*, 204; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 206, 212-215; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 588; Noe, ed. *The Yellowhammer War*, 235; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 221.

concept of the corrupt Carpetbagger interested primarily in his own advancement,” and with good reason. His own writings confirm many of the cynical characterizations of contemporaries and historians, and reflect a peculiarly nineteenth-century mixture of opportunism and idealism. As early as April 1865, Spencer wrote that “my army friends advise that I settle in Ala . . . if I do my connections with this Regiment will do me a great deal of good in after life & will give me a good position in the state & a good deal of capital can be made out of it and I can do the country some good.” In May, he reiterated that he had become “strongly of the opinion that I shall settle somewhere south as I think the chances of making a fortune there the best.” He took up residence in Decatur and began practicing law and engaging in cotton speculation. Spencer also waded into state politics and advocated on behalf of William H. Smith, whom he had met during the war at Corinth, Mississippi, when Smith was a refugee and Spencer a member of General Dodge’s staff. Due to their shared association with the First Alabama Cavalry, the two came together after the war in a notable but ill-fated political partnership.³⁵

In the summer of 1865, Spencer met with President Johnson in Washington several times to endorse Smith for provisional governor. Returning to Alabama, Spencer then announced his plan to “hold meetings for Smith & send forward petitions for him,” confidently predicting, “if we can get Smith we can control the state without trouble.” The *Chicago Tribune*, enthusiastic in its praise but imprecise in its details, editorialized that “George E. Spencer, of Limestone county, formerly Colonel of the 1st loyal Missouri cavalry, and Col. Wm. H. Smith, of Randolph County, formerly of the 2d Alabama loyal

³⁵ Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, “George E. Spencer: A Carpetbagger in Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 19 (January 1966): 52; Wiggins, *The Scalawag In Alabama Politics*, 39; Seip, “Of Ambition and Enterprise: The Making of Carpetbagger George E. Spencer,” 208-209; McIlwain, *1865 Alabama*, 137; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 161; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 295.

cavalry” both appeared well qualified for national office. Their Union services, it wrote, “have taught these people many lessons upon many battle-fields. Let our statesmen in the National Legislature convince them of their superiority in the forum.” Smith did not get the post, however, and Spencer quickly became disillusioned with Johnson and the results of Presidential Reconstruction. He wrote after the fall elections that “no loyal Union man can hold a position in the South if the President’s policy is carried out . . . although we conquered their armies they are in reality the victors.”³⁶

Left out in the political cold, Spencer departed the South to pursue other prospects in California in 1866. Unsuccessful there, he made a timely return to Alabama a year later, just as Congress passed the more robust Reconstruction Acts. Affirming his support for universal suffrage, Spencer re-entered the political arena with a renewed hope that, armed with African-American votes, he could “carry Alabama and secure it permanently to the Republican Party.” He explained, “my duty is to remain here and help reconstruct this God forsaken and miserable country. It is truly an awful place to live in, but since we have the colored men to help us we can out vote them.” Spencer stumped throughout the state over the course of 1867 assessing the political climate, organizing rallies, and generating support for Smith and himself. He remained in touch with soldiers he had commanded, giving him a feel for their concerns, and his wartime résumé accorded him a degree of legitimacy in northern Alabama that other carpetbaggers lacked. That fall he told his former mentor that “I stand as well as any Union man in the state and do not believe that there is any man in [the] party that wields more influence than I do.”³⁷

³⁶ Noe, ed. *Yellowhammer War*, 209-211; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 12, 1865; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 570.

³⁷ Noe, ed. *Yellowhammer War*, 210-211; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 584; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 161.

In February 1868, when Alabama voters went to the polls to ratify the new constitution, they elected William H. Smith the first Republican governor in the state's history. The Republican-controlled legislature then appointed Spencer to the Senate that summer, crowning his political enterprise. The Sacramento *Daily Union*, commenting positively on his selection, noted that it was due to his leadership of the First Alabama Cavalry that "the people of North Alabama were attached to him by many ties of gratitude and esteem," and "it was felt on all hands to be a merited tribute to worth and valor, that he should be elected to the best office in the gift of the Republicans of the State." Together, Governor Smith and Senator Spencer personified the triumph of wartime Unionists in Alabama under Congressional Reconstruction in 1868.³⁸

Southern Unionists did not enjoy entirely universal success throughout the Deep South that year. In Louisiana, a falling-out at the 1868 nominating convention led Louis Charles Roudanez, publisher of the influential New Orleans *Tribune*, to endorse James Taliaferro for governor. When Roudanez's preferred candidate, Francis E. Dumas – an urbane prewar sugar planter and Union veteran with one-eighth African-American heritage – lost the nomination to young carpetbagger Henry Clay Warmoth, Roudanez threw his support to Taliaferro, who would run with Dumas as his lieutenant governor. The former slaveholder Taliaferro, though sound on suffrage and running alongside an African-American man (though Dumas was himself a former slaveholder), remained saddled with a more conservative reputation than his opponent and did not enjoy the support of most African-American voters in Louisiana. Taliaferro even garnered a share of Democratic votes from those who viewed the venerable Louisianan as a better alternative to a northern carpetbagger. Taliaferro lost out to Warmoth – only twenty-six

³⁸ *Sacramento Daily Union*, August 12, 1868; Wiggins, *The Scalawag in Alabama Politics*, 39.

years old – in his race for governor in April 1868, earning just 37% of the vote.

Warmoth's machine, which not only emerged victorious but also promptly ran the *Tribune* out of business in revenge, demonstrated the strength of the carpetbagger faction in Louisiana. As the carpetbaggers and freedmen asserted their control of the Republican Party in the state, Taliaferro could console himself during his subsequent political retirement with a return to his position on the Louisiana Supreme Court.³⁹

For most long-suffering former Unionists, however, the arrival of Congressional Reconstruction represented new opportunities for employment and advancement. Upon assuming office, Governor Warmoth established the Metropolitan Police Force in New Orleans to replace the existing – overwhelmingly Democratic – units that patrolled Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard Parishes and had presided over the 1866 massacre. He hoped, writes Justin A. Nystrom, to create a “powerful state-run paramilitary brigade that could reliably support the aims of the Republican Party.” The integrated organization, which grated on many white New Orleans residents, recruited a number of white former Louisiana Unionist veterans into its ranks. Algernon Badger, late colonel of the First Louisiana Cavalry who had settled in the city after the war and become a port warden, enlisted immediately and was made a captain. By 1870 Badger had risen to chief of police, writing home proudly, “I have received a big piece of cake.” With former Union soldiers again under his charge, Badger hoped to turn the new outfit into the kind of force that Republicans had sorely lacked in 1866. “I have established regular drills and in a few months the dept. will be in admirable shape,” he told his father back in Massachusetts; “if

³⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 331-332; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 197-198; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 132-133; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 135; Warmouth, *War, Politics, and Reconstruction*, 58; Wynona Gillmore Mills, “James Govan Taliaferro (1798-1876): Louisiana Unionist and Scalawag.” Master’s Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1968.

any faction attempt to carry the election in this city by violence and with the aid of a mob they will meet a body of drilled and disciplined men that will be as efficient as any regt. in the regular army.” Though he complained privately about “Negroes with their high notions of freedom,” Badger defended the civil rights of African Americans in public and accepted them in the force. He became a stalwart Republican presence in the city and, as a leader of the Metropolitan Police, a frequent target of the Democratic press and at times Democratic mobs.⁴⁰

Other wartime Unionists also seized at the new opportunities for personal advancement made possible by the rise of the new political order. Alabama’s Thomas Haughey, who explained that he had initially entered politics because – as a former Union volunteer – he could find no other employment, now procured a government salary as the Congressman from the state’s sixth district. Jerome J. Hinds, the northern-born captain of Company A of the First Alabama Cavalry, became a state representative from Marion County. Another high-profile Unionist to benefit from the shifting political winds was Winston County’s C. C. Sheets. New President Ulysses. S. Grant appointed the Alabamian Consul to Denmark in 1869, where he served for almost three years. In west Tennessee, former Union cavalrymen Fielding Hurst and Isaac Hawkins – who had tangled with Forrest in their native state during the war – became a judge and a Congressman, respectively. Though Congress had exempted Tennessee from the Military Reconstruction Acts, the Republicans’ national ascendancy benefitted Unionists there as well. For what ultimately amounted to a brief period, former Unionists in the Deep South occupied the postwar positions of power many felt their wartime service deserved.

⁴⁰ Nystrom, *New Orleans After The Civil War*, 75-77; Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, February 11, 1868; Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, May 14, 1870; Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, March 7, 1872, *Badger Papers*.

Backed by the legislative authority of Congress and the presence – however thinly spread – of the Army, the political coalition of white scalawags, newly enfranchised African Americans, and northern carpetbaggers prevailed at the voting booth over the temporarily stifled Confederate veterans and sympathizers who comprised the majority of the white South. Their triumph, however, soon engendered a violent counter-reaction on the part of Democrats, one that sternly tested the allies’ commitment to one another and the Republican Party.⁴¹

In 1868 revanchist countermeasures in the Deep South against the “Radical” regime entered a new, darker phase. The presidential election that year between Ulysses S. Grant and his Democratic opponent Horatio Seymour became the most explicitly racist and violent the nation had ever witnessed, characterized in the South by the rise to prominence of groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Organizations like the Klan, established in Tennessee and led by – though not founded by – Nathan Bedford Forrest, and similar ones like the Knights of the White Camellia in Louisiana unleashed a harrowing new brand of terrorism on the region and into the country’s history. Seeking to roll back the gains made by emancipated African Americans and their allies under Congressional Reconstruction, the Klan resorted to arson, assault, and murder on an unprecedented scale. Though they principally targeted African Americans, they also attacked white scalawags and northern carpetbaggers – any supporter of Reconstruction – in the name of

⁴¹ Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 581; Wesley Sylvester Thompson. *The Free State of Winston: A History of Winston County, Alabama* (Winfield, AL: Pareil Press, 1968), 128; *New York Tribune*, May 28, 1904; Charles L. Lufkin, “Divided Loyalties: Sectionalism in Civil War McNairy County, Tennessee.” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 47, No. 3 (Fall, 1988), 33; Baggett, *The Scalawags*, 86; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 199.

white supremacy. The Klan functioned as a de facto military arm of the Democratic Party in the region and sought to suppress the Republican vote by whatever means necessary.⁴²

The Democratic press in the Deep South, for its part, looked the other way or actively justified the violent countermeasures. The Klan violence seemed to many conservative southern whites a predictable, convulsive response on the part of the white community to the “shock treatment” administered by the Radical Congress. “Who is to blame?” asked Louisiana’s *Courier of the Teche*, for example, after the murder of a Republican judge. “Assuredly not we people of the South,” it explained, “who have suffered wrongs beyond endurance. Radicalism and negroism, which in the South are one and the same thing, are alone to blame.” The editor of the Tuscaloosa *Monitor* explicitly endorsed the violence and referred specifically to Col. George Spencer when he wrote that “there might not be enough boughs from which *all* such characters should swing, but the worst of them should be accommodated.”⁴³

Democratic papers, which far surpassed the Republican press in terms of distribution and readership in the South, increasingly depicted the conflict at the heart of Reconstruction in literal terms of “black and white,” where no compromise could exist any longer between Republicans and Democrats. The Moulton *Advertiser* summarized that “this contest [is] honesty vs. corruption . . . the white man against the black man . . . decency against filth.” A typical article that appeared in the Natchitoches *Vindicator* enjoined “our native white fellow citizens of Louisiana, who have arrayed themselves

⁴² David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War In American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 101-102; Trelease, *White Terror*, xxv, xxxv, 14; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 69; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 342-343; Nystrom, *New Orleans after the Civil War*, 74; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 199.

⁴³ Michael W. Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement In the Deep South: Politics and Agricultural Change During Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 216-217; *Tuscaloosa (Ala.) Monitor*, March 18, 1868; Degler, *Other South*, 233, 254; Trelease, *White Terror*, xlv; *Courier of the Teche* (St. Martinville, LA) August 30, 1868.

against their white brothers, to retrace their steps while there is still time left to do so . . . When a war of races is imminent—and we tell them that it is imminent—they should be found but on one side battling with the Caucasian race; words of sympathy will not do.” Though many white southern Unionists tried to occupy a middle ground, they found it impossible. Scalawags became inextricably identified, along with African Americans and carpetbaggers, as one part of the “diabolical trinity” of Republican oppressors. After 1868, the Democratic press consistently labeled any and all supporters of Reconstruction as Radicals, and loudly declared them thus traitors to the South and to the white race.⁴⁴

C. C. Sheets represents a case in point. An unblinking racist, Sheets consistently declared himself in favor of a “white man’s government,” and though he sanctioned African-American suffrage as a weapon against former Confederates, he spoke publicly against African American office-holding. Well into the 1870s Sheets reiterated his support for “colonizing the Negroes in Africa or some of the Western Territories with the Indians.” Yet the former diehard Unionist remained an active Republican because of his intense antipathy for secessionists and their Democratic progeny. As a result, the Democratic press excoriated him. After his diplomatic appointment by Grant, one Alabama paper described Sheets to its readers as “that moral, political, and intellectual *abortion*.” Upon his return from the consulate, Sheets earned election to the 43rd Congress on the strength of his white base of support in Winston County, which only increased the share of published abuse directed his way from the rest of the state. The Huntsville *Weekly Democrat* counted him prominently among the “unprincipled men, arch traitors to their race and to civil liberty” in Alabama, and the *Moulton Advertiser*

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement In the Deep South*, 216-217; *Moulton (Ala.) Advertiser*, August 13, 1875; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 165; White, *The Republic For Which It Stands*, 90; Trelease, *White Terror*, xxv; Degler, *Other South*, 253.

concluded that Sheets “is a traitor to his country, and a slave and subaltern of that reckless faction of centralism at Washington, that is to-day plotting for the overthrow of our republican government, and the establishment of a military despotism.” White southerners like Sheets that enjoyed the support of the Radical regime earned the particular opprobrium of the Democratic press, regardless of their shared aversion to rights for African Americans.⁴⁵

More so than for emancipated African Americans or northern carpetbaggers, whose aspirations remained offensive yet generally understandable, most white residents of the Deep South struggled to comprehend the stance taken by scalawags, the pejorative term so widely used it became definitive. “We can trust a Southern black man when we cannot trust a white traitor,” opined Alabama’s *Elmore Standard*; “give us the Southern negro, every time, before a domestic . . . Radical.” To many contemporaries, explained historian David H. Donald, scalawags “were the veritable Esaus of the Caucasian race.” The Democratic press castigated the white southern men who became Republicans as “moral lepers” and “white negroes” who had repudiated their racial birthright. An article in *The Southern Magazine* explained that “he [the scalawag] goes beyond the *pale* in the selection of his associates; voluntarily places himself on a level with beings of a vastly inferior order; would erase, if he could, all the natural distinctions which a wise creator has established between the white man and the black, and would bury and conceal his own shame beneath the universal wreck of Southern society.” Unionist scalawags, by allying themselves with African Americans – however half-heartedly – played a crucial role in sustaining the Radical regime, and as the native white collaborators with the

⁴⁵ *The Moulton Advertiser*, June 11, 1869 [italics in original]; October 2, 1874; February 19, 1875; *Huntsville (Ala.) Weekly Democrat*, June 24, 1875; Robin Sterling ed. *Lawrence County, Alabama: Newspaper Clippings from The Moulton Democrat, Union, & Advertiser, 1855-1875* (2016), 292.

Federal occupation held a place of particular scorn in the minds of its opponents. In addition to constant denunciation in the Democratic press, former Unionists suffered a share of the increasingly organized terrorist violence that spread throughout the Deep South during and after 1868.⁴⁶

Union Leagues that had sprung up in the region, the sites of tenuous but effectual political cooperation between white scalawags and African Americans, became the immediate targets of the Klan. Members and leaders alike learned they faced a grave threat if they continued to organize. One Calhoun County, Alabama, scalawag wrote to Governor Smith that “there are but few white males in our county belonging to the Republican Party,” and “in some instances their houses have been surrounded by disguised bands in the night time, threatening their lives if they do not desist in their political course.” John Ramsey told the Southern Claims Commission that for white southerners, “it has taken almost as much nerve to be a Republican in the midst of KuKlux bands as it did during the war in the time of vigilance committees and bands of cutthroats.” Though some – including a few First Alabama veterans – took steps to fight back, effective resistance proved almost impossible against the Klan’s night-riding tactics, which the Army could also do nothing to counter. In Louisiana as well, scalawag Thomas Hudnall attested in October 1868, vigilantes “bulldozed” Republicans into submission. “There is not a single white man whose sympathies are with the Republican Party,” Hudnall reported, “who can be able to live in the parish of Morehouse.” Through the use of violence and the credible threat of more to come, the Klan crippled the Union

⁴⁶ David H. Donald, “The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction” *Journal of Southern History* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Nov, 1944), 447; *Elmore Standard* (Wetumpka, AL) August 2, 1867; Herbert Barnes, “The Scalawag,” *Southern Magazine* 15 (November 1874): 303-304; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 297; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 5-6; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 203-204.

Leagues with shocking rapidity and successfully managed to drive down turnout among Republican voters throughout the Deep South. In Lafayette Parish, one contemporary judged, “true, earnest working Republicans, ‘are like angels . . . few and far between.’” More ominously for the long term, the issue of terrorism also exacerbated and created new rifts within the Republican coalition. Among white scalawags, most of whom considered their alliance with African Americans as pragmatic at best, their shared party affiliation came to seem increasingly untenable. The partnership, always vulnerable, began to fracture under severe pressure.⁴⁷

After 1868, many native white Republicans began to recoil from their political détente with African Americans, and from their carpetbagger allies as well. Union League activity plunged among whites loath to participate visibly in the integrated institution. “Instead of uniting Republicans in a struggle for survival,” explains Eric Foner, “the question of violence further exacerbated the party’s internal discord.” In Alabama, the political violence drove a wedge between Governor Smith and Senator Spencer. Spencer sought additional military aid and stronger measures from Washington to combat the Klan. Smith, in an attempt to conciliate the opposition and gain Democratic support, played down the level of disorder and insisted that local officials could handle the situation. The two men, each distrusting the other’s political intentions, produced wildly conflicting reports on conditions in the state. Smith even improbably claimed that “if such an organization [as the Klan] ever existed in this state he was not aware of it.”

⁴⁷ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 427, 439; John A. Detman et al. to William H. Smith, August 7, 1869, Alabama Governor’s Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, 213, 218-223; E. B. Goodwin to Stephen B. Packard, September 17, 1871, Henry Clay Warmoth Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 156-161; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 199, 225; Trelease, *White Terror*, 109, Rable *But There Was No Peace*, 103; Egerton, *Wars of Reconstruction*, 291-296; Storey, “Southern Ishmaelites,” 315.

Like Governor Wells before him in Louisiana, Smith's conciliatory approach in Alabama not only alienated many of his fellow former Unionists, it also failed to win over Democrats. Spencer broke decisively with Smith over the issue of federal intervention, lambasting the governor as "criminally derelict and flagrantly wanting in the commonest essentials of his office," and possessing the "disordered brain of an ingrate and self-convicted apostate." While Smith retained the support of a number of prominent scalawags, including Thomas Haughey, African-American voters – the preponderance of the Republican electorate in the Deep South – settled firmly in the Spencer camp. Smith lost his subsequent bid for reelection in 1870, while Spencer cemented his position in the Senate for years to come. Spencer also managed to secure nearly total control of federal patronage in Alabama and began systematically denying it to native scalawags. Unable to unify in response to Democratic violence, the Republican triumvirate turned on one another.⁴⁸

Violence even erupted within the Republican camp itself. In 1869, Smith ally and former Union volunteer Thomas Haughey ran for reelection in Alabama's sixth district. Jerome J. Hinds, a protégé and close confidant of Spencer's since their days with the First Alabama Cavalry, stood against him. Both Haughey and Hinds had served in the Union army during the war but now found themselves locked in a bitter internecine political rivalry. Haughey had followed Governor Smith toward the political middle, while Hinds echoed Senator Spencer's criticism of the state administration and demand for more

⁴⁸ Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction In Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption In the Cotton South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 217; Fitzgerald, *The Union League Movement in the Deep South*, 83-85, 223; Webb and Armbrister, eds., *Alabama Governors*, 88; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 103-106; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 439; Trelease, *White Terror*, 87-88; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 266; Wiggins, "George Spencer," 42-43; Wiggins, *The Scalawag in Alabama Politics*, 58-60; Storey, "Southern Ishmaelites," 319.

radical solutions. “Charges of theft, bribery, corruption, and perjury flew between the two Republican candidates,” wrote historian Sarah Wiggins. On July 31, during a public speech in Courtland, Alabama, one of Hinds’ henchmen shot and mortally wounded Haughey. News of the assassination of a sitting U.S. Congressman traveled widely, but the murderer – described in the papers as “a perfect desperado” – escaped justice. The Democratic *North Alabamian and Times* reveled in Republicans’ bad blood and charged them with hypocrisy, pointing out that “if a Southern man, or a Democrat had done the killing, it would have been published to the world as ‘a heinous, infamous Ku Klux murder’ . . . the difference is very slight.” Instead, Republicans now killed one another without Democratic assistance. The murder of the Union veteran and scalawag Haughey over a dispute with the carpetbagger Hinds, himself a former captain in the First Alabama Cavalry, underscored the utter collapse of the Republican partnership in the state and the region. Former wartime allies had split irreparably in peacetime, a development that represented one of the final nails in the coffin of the Republican Party in the Deep South and hastened the slide toward Redemption.⁴⁹

III—Redemption

Ultimately, endemic political violence proved the telling factor in the eventual collapse of Reconstruction after the Civil War. Over course of the early 1870s, Democratic partisans – through fraud, intimidation, and murder – regained control of Alabama, Louisiana, and the rest of the Deep South from Republicans piece by piece. In Louisiana, the denouement of Reconstruction came at the Battle of Liberty Place in New

⁴⁹ Wiggins, *The Scalawag in Alabama Politics*, 57; *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN) August 3, 1869; *Moulton Advertiser*, August 13, 1869; Storey, “Southern Ishmaelites,” 314; *CSR, Alabama, First Cavalry*, M276, roll 4, RG94, NARA, “Hinds, Jerome J” [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/100489930>].

Orleans in September 1874. In an attempt to unseat the Republican government by force, the Crescent City White League – several thousand strong – launched a putsch and fought what amounted to a pitched battle with Metropolitan Police led by Algernon Badger and scalawag James Longstreet. Badger and Longstreet both received critical wounds, and the White League successfully occupied the state house. Only the eventual arrival of Federal troops dispatched by President Grant defused the explosive situation. During his recovery, Badger explained in a letter home that “this was no ordinary mob, but a well armed, organized and drilled White League officered by experienced Confederate soldiers.” In his account of the melee, Badger – without a hint of sarcasm – also accused his esteemed colleague Longstreet of “bad generalship” on the day. The Battle of Liberty Place bore echoes of the 1866 riot eight years earlier, but had played out on an even more brazen, organized, and destructive scale. To demoralized Republicans throughout the country, Louisiana – and the project of Reconstruction as a whole – appeared to have taken one step forward and two steps back. Unlike in 1866, however, most white northerners reacted not with outrage and renewed determination but with exasperation and exhaustion. Only outside intervention, it had become clear, could continue to prop up Republicans in the Deep South, and the rest of the nation had grown weary of providing it.⁵⁰

Many white former Unionists, in the face of overwhelming social pressure within their communities and diminished support from without, withdrew from their political alliance with African Americans. The level of stigmatization and risk they encountered

⁵⁰ Trelease, *White Terror*, xlv-xlvii; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 138-140; Wetta, *Louisiana Scalawags*, 162-163; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 551; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 354; Nystrom, *New Orleans After the Civil War*, 171-177; Algernon S. Badger to John B. Badger, December 22, 1874. *Badger Papers*.

put the tentative coalition under too much strain for it to bear. Deep-seated racism had always prevented the unalloyed cooperation of white and black Republicans in the Deep South, but violence made the dysfunction decisive. As Alabama Republican Joseph C. Bradley had predicted to William H. Smith back in 1867, “people are getting very sore on the negro question, and it will be the cause of our defeat if anything is.” A significant amount of native white Republicans in the Deep South succumbed to the combination of race baiting and physical intimidation launched by the Democratic opposition over the course of Reconstruction. Unlike African Americans, some white Unionists found they could regain their racial privileges and protect themselves from future violence if they disavowed the Republican Party, and some evidently chose to. The Klan, testified one former Unionist, “don’t like a man who served in the Federal Army unless he joins them and is one of their sort; then they like him pretty well.” As Michael W. Fitzgerald concludes, “in the end, the loyalists indeed preferred the rebels as their masters to the freedmen as their allies.”⁵¹

The failure of white former Unionists to ally themselves meaningfully with African Americans in the former Confederacy lies at the heart of many historians’ assessment of the broader “failure” of Reconstruction as a national undertaking. While such a partnership did briefly flicker to life in parts of the Deep South in the late 1860s, historians have also thrown serious doubt on its potential for long-term viability. The vilification and violence scalawags suffered as perceived race traitors became too much for many to bear, and Democrats’ unscrupulous tactics ultimately proved effective

⁵¹ J. Bradley to W. H. Smith, May 1, 1867. *Swayne Papers*; Fitzgerald, “Radical Republicanism and the White Yeomanry during Alabama Reconstruction,” 588, quotation on 596; Trelease, *White Terror*, xxxv; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 224-230; Donald, “The Scalawag in Mississippi Reconstruction,” 460; Degler, *Other South*, 230-231, 254.

against their enemies. As the *Memphis Daily Appeal* relayed in 1870, many outside the South would find it difficult to “realize the depth of their [the Southern people’s] malice at what they termed ‘home-made Yankees,’ or ‘native Abolitionists.’” Continuing to identify as a “native abolitionist” carried an ignominy beyond what most white Unionists felt able to justify. By the 1870s, with the integrity of the Union secure, white southerners saw less reason to couple support for African Americans with their support for the Union. Like many northerners then, they dispensed with justice for African Americans in the name of reunion and peace— for themselves, at least. Men who had put their life on the line for the Union would not go so far on behalf of civil rights. As the experience of white Unionists in the Deep South demonstrates, no period of American history – not even the Civil War itself – bears out historian U. B. Phillips’s infamous assessment of the “central theme of southern history . . . that the South ‘shall remain a white man’s country’” more clearly than Reconstruction.⁵²

Perhaps the only bright spot for southern Unionists during the long Democratic counterrevolution after the Civil War was the establishment of the Southern Claims Commission by Congress in March 1871. Residents of the Confederate states, if they could prove their loyalty to the commission, could petition the government for reimbursement for property destroyed or appropriated by Union forces during the war. Over twenty thousand individuals made applications. Proving loyalty – the prerequisite for eligibility – however, was easier said than done. The SCC earned a reputation as a notoriously stingy bureaucratic entity, and would take any available excuse to deny a

⁵² *Memphis (Tn.) Daily Appeal*, February 27, 1870; Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction*, 198-199; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 215; Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 62; Trelease, *White Terror*, xxxv; Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1928: 30-43.

claim. Union military service, as a result, became virtually the only unassailable evidence of Union loyalty for a white southerner. While the SCC disallowed more than half of the claims that came before it, it rarely did so for a Union veteran or his family.⁵³ In Alabama, for example, establishing a connection to the First Alabama Cavalry represented a major boon to one's chances of approval, and references to the regiment and its leaders appear frequently in the claims. Jonathan M. Barton, sergeant of Company L, for example, who had not only served but also recruited, received the considerable sum of \$1,202.50. Another claimant, Green M. Haley, testified that "General George E. Spencer, then Colonel of said Regiment and Captain J. J. Hinds, will each well recollect, no doubt, my visit and stay at Glendale [bringing recruits] and my actions toward and for the Union cause, and its supporters." William Dodd, who "could not have proven his loyalty to the Confederacy, if it had been established," received \$135 of the \$205 he sought for – among other things – one sorrel mare and fifteen bushels of corn. In this one material way at least, the white southerners that had dared to wear the Union blue received a portion of their just deserts. Ultimately, however, it would have seemed meager solace. White Unionists in the Deep South had won the war but lost the peace.⁵⁴

IV—Postscript

⁵³ One notable exception to this trend is the case of Louisianan Dennis Haynes. In 1874 the SCC denied his claim for \$2,100 due to evidence he had used Confederate money to pay for the property he lost. Former Governor James Madison Wells testified on behalf of Haynes' Union loyalty, to no avail. (Bergeron ed., *A Thrilling Narrative*, xx)

⁵⁴ Gary B. Mills. *Southern Loyalists In the Civil War: The Southern Claims Commission* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1994), ix, 36, 167; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 9; Robin Sterling ed., *Winston County, Alabama Files from the Southern Claims Commission: Rare First Person Accounts of Life in the Hill Country during the Civil War* (2013), 31; Claim 17325, "Dodd, William." SCC. [<https://www.fold3.com/image/34/273538321>]; Claim 2177, "Haley, Green M." SCC; CSR, *Alabama, First Cavalry*, M276, roll 1, RG94, NARA, "Barton, Jonathan" [<https://www.fold3.com/image/272/100480934>].

On Saturday, October 25, 1884, in Hartselle, Alabama, veterans of the Confederate Seventh Alabama Cavalry met for their annual reunion. “Ours is the ‘Lost Cause,’” declared their commissary Jack Russell; “it is eminently proper for us to join in social re-unions, enjoy reminiscences of our soldier days and perpetuate the hallowed bonds of esteem and true friendship which germinated in seasons of war.” That same day, just twenty miles to the south in the town of Cullman, a similarly themed but far more unusual event took place. Members of the First Alabama Union Cavalry had gathered there, in the heart of the “redeemed” South, to reminisce over their own shared experiences – fighting for the Union against the Confederacy – and to begin the process of organizing a G.A.R. post. Nineteen years after they had completed their Union service, having endured the tortuous tenure of Reconstruction, this group of rebels against the Confederacy had thinned considerably. One attendee recorded his thoughts. “Many of our old regiment are gone; some went North and many are dead; some were killed by the Alabama Ku-Klux, and those that are left are getting old and feeble.” The struggle for white Union veterans in the Deep South had carried on long after 1865.⁵⁵

Out of all white Union veterans, contended the Alabamian, those from the Deep South had risked the most and deserved assistance the most. “Those who served in the 1st Ala. Cav,” he remembered, “everyone of them risked their lives in getting into our lines to enlist, and then offered them in defense of their country, leaving their families to be robbed and, in some cases, murdered on account of their loyalty to the old flag. The Government owes to the loyalist of Northern Alabama a debt it never can repay.” Such men, he lamented, “are entitled to at least their just dues.” Instead, contrary to all of their hopes and expectations, they had entered the American lexicon as contemptible

⁵⁵ *The Alabama Courier* (Athens, AL), November 13, 1884; *The National Tribune*, November 20, 1884.

“scalawags,” remained the targets of violence and intimidation from unrepentant and vindictive neighbors, and found themselves once again occupying the political and economic margins in their home state. For all intents and purposes, it seemed as though these Union veterans had fought on the losing side, rather than their supposedly vanquished counterparts who had gathered that same day in Hartselle. Unlike the reportedly “pleasant occasion” of the nearby Confederate reunion, the Union reunion was tinged with disappointment and pessimism. “The country is in fact dead,” the writer concluded bitterly; “it is bankrupt in politics and pocket . . . and nothing will revive it but free schools, free speech and a free ballot,” three things he felt the region still conspicuously lacked. For many white Unionists who continued to reside in the Deep South, such as the beleaguered group that gathered in Alabama in late 1884, the long road they had traveled through the war, reconstruction, and “redemption,” had not brought them safety or security but had delivered only near-continual uncertainty.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *The National Tribune*, November 20, 1884.

Epilogue

“Gone from View, Mingled in Peace”

In January 1864, at the annual meeting of the New York Historical Society, committee member William J. Hoppin made a number of prescient remarks on the conflict then still ravaging the nation and how he believed it would come down through history. He observed that, “no war which was ever waged has been so thoroughly described in a literary way as will be this gigantic struggle. No war ever enrolled among its soldiers so many men who are skilled in the art of composition. The vast number of private letters, diaries, communications to newspapers, official reports, pamphlets, apologies, of this or that General, besides the more ponderous and formal histories, will make the literature of this revolution more copious and affluent than that of any war that was ever waged.” The sheer volume of Civil War literature produced since then, academic and popular, across disciplines and genres, has surely proven him right. Hoppin, for his part, would later pen a tribute to Union Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth, who died fighting in Virginia that summer. Speaking at the NYHS, Hoppin also noted that, in contrast, “the unimaginable sufferings and the glorious martyrdoms of the loyalists of the South . . . alas! must in numberless cases perish from the remembrance of men without any record.” For all the mass of written material that he felt sure would emerge from the war, Hoppin worried that it would still fail properly to reflect

southern Unionists' contribution to the cause. On this point he has also been proven largely correct.¹

Despite their creditable military service against the Confederacy and symbolic importance to both sides during the conflict, white Unionists in the Deep South occupy a relatively small place in the historiography and popular memory of the American Civil War. The long term academic and cultural legacy of the Lost Cause, with its customary depiction of an undivided white South, left little or no trace of hardcore white Unionist resistance within the Confederacy—and especially not in cotton states like Alabama or Louisiana. Thomas L. Livermore, for example, in his *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War* (1900), which became the standard reference, left out all white southern soldiers who fought for the Union except for those from Tennessee. The rest he flatly called “unimportant exceptions.” Though members of the war generation, mainly veterans of the regiments and their families, lobbied for recognition and sought to keep the memory of their Union service alive, it largely faded in the twentieth century.²

The numbers tell part of the story. In the Deep South, unconditional Unionists represented a tiny minority of the white population. Just one in ten white Louisiana soldiers fought for the Union and as few as one in twenty from Alabama. These stark percentages suggest that Unionists would find their voices drowned out by the chorus of returning Confederates and their descendants. Yet it remains a remarkable fact that – in spite of having sided with the victors and ostensible conquerors, and having aligned

¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 12, 1864; William J. Hoppin, *Eulogy on the Life and Services of James S. Wadsworth: Brigadier-General of Volunteers in the Army of the United States* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1865).

² Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 19; Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 212; Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten*, 24; Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*, 227.

themselves with the prevailing national values – white Unionists in the Deep South left almost no perceptible memorial legacy. In the entire region only one monument honors white Union veterans. Dedicated in the 1980s, it stands in front of the Winston County, Alabama, Court House. Even that most unusual statue, however, is not strictly speaking Unionist, but rather pays tribute to the soldiers from Winston who fought on both sides. Known as “Dual Destiny,” it encapsulates the Reconciliationist memory tradition. Confederate monuments in the Deep South outnumber “Dual Destiny” by the score, even in places that experienced considerable division and contributed thousands of white Union soldiers during the war. Fayette, Franklin, Morgan, and Walker counties, for example, which provided the greatest number of recruits to the First Alabama Union Cavalry, each has a Confederate statue in their courthouse square. No monument to white Unionists exists in New Orleans, or indeed anywhere in Louisiana.³

This pattern of commemoration serves as an ongoing reminder of the negligible impression white Unionists made on the cultural landscape. Nor is it to say that the distribution of statuary represents the only way of measuring the prevalence of certain strands of memory. Memory takes many different, often analytically elusive, forms. By any token though, awareness of Unionism in the Deep South during the Civil War diminished drastically in the twentieth century, even in some of the very families and neighborhoods where it had originated. After the end of Reconstruction and with the gradual onset of Jim Crow, it became increasingly rare for anyone below the Mason-

³ Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*, 218; Kelly Kazek, “A Look at Confederate monuments in every Alabama county,” AL.com, Accessed November 5, 2019 [https://www.al.com/living/2017/08/here_are_confederate_monuments.html]. In May 2019 the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War rededicated a G.A.R. monument in Birmingham, Alabama's Oak Hill Cemetery, originally unveiled in 1891 and vandalized in the 1930s. Eleven Union soldiers (of unclear origin) are buried there [<https://www.al.com/news/birmingham/2019/05/sons-of-union-veterans-civil-war-will-rededicate-monument-at-oak-hill-cemetery-sunday.html>].

Dixon Line to venerate Union sacrifice in the “redeemed” South. But there are also different, less overt reasons for the diminution of Unionist memory.⁴

Many white southerners allowed the memory of their own Unionism to fade because they found little to savor about the social consequences that had resulted from their Union service and contribution to Union victory. As historians such as Anne E. Marshall, Patrick A. Lewis, and Mark W. Summers have written, many former Unionists did not possess any enthusiasm whatsoever for the emancipationist element of the Union triumph. “Whites who sided with the Union during the war found it difficult to honor that past,” explains Marshall, and “as long as Union victory was so strongly equated with black emancipation and Republican politics there remained little cultural and political ground upon which conservative white Unionists could celebrate.” Marshall’s study focuses on border state Kentucky, but her conclusions apply just as well, if not better, to parts of the Deep South, where any association with emancipation or racial equality invited severe condemnation from the white community. Ultimately, as the distance from the war increased and with the immediacy of the threat to the Union long since dispelled, the pull of white racial solidarity resulted in a degree of acquiescence to pro- (or pan-) Confederate memory among white southerners greater than that which had existed during the war. It seems a uniquely American irony that the descendants of those who had risked so much to support the Union often found themselves playing down that association later.⁵ Such a broad development of cultural memory loss took some time to settle.

Memory of white southern Unionists could not and did not disappear overnight. While it

⁴ Samuel L. Webb, *Two-Party Politics In the One-Party South: Alabama's Hill Country, 1874-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 4, 8-9.

⁵ Marshall, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky*, 5, 91-94; Lewis, *For Slavery and Union*, 196; Summers, *Ordeal of Reunion*, 62; Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 10; For more on Unionists’ postwar identification with the Confederacy, see also: Browning, *Shifting Loyalties*, 2-3.

remained, the war generation sought to perpetuate a memory of their service that foregrounded the salvation of the Union, absent of any celebration of emancipation.⁶

In the decades on either side of the turn of the twentieth century, veterans of the First Louisiana and First Alabama Union Cavalry regiments – many still living in the Deep South – wrote to the *National Tribune*, a publication that provided an outlet for soldiers describing their wartime experiences. The Unionist veterans explained why they fought, and advocated for their fair share of recognition. Their letters belong to the non-emancipationist Union and Reconciliation strands of memory tradition and sounded many familiar notes, often mixing wistful nostalgia for an exciting part of their youth with serious homages to principled sacrifice on behalf of the Union. George M. Chick, announcing himself as one “born and raised in northern Mississippi,” wrote from Texas in 1907 that he was “proud of being one of Uncle Sam’s boys.” Alabamian Thomas H. Lay thanked God he “was able to give the rebels some lively whippings.” Leonard S. Johnson, from Oktibbeha County, Mississippi, and a soldier in Company F of the First Alabama Cavalry, recalled that the men “were in some very trying places; but the Lord brought us through, and He gave victory to the Government that defended the Union.” George C. Jenkins, of Company M, exhorted his fellow former Unionists to “let the readers of the National Tribune know that the old 1st Ala. Cav. was ‘thar’ during the war . . . and did as much and as gallant service as any organization in the grand old Army of the Tennessee. Write, boys . . . of the skirmishes, fights and fun . . . and of the hardships, hard fighting and mud.” In 1904, Mrs. J. C. Feherler from Village Springs, Alabama

⁶ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 102.

wrote seeking information on her brother William Dwyer, who “was loyal to the old Flag . . . [and] served in the Lincoln army,” and who she had not seen for forty years.⁷

Union veterans from northern states also occasionally wrote to the *National Tribune* with thanks and praise for the service of white southerners. W. W. Zuel, for example, who had served in an Illinois regiment, recalled the “Alabama men” he had fought alongside, commenting, “I believe they loved their country and flag as much as any of the full-blooded Yankees that came from away up North . . . They were good soldiers.” One Ohioan reported in his account of the Battle of Monroe’s Crossroads that “the honor of changing a most complete rout to a glorious victory was due to the valor of the 1st Ala. Cav. of the Third Brigade.” In 1897, Pennsylvanian J. B. Duple wrote to express his concern that white southern Unionists had not received their just deserts. “Permit me to suggest,” said Duple,

That one section of our country has been somewhat overlooked in history—one class of our soldiery, who helped fill the quota of loyal States, and whose sacrifices and services on behalf of the old flag are but lightly appreciated because they have been but lightly understood. I speak of the boys of the South who were loyal to their country . . . Socially ostracized, driven from their homes, thousands found their way to the Union lines and enlisted, and I venture to say that not a battlefield of the war but was stained with the blood of a Southern Union soldier. At the close of four years’ struggle, when the victorious hosts were welcomed back to their homes amidst the plaudits of a grateful people . . . the Southern Unionist, denied this mead of praise, must content himself with the thought of duty well done. I am satisfied that if those who know of the services of these men would write oftener to your paper, there would be uncovered deeds of heroism unparalleled in the history of this or any other country and do justice to a class that has never received proper recognition.

Duple, along with many northern contemporaries, lamented that the ostracism of Unionists had not been mitigated by victory and that, despite their sacrifices, they had once again become a beleaguered minority in the former Confederacy.⁸

⁷ *The National Tribune*, June 20, 1907; November 26, 1908; September 22, 1904; February 21, 1889; May 19, 1904.

White Union veterans in the Deep South, both natives of the region and some some transplanted northerners, attempted to organize a number of G.A.R. posts during the 1880s. In northern Alabama and New Orleans, with their high concentration of Unionists relative to the rest of the region, a handful of posts managed to get off the ground. The Department of Alabama, with posts in the expected hill country counties as well as Mobile, was established in 1889. Its last member died in 1940, after which the organization ceased to exist. Algernon S. Badger, former colonel of the First Louisiana Cavalry and chief of New Orleans's Metropolitan Police, served as the deputy commander of the Department of Louisiana and Mississippi for 1886. No white Union veterans organizations formed in western Tennessee. The unusual situation of these G.A.R. posts and their members quickly generated controversy inside and outside the former Confederacy.⁹

Though national G.A.R. policy technically forbade segregation, posts in the Deep South explicitly barred interracial participation and appeared committed to enforcement. They had organized under distinctly "non-radical white auspices," and showed no desire for, and in fact an active antipathy toward, sharing any commemorative aspect of their Union service with African Americans. In 1891 the senior vice-commander of Alabama argued that, "such close comradeship as our order inspires, will not permit of the introduction of this element into our ranks . . . at least here in the South where the question of race enters so largely into the subjects affecting man's happiness and

⁸ *The National Tribune*, June 20, 1889; January 24, 1901; September 30, 1897.

⁹ Wallace E. Davies, "The Problem of Race Segregation In the Grand Army of the Republic." *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 13, no. 3, Aug. 1947, 355, 365; Barbara A. Gannon, *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship In the Grand Army of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 88; Stuart Charles McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 215.

success.” Charles F. Fink, assistant quartermaster, put it even more bluntly: “we will not associate with them.” White Union veterans in the Deep South showed themselves willing to wear the same uniform in war, but not in peace. As they organized to commemorate their service to Union, the Deep South’s white Union veterans felt no obligation to defend the rights of their African-American former comrades against their mutual former foe. This did not sit well with many G.A.R. members outside the former Confederacy, who insisted that (at least de jure) equal legal status before the law had constituted one of the principles enshrined by Union victory. At a national encampment in 1891 the issue led to chaos in the Louisiana and Mississippi Department that resulted in an exodus of its white members. As one white participant reported, not only did “race prejudice remain . . . the chasm seems to be widening.” The incident highlighted the increasing difficulty of squaring Unionism and white southern identity at the close of the nineteenth century. White southern Unionists who could not find the will to celebrate emancipation or Republican politics in their memory of the war increasingly found themselves culturally alienated from the larger national community of Union veterans. In spite of the short-term and noteworthy success of the G.A.R. in some parts of the Deep South, former Unionists – most now of old age – became overshadowed by the extent of pro-Confederate commemoration.¹⁰

Some southern Unionists who lived long enough to observe the direction that memory of the war was heading attempted to divert its course. In 1898 Henry Bullard Taliaferro, still living in Harrisonburg, Louisiana, published an editorial in the *National Tribune* titled “A Plea for the Neglected.” He wrote bitterly that “while the South is

¹⁰ McConnell, *Glorious Contentment*, 40-41, 71, 215-218; Gannon, *The Won Cause*, 29-32; Davies, “The Problem of Segregation,” 361, 365, 371. Overall, G.A.R. posts in the former Confederacy deserve further study.

building memorial halls and monuments to perpetuate the glories of the Lost Cause and the memories of those who fell in its defense,” no memorial existed to the “men of the South who were put to death during the reign of terror down here because of their fidelity to the Government of the United States.” Southern Unionists, Taliaferro judged, “have disappeared from sight, leaving no traces of recognition—erased by time—gone from view—mingled in peace.” He suggested a monument in the nation’s capital. “Let none be left out,” he said, “let all who perished for their country in that glorious struggle be remembered.” No statue ultimately materialized. Individuals such as Taliaferro remained largely isolated, and in spite of their best efforts white southern Unionists remained on the distant margins of Civil War memory for much of the next hundred years.¹¹

Memory of white Unionism faded into true obscurity with the generation following the men who had served during the war. As living recall of the war for the Union passed away in the early to mid twentieth century, white Unionists from the Deep South became more and more difficult for most Americans to imagine. At times even academic historians recorded their bewilderment and near-disbelief at the existence of Union diehards in the center of the Confederacy. In 1956 James C. Bonner, after some considerable travel and archival spadework, published an article in the *Georgia Review* profiling David R. Snelling, a native Georgian in the First Alabama Cavalry who accompanied Sherman on his March to the Sea. “No one in Baldwin County [Georgia],” reported Bonner, “including those well versed in local history, seemed to have ever heard of the Snelling family.” Snelling’s own daughter, then living in Arkansas, “had never read of her father’s exploits as reported by Sherman.” By the 1950s, descendants of white Unionists still living in the Deep South had no social incentive to promote their non-

¹¹ *The National Tribune*, December 8, 1898.

Confederate heritage, especially not any positive association with Sherman. Given that Bonner himself judged Snelling's Unionism to "contribute something to an understanding of the young men who defected to the Red Chinese in our time," it becomes easier to see why.¹² Though Mississippi Unionist Thomas Aughey had predicted in 1863 that "the descendants of the Tories carefully conceal their genealogy, [and] the descendants of the secessionists will do the same," in the end he got it almost exactly backward.¹³

* * * * *

In recent decades, scholars have produced a substantial body of work on southern Unionists and no longer consider them unknown or unstudied as a group. The bulk of the literature centers on the Upper and Border South, Appalachia and bushwhacking Missouri.¹⁴ White Unionists from the Deep South, though – as soldiers, veterans, voters, and politicians – also have something to contribute to our understanding of the Civil War era.¹⁵ They comprised a remarkably diverse set of individuals, families, and communities who supported the Union unconditionally and resisted the Confederacy for disparate reasons. Taken together, they reaffirm the centrality of Union, as a cause in and of itself, above all others as the single greatest shared motivating factor for loyal white citizens during the Civil War. Historians must reckon with white southern Unionists because, due to their peculiar situation, they took on a symbolic importance both during and after the conflict that illustrates the stakes of the contest as understood by those who lived through

¹² Bonner, "David R. Snelling," 277-278.

¹³ John H. Aughey, *The Iron Furnace: Or, Slavery and Secession* (Philadelphia, PA: W. S. & A. Martien, 1863), 294.

¹⁴ See, for example, Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists*; Freehling, *The South vs. The South*; Inscoc and Kenzer, *Enemies of the Country*; Sutherland, *Guerrillas, Unionists, And Violence On The Confederate Home Front*, and Myers, *Rebels Against the Confederacy*.

¹⁵ There is a growing body of literature on Unionism in the Deep South. See, for example, Bynum, *The Free State of Jones*; Pierson, *Mutiny At Fort Jackson*; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, and Rein, *Alabamians in Blue*.

it. To those in the United States they represented the ever-loyal southern population swept away by the tide of secession, the men upon whom the foundation of Reconstruction would rest. To Confederates, they represented Tories, enemies of the political ideals of the South and, most important as the war went on, traitors to the white race.

That perceived race betrayal, for which General Nathan Bedford Forrest's Confederates executed Union Major William F. Bradford after the Fort Pillow Massacre in 1864, goes a long way toward explaining both the subsequent course of Reconstruction and white southern Unionists' inconspicuous place in southern and national memory. The salvation of the Union proved the only cause for which the vast majority of white southern Unionists would stand on common ground with African Americans. Even then, they generally tolerated rather than championed emancipation and black enlistment as a means to that end. After 1865 white racial solidarity again prevailed in the Deep South in ways it had not during the war, when the Union remained at issue. Former Unionists' refusal to ally meaningfully with African Americans against the political machinations of former Confederates in the postwar period ultimately prevented the development of a viable Republican coalition in the region. Their willingness, with the Union's indivisibility no longer a real concern, to realign themselves with their former foes in white solidarity against black liberty also helps explain the capitulation of subsequent generations to a Lost Cause vision of a unanimously pro-Confederate white South. In the end, the cultural trajectory of white southern Unionists – through war, peace, and now memory – represents a crucial, yet still understudied, aspect of national reconciliation after its greatest crisis.

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