

THE CAVALIER IN THE MIND OF THE SOUTH, 1876-1916

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ABSTRACT

The cavalier image in the antebellum South represented the pinnacle of white southern manhood. Defined by their chivalry, honor, bravery, and skills as horsemen and fighters—characteristics found valuable by southerners. Cavaliers, however, also embodied the white South's control over a large enslaved black population, and many southern planters fashioned themselves according to this image. Over time, the image became more aristocratic as cavalier became synonymous with slaveholders, and slaveholders, most believed, provided social order.

After the Civil War, the cavalier did not completely disappear. Instead, southerners slowly began a transformation of the cavalier. By applying the title of cavalier to George Armstrong Custer after his death, southerners honored his military ability, his manhood, and most important, the uses his death had in aiding southerners in their call to end Reconstruction. Applying the title to a northerner, however, hastened the downfall of the cavalier image. During the Spanish-American War, southerners honored Theodore Roosevelt for his manliness and his martial abilities, but never called him a cavalier. In fact, most southerners agreed that the cavalier had become a figure of the past ensconced in the history of the Civil War. In 1898, most of the South's praise went to volunteer soldiers, who now commanded a powerful place in the southern mind for their prowess in combat, their dutiful response to the call for volunteers, bravery, and manliness. Southern manhood and volunteerism had become such powerful notions that by 1916 both white and black volunteers received praise. Replacing the cavalier, the volunteer image came to embody many of the characteristics its predecessor: honor, manhood, and martial prowess.

The declension of the cavalier image can be attributed to three distinctive themes. First, chivalrous manhood became less important to southern society, and as chivalry faded, so too did the cavalier image. Warfare and society also became more egalitarian. Volunteer soldiers became just as potent symbolically as the cavalier had once been. Finally, the nature of warfare itself changed. No longer able to mount cavalry charges because of technological advancements, the importance of the mounted warrior dwindled away.

INTRODUCTION

Historians of the American South often debate the distinctiveness of the antebellum South and whether it had a particular penchant for violence and a strong tradition of militarism. John Hope Franklin argued that it did and attributed southern militancy to the South's harsh, frontier-like environment in combination with the brutalizing effects of slavery upon the southern populace. Orlando Patterson put even more emphasis on the role of slavery: he demonstrated that slavery created an honor-bound ruling class determined to use force to secure its status in society. According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, men became increasingly sensitive to the demands of honor and would resort to primal forms of violence in order to retain their honor. Tying notions of honor to the virtue of republicanism, Rod Andrew maintained that southern military academies perpetuated the idea that the qualities instilled in soldiers also made good citizens. By linking militarism with citizenship, Andrew showed how southerners began to view military service as a means to demonstrate patriotism and to fulfill their civic duty. Military service and a more militaristic culture helped southerners achieve a greater degree of social order, which, according to Dickson Bruce, became one of the primary goals of antebellum southerners. Militaristic displays by southerners were designed to prevent attacks on both the personal and national level.¹

Other historians claim that if southern distinctiveness did exist, it did not originate with southern militarism. Marcus Cunliffe, citing the number of southern graduates from West Point and the proportion of southerners in the Regular Army prior to the Civil War, disputed the claims of

¹ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South: 1800-1861* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 77-104. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Rod Andrew Jr., *Long Grey Lines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-25; Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 161-177.

historians who sought to define southern distinctiveness based on militaristic terms alone. R. Don Higginbotham compared the militant cultures of the South and New England in order to show that militancy did not define solely the South. Neither historian denied the militaristic characteristic of southern society, but both claimed that these traits existed throughout the nation and do not help define southern distinctiveness.²

Although some historians continue to question the existence of a strong tradition of militarism in southern culture, antebellum Americans pictured the South and its inhabitants as more prone to exemplify and glorify military values. The bellicosity of southerners prior to the Civil War became a common stereotype that dominated the popular image of the South. Before Bull Run, southerners claimed that one Confederate soldier could singlehandedly whip ten Union troops; many northerners agreed. Out of this belief in a militant culture emerged a figure, the cavalier, steeped in many of the South's most important cultural values—honor and chivalry, self-discipline, skill in battle, horsemanship, and civic duty. Revering order and martial displays, though, and idolizing a cavalier were two different things. Even though the cavalier often resorted to violence in defense of home or country, violent actions did not entirely describe the cavalier. Rather, southerners looked to their imagined historical and literary past to define more fully the cavalier.

Antebellum southerners often fancied themselves the descendants of King Charles I's Cavalier supporters during the English Civil War. Their cavalier heritage could be traced to the conquering Normans, whereas many believed that northerners could trace their lineage only to the passive and conquered Saxons. Picturing themselves as the inheritors of the traditions of the English aristocracy, southerners strove to recreate as many of these customs as possible. The ownership of immense landholdings, the construction of manor homes, and the marshalling of political power—not to mention

² R. Don Higginbotham, "The Martial Spirit in the Antebellum South: Some Further Speculations in a National Context," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Feb. 1992), 3-26; Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), 337-384.

horse racing, gambling, and drinking—became the hallmarks of the southern gentry. The type of landed elite that developed in the South, though, differed distinctly from their English counterparts: the southern gentry relied on slave labor and a staple crop economy compared to the system of tenancy that had taken hold in England. Nevertheless, taking to heart the idea of their own cultural distinctiveness and superiority, slave-holding planters began to portray themselves as the inheritors of a cavalier tradition.³

Literature, especially Sir Walter Scott's novels, added to the southern fascination with the cavalier. Scott's novels romanticized the knight-errant figure and the chivalric attitude associated with him. Southern authors copied Scott's style and transplanted medieval knights onto American soil in the form of southern planters. Popular fiction prior to 1860, especially the works of John Pendleton Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms, highly romanticized the idyllic lifestyles of planters, their kin, and their slaves. Perpetuating images of planters as benevolent, chivalrous, and graceful, popular fiction written by southerners solidified the cavalier image in not just the South, but across the country as well. The image of the cavalier spread by literature also described the cavalier as a man in complete control of his emotions and actions, the sober vanguard of an expanding civilization on the fringes of society combating the individualistic forces unleashed by Jacksonian democracy. The idea of a cavalier's self-control played into the more refined aspects of the cavalier's image.⁴

The popular image of the cavalier spread by southern fiction contributed to another aspect of the cavalier image, chivalry. In the fifteenth century, chivalry denoted an individual skilled in the practice of warfare and exhibiting bravery in battle; more contemporary meanings suggest manners.

³ Historians also note a class distinction when discussing the cavalier figure. See, for example, James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25-33, where the author uses the phrase "planter-Cavalier" to describe elite planters.

⁴ John Fraser, *America and the Patterns of Chivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3-12; Daniel Joseph Signal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 11-21

Chivalry for antebellum southerners acted as a patina over the harsher and more violent aspects of honor and demanded that men of honor act with self-restraint in all matters. Even though the cavalier represented the ideal male warrior, southerners often celebrated the cavalier for his domestic characteristics as well as his more aggressive ones. But in the nineteenth century south, especially after 1830, chivalry became intimately connected with ideals of domesticity and thus became described as more of a feminine quality. In fact, the chivalrous characteristics of a cavalier necessarily included both manly and womanly qualities. Yet chivalry had not completely lost its violent and manly luster. The cavalier had to balance domestic characteristics with more warlike traits in perfect harmony in order to retain his sense of manhood and honor.⁵

Older than the idea of chivalry, and even more potent, the ethic of honor also colored the way southerners pictured the cavalier. The most enduring aspect of the code of honor remains the duel. But honor meant much more than pistols at twenty paces. A man's good name and reputation, along with that of his family, became inexorably tied to the idea of honor. As the communal affirmation of an individual's status and authority, honor became a way for a community to develop acceptable standards of behavior and rank. Ranging in scope from familial to regional, honor could be used to confer a high social standing on an individual in a small, isolated environment or on a larger, regional scale. Individuals saw honor as a measure of self-worth and one could not claim honor unless the community deigned that person honorable. By recognizing a man as honorable, a community also recognized him as a man of character. Inherently tied up with the idea of honor, qualities like dignity and character latched onto and became protected by honor. Character and dignity could eventually lead to honor, but with the loss of honor, those two qualities would evaporate.⁶

⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, s.v. "Chivalry;" Paul Christopher Anderson, *Blood Image: Turner Ashby in the Civil War and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), xiv-xvi, 24-26.

⁶ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South*.21-33; William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and*

Combined with the tenets of honor, the notions of knighthood and chivalry became popularly replicated styles of behavior in everyday southern life. Towns across the South held ring tournaments, designed to resemble medieval jousts, where young men mounted on their finest horses would perform a variety of tasks in order to gain renown within the community for their horsemanship and to display their masculine qualities—often to potential brides. Successful participants earned the label of brave warriors and graceful riders. Skill on a horse ensured success in ring tournaments and endeared participants to the crowd. Without horsemanship, riders could gain neither recognition nor honor. Thus, the cavalier image became dependent upon horsemanship and the horse. Deriving from the French words *cheval* (for horse) and *chevalier* (for knight), cavaliers became synonymous with daring, skillful horsemanship as well as an affinity for horses.⁷

Other southern institutions, especially local militias, also fed into the developing military culture and further entrenched the importance of martial values. Musters acted as a means to provide defense for the community against slave insurrection and created a semblance of military preparedness, but also reaffirmed the deferential nature of southern society. The men elected to lead the local militias often represented the highest ranks of society and strove to recreate the cavalier image as they commanded their companies.

A combination of factors, then, led to the creation of the cavalier in the southern mind: a romanticized past, the importance of honor, chivalry, and horsemanship, and the defense of home. “Cavalier” also usually referred to planters who had the status, wealth, and power to portray

American National Character (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15-22; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, xv-xix, 34; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Rituals in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 6-23.

⁷ On ring tournaments see, Ester J. Crooks and Crooks, Ruth W., *The Ring Tournament in the United States* (Richmond: Garret and Massie, 1936). “Cavalier” also came into usage around 1470 by the Dutch, and by 1590 it had also been introduced into the English language by way of Italy where it “signifieth a Gentleman seruing on horsebacke.” See, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, s.v. “Cavalier.”

themselves as such. Their status as slave owners provided substantial proof of their desire to provide order, as did their willingness to serve as the leaders of militia companies. Entwined into the cavalier image, then, were strong overtones of racial control and military skill and how the latter contributed to the former. Cavaliers also served as the epitome of southern manhood: long-standing custom held that a good southern man should exhibit both manly and womanly traits and balanced the two into one harmonious and functional image. By conferring cavalier status upon an individual, southerners not only honored his military prowess, his skill as a horseman, and his dedication to home and hearth, but they also acknowledged his manhood. The cavalier of romantic literature and history thus became the living embodiment of the martial ability and cultural mores that southerners admired. Because the status of cavalier held so much importance in southern society, an individual could not simply proclaim himself a cavalier; neither did a solemn knighting ceremony exist. Instead, popular opinion judged a man based on his actions, his social standing, and his image and either denied or conferred the cavalier status upon him.

Not surprisingly, the Civil War became the proving ground for the southern cavalier. Every soldier who fought for the Confederacy became a hero, but only a select handful ever became a “cavalier.” Reaching mythic status, cavalry officers like J.E.B. Stuart and John S. Mosby—along with the quintessential Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson—became ideal cavaliers during the war. Although most Confederate soldiers were deemed honorable and brave, soldiers needed an image that corresponded to the popular understanding of the cavalier: Stuart’s flamboyant style, Mosby’s skillful raids, and the spotless reputations of Lee and Jackson all cemented their place in Confederate memory and their status as cavaliers. Although no single image dominated the ranks of Confederate cavaliers, it became clear that not every man could become a cavalier. Only the most honorable, brave, and skillful soldiers with the appropriate aristocratic bearing could ever claim

cavalier status.

The Confederacy's defeat did little to tarnish the cavalier image in the southern mind. Proponents of the Lost Cause held that the South had not been defeated because of any inherent societal flaw or lack of bravery in Confederate soldiers; rather simple arithmetic—more men with more guns—accounted for Confederate defeat. This rationalization allowed the cavalier image to survive. Able to claim that the epitome of southern manhood and military culture had not suffered defeat at the hands of a more skillful northern soldier, southerners could claim that the cavalier image remained highly valued and largely unscathed in the immediate postbellum years. In the half century that followed the end of Reconstruction, American military forces engaged in three conflicts: the Indian Wars, the Spanish American War, and the Punitive Expedition of 1916. Oddly enough, with so few opportunities for military action, southern militarism arguably grew in strength and intensity after the Civil War.⁸ This increased fascination with all things military led to the growing need for martial heroes to fill the niche left vacant by the dearth of military activity. In these three military encounters, southerners sought opportunities to prove themselves on the field of battle but, despite their service, none received the title of cavalier.

Three factors hastened the alteration of the cavalier image: the increasingly egalitarian nature of southern society, the changing notions of manhood, and the more violent and mechanized nature of modern warfare. Several aspects of the cavalier's image, namely bravery, honor, and civic duty, became commonly employed descriptions of volunteer soldiers. Changing notions of masculinity sapped the traditionally aristocratic cavalier figure of much of its symbolic power as refined notions of as Victorian manhood gave way to a more aggressive and violent model of manhood. The type of warfare that the Civil War helped usher in—a people's war where an entire nation engaged in making

⁸ On the place of militarism in southern life after the Civil War, see, for example, Rod Andrew, *Long Grey Lines*, 46-63.

war, not just the troops on the frontline—also ensured the increasing destructiveness of war. With larger armies required for victory, mobilizing vast numbers of male recruits became a staple of warfare. The anonymity experienced in modern warfare made personal exploits in combat more difficult to achieve. The most aristocratic means of warfare, cavalry operations, also became obsolete. New forms of technology ensured that mounted combat and cavalry charges played no significant role on the modern battlefield. The corresponding values brought about because of the cultural importance of horses, particularly chivalry, began to disappear from the southern life and that shift reflected the changing nature of warfare. Without aristocratic forms of mounted combat, and without the refinement provided by chivalry, the nature of manhood changed. Rather than honor an aristocratic cavalry soldier, southerners turned to the common volunteer soldier as their ideal version of manhood. Manhood, egalitarianism, and the nature of warfare thus interacted and entwined with one another to alter permanently the nature of the cavalier. The democratization of various parts of the cavalier image made it possible for southerners to honor volunteer soldiers using the traditional elements of the cavalier image. In doing so, southerners effectively crafted and empowered a volunteer image that replaced the cavalier.

Aside from the changing nature of warfare, manhood, and the egalitarian nature of society, other factors contributed to the alteration of the cavalier image in the half century following the Civil War. Racial politics in the South, especially during Reconstruction, provided southerners with a motive for applying the title of cavalier to a northerner, George Armstrong Custer. Though Custer had consciously cultivated a similar image to that of the cavalier, southerners had to recognize him such before they could honor him. Yet white southerners had other motives than just honoring one of the nation's preeminent soldiers. By lionizing Custer with the title of cavalier and then by attempting to enlist to avenge his death, southerners hoped to signal to the rest of the nation that they had achieved

reconciliation and no longer required the army's presence in their region. Removal of the army would effectively end Reconstruction and restore white Democrats to power. By regaining control of the politics of their region, white southerners knew they could effectively return the South to white control and end any hopes of a biracial political system. Custer's image as a cavalier became a useful means of attempting to recreate a hierarchical world where blacks remained subservient to whites.

Southerners not only drew on the past when they attempted to recreate it in everyday life, but also when they sought to live up to its standards. The Civil War generation, having ensconced its significance in southern society, gave younger generations a standard of comparison. Because of the momentous nature of the Civil War, other events seemed to pale in comparison; likewise, other generations felt indebted to the war generation and continually sought to prove themselves to their elders. In the Spanish-American War, a new generation of white southerners volunteered in droves to prove themselves to Civil War veterans and southern society at large. Volunteering had become so important, in fact, that by 1916, African Americans also drew on their own legacy of military service to strengthen their call for equal rights when they sought to enlist for service in Mexico. Rather than pay homage to secessionists, blacks instead looked to those who had fought and earned their freedom for inspiration and to ensure that their struggles would not be wasted.

Understanding a society's heroes allows historians to realize more fully the values of that society. By understanding the changing nature of the cavalier image in southern society, it becomes possible to more fully grasp the complex changes occurring within in the South. The southern need for a cavalier waxed and waned over the course of a half-century following the Civil War. That a northerner could become a cavalier in 1876 but not 1898 or 1916 only underscored the amount of change that had occurred in little more than fifty years. By understanding the nature of the men who became, or nearly became, cavaliers after the Civil War, southerners articulated opinions about these

men that further emphasized the amount of change occurring in southern society. Their opinions provide a better understanding of the changing concepts of honor and chivalry, patriotism, and manhood within the South by demonstrating the changing nature of the cavalier image and its transformation into one designed not to honor a single, aristocratic figure, but the multitude of volunteers.

CHAPTER ONE

YANKEE CAVALIER: GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER AND THE USES OF THE CAVALIER IMAGE

The death of George Armstrong Custer on June 25, 1876, sent shockwaves throughout American for nearly a month. Indignant cries for revenge filled newspapers of every type as Americans coped with the death of one of the country's most famous soldiers. As the initial shock passed, many in the South began to place Custer firmly in the tradition of the cavalier. Politically motivated southerners grafted Custer's consciously self-created image onto that of the cavalier in order to achieve white political rule. Southern newspapers offered the public a means of understanding Custer's multi-faceted personality by reporting on his image and how he resembled the cavalier. Southerners also compared the idealized vision of the cavalier to their idea of Native Americans. Defining Custer's enemies, in fact, became an important aspect of his image and the South's use for his image. If he had fallen to a race of inferior warriors his death would have been dishonorable. Southerners created an image of a skillful and determined enemy who differed from Custer in many ways, but in whose struggles they recognized similar aspects to their own during the Civil War. Ultimately, however, southerners could not sympathize with the Sioux because of racial differences. Most white southerners placed the blame for Custer's death squarely on President Grant and his administration's policies towards the Indians and the South. White southerners saw Custer's defeat and his adoption as a southern-styled cavalier as a means of expressing outrage toward Republican rule and military occupation. Throughout the process of defining Custer as a cavalier and mourning his loss, southerners expressed patriotic sentiments that seemed to signal that the South had readied itself for a political reunion with the rest of the nation based on military service.

Before the news of Custer's death reached mythic proportions in the United States, he had

started on a long road to national recognition that began during the Civil War. As a cavalry officer, Custer quickly reached the rank of a breveted brigadier general, and his supporters began calling him the “Boy General” to honor his meteoric rise in rank at such a young age. He also began cultivating an image during the war that endeared him to many Americans. Sporting long blond hair, a red bandana tied around his neck, and an attitude defined more by braggadocio and an over-abundance of confidence and less by thoughtfulness or refinement, he soon became a military celebrity because of his swagger and impressive victories. Once the fighting ceased, Custer joined the pared down regular army at a lower rank—lieutenant colonel—and began his role as a member of the new army in the Seventh Cavalry. After serving for several years on the frontier, the Seventh redeployed to Kentucky in 1871 in order to help protect blacks from the attacks by the Ku Klux Klan. In theory, Custer’s assignment of protecting African Americans should have alienated him from the white population. Instead, stationed at Elizabethtown until February 1873, Custer gained the respect of the local population not only for his role in the war, but also for the many appealing traits he exhibited—horsemanship, bravery, and self-confidence. Rather than actively patrol or hunt Klansmen, Custer cavorted with former Confederates and enjoyed spending much of his time around fine horses.

The life of an occupying soldier, however, never suited Custer. He longed to return to active duty and understood that only in the West would he again see combat. Ordered to command an expeditionary force in 1874 into the Black Hills to scout for a possible railroad route, the Seventh spent much of its time protecting miners searching for gold. Soon thereafter, in the spring of 1876, Custer became the center of controversy when he testified before the House of Representatives on the corrupt practices of the Army, particularly the post traders. President Grant’s Republican administration, already under attack for the infamous Whiskey Ring—a scheme by high-ranking government officials to embezzle huge amounts of public money—did not receive Custer’s testimony lightheartedly.

Neither did the president enjoy learning of Custer's public outings with several high-ranking Democratic congressmen. Grant responded to Custer's testimony and his interest in the rival political party by removing the soldier from his command and denying him the opportunity to participate in the upcoming campaign against the Plains Indians. Pleading with the president, generals Sherman and Sheridan backed Custer who eventually regained his position and joined his troops in May 1876, just before they rode for Sioux territory.¹

A treaty signed in 1868 had designated a large tract of territory in the West exclusively for the use of the Sioux. Part of the agreement forced the Indians to stay on this ceded land. According to President Grant, many Indians had left their lands and he ordered the army to force them to return. Though planned for the winter, the campaign experienced delays and did not leave until late spring. From Wyoming, General Crook led his command north in search of the Indians. Colonel Gibbon's troops advanced from western to eastern Montana, while General Terry, with Custer in tow, left Ft. Lincoln in North Dakota. On June 17, Crook's forces suffered a serious defeat at the hands of Crazy Horse and his band of Oglala Sioux at the Battle of the Rosebud, effectively halting Crook's march north and eliminating one branch of the campaign. With no means of communication between the advancing columns, the remaining two wings of the army continued their marches according to plan. Custer commanded the Seventh, however, to race ahead of its support column of infantry and to begin tracking down the Indians alone.²

On June 25, Custer's scouts found the location of the Indian encampment, and he wasted no time beginning the attack. Without stopping to create a coordinated plan or to conduct sufficient

¹ Jeffrey Wert, *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 300-339.

² For U.S.-Sioux relations see Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60-64; as well as, Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 144-151.

reconnoitering, the men of the Seventh Cavalry spurred their horses toward one of the largest gatherings of Native Americans on North American soil. As many as two thousand warriors made camp at the Little Big Horn camp; women, children, and the elderly numbered more than seven thousand. Having divided his forces, Custer's weakened regiment stood little chance against numerical superiority of the native warriors. All three detachments suffered greatly; Major Reno panicked at the first sign of blood and lost control of his troops. Within an hour of fighting, he had lost nearly a third of his detachment and retreated to the top of a nearby hill. Benteen, who had been following Custer's advance, spotted Reno's retreat and went to his aid. The combined companies of Reno and Benteen remained on their hilltop perch and did not attempt to aid Custer. Custer's advance also met stiff resistance while trying to ford the Little Big Horn River; he and his men withdrew to the heights above the camp. Fighting on the run, the men under the Boy General soon found themselves completely encircled and heavily outnumbered. Unable to retreat any further and with no signs of additional troops, Custer and his men made their famous last stand until every soldier had been killed. During the night and part of the next day, the soldiers entrenched on the hilltop and endured many fearful hours filled with persistent Indian attacks.³

On the 26th, the Sioux learned that more troops would soon arrive and decided to move their camp. The next day, an advance company of scouts under Colonel Gibbons arrived to find the decimated remains of the once-famed Seventh cavalry. From there, the news spread slowly but it inevitably made its way east. The *Far West*, a riverboat acting as supplier for the troops, left the Little Big Horn on the 30th carrying wounded soldiers. By the time it reached Bismarck on July 5th, people had begun whispering rumors about a tragic defeat. With confirmation arriving from the wounded

³For the battle, see, James Welch and Paul Stekler, *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 149-197; Wert, *Custer*, 340-358; Evan S. Connell, *Son of a Morning Star: Custer and Little Bighorn* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), 264-285.

soldiers, telegraph offices began sending word of the defeat to cities further east. By the July 6th, most major cities had received news of the battle, and on the 7th newspapers first printed accounts of the battle. Arriving just two days after the events of the joyous Centennial Celebration—but eleven days after the battle had actually been fought—the news of Custer’s defeat aroused strong emotions throughout the nation. On July 7th, the *Charleston News and Courier* commented that, “The news of the massacre of Gen. Custer and his command by the Indians created much excitement in the city yesterday afternoon.” The news soon made its way into private correspondence as well. In a letter to his wife, the burgeoning North Carolina politician, John S. Henderson, asked: “Have you seen an account of the slaughter of Custer’s troops by the Sioux Indians?” Henderson “looked over the casualties expecting” to find the name of a friend but did not find it.⁴

Anger and calls for revenge dominated the initial public reaction in the South. Southerners wanted not just to punish the Sioux, but also to avenge the death of Custer. As anger toward the Sioux mounted, southerners also mourned Custer’s death. The citizens of Louisville felt particularly close to Custer because of the time he and the Seventh Cavalry had spent in Kentucky during Reconstruction: “All of us knew Custer here in Louisville, and all of us were fond of him, and all of us lament him,” stated one editorialist. In Raleigh, “the death of Custer will be deeply regretted even by the men who met him in arms a few years ago.” And in Alexandria, Louisiana, one editorial noted that “there will be sadness in many a heart for the brave Custer.” Citizens in Augusta regretted “the death of such heroic men as Custer and his band of warriors,” but found solace in the fact they had fallen “in the discharge of their imperative duty.”⁵

As the anger and sadness subsided, Custer’s image in the South changed from a Union soldier

⁴ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 7, 1876, 1; John S. Henderson to Elizabeth Henderson, July 10, 1876, John S. Henderson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, UNC, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁵ *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1876, 3; *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 8, 1876, 2; *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 19, 1876, 2; *Augusta Constitutionalist*, July 8, 1876, 3.

who had once fought against the Confederacy in the Civil War into an American soldier who had bravely sacrificed himself for the defense of the nation. Using the language and rhetoric of the Lost Cause, a discourse that excelled at creating heroes out of fallen soldiers, southerners began describing Custer as the prototypical southern warrior, the cavalier. Custer, according to many, “was essentially a cavalier and a man of the world,” and, “a brave and ideal hero...something of a wizzard [sic] in the saddle. He died gloriously as he wished to die...at the head of his command, the central figure of a tragedy unsurpassed, unequaled in Border annals.”⁶ By proclaiming Custer a cavalier, southerners found a means of honoring a soldier whose only previous association with the South had been as an invader during the Civil War and an occupier during Reconstruction. Southerners and former Confederates found it difficult not to honor Custer for his sacrifice, as well as for his many personal characteristics and qualities that they found appealing.

Most of the accounts and memorials focused on Custer’s bravery and skill as a soldier, his love of all things martial, and his excellence at riding horses. For example, some described him as “a chivalric, dashing soldier and a gentleman” who died fulfilling his duty as a soldier. Furthermore, he “was a born soldier. He loved the call of the bugle and the glitter of the sun on the line of steel as his regiment formed in the field.” Likewise, other southern newspapers honored him for his manly comportment and his love of all things military: “Custer was one of the best marksmen in the army, and one of the best horsemen. Marvelous stories are told of his feats in both particulars.” Perhaps the most popular account of Custer’s horsemanship occurred during the Grand Review in May, 1865, a story recounted several times immediately after his death. As Custer’s regiment approached the review stand, his “large bay horse, of almost baronial blood,” named Don Juan, jumped into the air and repeatedly tried to buck Custer off. Custer kept his composure as well as his seat in the saddle. One

⁶ *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1876, 3. The Confederate cavalry commander Nathan Bedford Forrest, a hero of the Lost Cause, already laid claim to the epithet, “wizzard of the saddle.” Acknowledging Custer’s skill as a cavalry soldier by using the same description as a Confederate hero was immensely high praise.

reporter remained convinced that “only a centaur could keep his seat on such a stallion.” As Custer raced by President Johnson, he offered a hasty salute and then stopped his runaway horse to the cheers of an admiring crowd.⁷

His bravery and gallantry, though, shone through most clearly in moments of duress when Custer possessed *sprezzatura* not capable by most men. “I have seen Custer in circumstances,” noted a former soldier, “when it was hard for me to believe that he was human.” The trooper remained “confident that when overwhelmed and surrounded in that ravine, and staring death squarely in the face,” that Custer loaded his ever-present rifle, “as coolly and aimed it as accurately as if he had been target-shooting on the parade ground at his post.” This coolness and ease in battle seemed to conflict with his more passionate nature and appeared to bubble just below the surface of his controlled and composed demeanor. Others recognized the balancing act that Custer played between the composed façade of the cavalier and the ardent warrior. “There was in Custer a reckless daring which was hidden under his severe and listless bearing. He seemed too courteous and too calmly graceful....But when the spirit of daredevilry did come into action it showd [sic] its possessor as one of the most intrepid and chivalrous officers that was known to the service.” Others found him “deliberate and careful in planning a battle,” but when the plan had been made, “and his bugles rang out the signal for conflict, his gallantry in pushing forward his lines approached something like recklessness.” Custer’s coolness apparently suffered from excitement under the stress of battle. But at most other times, his contemporaries agreed, he skillfully balanced composure and passion into one supremely controlled image.

Custer did not just have to balance serenity and passion; he also had to demonstrate an

⁷ *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 19, 1876, 1; *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 8, 1876, 2; *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 26, 1876, 1; *Charleston News and Courier*, July 12, 1876, 2. Most historians consider the story of Custer’s runaway as a staged effort on the part of Custer to demonstrate his ability in front of an admiring civilian population, see, for example: Wert, *Custer*, 228-230.

equilibrium between Victorian concepts of masculinity and femininity. Former Confederate cavalry officer T.L. Rosser knew Custer “intimately from boyhood,” graduated with him from West Point, and “being on opposite sides during the late war,” the two often, “met and measured strength on the fields of Virginia.” Rosser honored Custer by describing him as the perfect balance required by the cavalier: “I can truly say now that I never met a more enterprising, gallant, or dangerous enemy during those four years of terrible war, or a more genial, whole-souled, chivalrous gentleman and friend in peace.”⁸ This dual nature of Custer’s image described by Rosser—dangerous warrior and chivalrous gentleman—became the two primary facets of the Custer image that southerners used to define him as a cavalier. Although these two characteristics were seemingly at odds, the antebellum ideal of the cavalier involved a balance between ideals of masculinity and femininity in order to present a magnanimous and complete image. The ideal of chivalry accompanied honor and pervaded the antebellum South. While it certainly evoked images of mounted combat and jousting tournaments, chivalry meant much more in southern society. Chivalrous men needed to exhibit “graciousness in manners as well as bravery in war.” It required men of honor to maintain a balancing act with their militant, masculine nature and their more refined, feminine side. Cavaliers needed to show a degree of sensitivity but never weakness. Overemphasis on traditionally masculine qualities would hide the ease with which chivalrous men performed this balancing act. In short, before southerners could grant Custer cavalier status, they first had to understand the many facets of his personality and how he kept them all in check.⁹

While initial accounts of his death described Custer as a cavalier for his soldierly qualities, others sought to flesh out the Janus-faced nature of Custer’s image in order to show a cavalier

⁸ *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 26, 1876, 1; *Ibid.*, July 12, 1876, 2; *Richmond Whig*, July 8, 1876, 1; *Little Rock Daily Arkansas Gazette*, July 16, 1876, 2.

⁹ For a more detailed description of the balancing act dictated by the ideal of chivalry, see Anderson, *Blood Image*, 30-39, 24.

comprised of more than just military attributes. Southerners also began to describe his more refined cultural pursuits. It became possible, then, for many to see Custer as both “a gentleman of much military skill,” and “a man of literary culture” without seeing any great fundamental contradiction. The cavalier had to demonstrate both martial and refined qualities. For southerners, his military skill was just as important as his more cultural pursuits. Aside from exhibiting martial skill, Custer had, in fact, written “a great many essays” for the *Galaxy* describing many of his hunts and frontier battles against Indians in lively and romanticized prose, “which pleased those persons who had a taste for literature.” These collected articles would eventually become his memoirs, *My Life on the Plains*. Even before his frontier articles appeared, Custer had written extensively on the South. During his time in Kentucky in the early 1870s, Custer wrote several articles for the magazine *Turf, Field and Farm*. Using the pen name “Nomad,” Custer reported on his many visits with the Kentucky gentry, or, as he called them, the “Blue Grassonians.” Most of his writings focused on horse racing in Lexington and Louisville, and he described in detail many of the fine horses and beautiful ladies he encountered in Bluegrass Country. “The greatest pride of the Blue Grassonians is to be found,” Custer thought, “in the unparalleled loveliness of their women. The beauty of the women of the Blue Grass region seems to have been developed like the speed of its thoroughbreds, so as to eclipse that of all other lands.” While even the most romantic of writers may have found comparing a woman’s looks to the swiftness of a horse problematic, Custer thought the analogy fitting. Feeling at home among the “charmingly beautiful” women and the “proverbially chivalrous” men, Custer used his writings to publicly establish his esteem for the idealized lifestyle of the southern gentry, the beauty of southern belles, and the prized horses raised on Kentucky bluegrass. His reputation as a man who understood horses and who had excellent relations with horse breeders led to one of his more pleasing duties while stationed in

Kentucky—horse buyer for the Army.¹⁰

Custer's admiration for southerners facilitated the ease with which they could honor him. His fair-mindedness became evident when one newspaper reported that, "He did not hate our southern people, and accorded to them not only valor, but honesty of purpose."¹¹ Thrust into chaotic scene of Reconstruction politics, Custer's sympathetic views of white southerners may have been tinged with romanticism; his attitudes toward the defeated region, nevertheless, endeared him to many of its inhabitants. No doubt much of Custer's opinion of the people of Kentucky originated with their shared affinity for horses as well as the nostalgia and romanticism perpetrated by the early Lost Cause movements. His inability, though, to understand that not all men had the characteristics of gentlemen and not all women exhibited such grace and beauty as those in the Bluegrass skewed his vision of the South. He probably cared little for the plight of blacks in the South, and even though he had been assigned to protect them, he spent most of his time in Kentucky at race tracks and at the residences of the local gentry and horse breeders.

Having established the soldierly and literary aspects of Custer's cavalier image, other accounts turned to his peculiar style of dress on the battlefield, and how that style reflected the fluctuations in his personality. While some of these accounts placed Custer squarely in the role of the cavalier, others thought his choice of uniform made him appear effeminate and downright irrational. "[H]e used to go about dressed like one of [Lord] Byron's pirates...with waving, shining locks and a broad, flapping sombrero." Flamboyant dress became a way for a soldier to distinguish himself from the drab uniforms of his peers. Confederate officers like J.E.B. Stuart, P.G.T. Beauregard, A.P Hill, and George Pickett all wore colorful clothing or grew their hair long to distinguish themselves on the

¹⁰ *Mobile Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1876, 2; Brian W. Dippie ed., *Nomad: George A. Custer in Turf, Field and Farm* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980), 84-88.

¹¹ *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 8, 1876, 2; *Raleigh Sentinel* July 8, 1876, 2; *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 19, 1876, 1; *Mobile Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1876, 2.

battlefield. Designed specifically to make the wearer more noticeable on the battlefield, Custer's style of dress became one of his most recognizable features both during and after the Civil War. "During the war Custer always dressed in what the soldiers of the old school called an outlandish fashion," recalled one soldier. "When he went into battle he always wore a loose blouse...Under his collar was always a strip of red flannel for a neckcloth, with long ends that floated out over his shoulder as he rode." To round out his attire, he wore a "broad sombrero...with heavy clanking spurs on his rough boots, from the top of each of which the handle of a pistol was always visible, a ponderous saber at his side and a rifle across his elbow completed his 'outfit.'" His style of dress on the frontier differed from what he wore during the war. "On the plains," noted a reporter, "Custer always wore a handsomely embroidered buckskin suit, with his red neck-tie...with the exception of his saber which he never carried on the plains."¹² Although his style of dress changed to meet the circumstances in which he found himself, the most important reason for extravagant clothing—battlefield recognition—did not. Custer's buckskin uniform on the plains differed from the uniform of his troops, just as his large hat and red necktie made him stand out from soldiers under his command during the Civil War.

Not just his style of dress came into question. Custer's image had been a carefully constructed one that began in the earliest days of the Civil War. Some remembered Custer not as the epitome of manhood, but instead defined him for his womanly or effeminate characteristics. Called "'Fanny of the Golden Locks' in both armies [during the Civil War]" because of his "youth and apparent effeminacy," his fellow soldiers early in his career chastised him for his attempt at cultivating an image he had not yet earned. After he had proven himself in battle, soldiers ignored his "almost girlish...appearance" because "all his actions since have proved that he bore the heart of a lion in his

¹²*Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 26, 1876, 1.

slight frame.”¹³

The South’s idea of the cavalier rested upon an image of self-control, but Custer continually appeared to lose himself within his emotions. Custer’s “touch of romance,” recalled a former soldier, ensured that he “was always aflame.” Though rash, the soldier continued, “we all liked Custer and did not mind his little freaks in that way any more than we would have minded temper in a woman.” The balance between masculine and feminine qualities also became apparent when one admirer described him as, “Courtly, suave, and elegant, the ideal *beau sabreur*, he was of that type which is keen to avenge and slow to forgive.” The struggle within Custer to master his own emotions, even if they did sometimes boil over, demonstrated to southerners that his inner battle for mastery sometimes flared into view. By embodying the masculine tenets of honor and militancy and balancing them with effeminate passion Custer became “a curious compound of the hero and the dandy.”¹⁴

By seamlessly blending “so many kinds of character—fighter, amateur writer, speculator and social companion” into one controlled image, Custer came to embody the cavalier ideal held by many southerners.¹⁵ Custer’s image that he had so carefully molded over the course of his career also fit into the southern vision of how a cavalier should look and how he should act. The qualities that southerners found appealing in the cavalier—a balance between militant and refined pursuits; an equilibrium between manly and womanly traits—were also found elsewhere in Victorian America. Other frontier heroes like Buffalo Bill received similar praise for their balance of manly and womanly characteristics.¹⁶ As evident by the South’s acceptance of Custer, the balance of manly and womanly

¹³ *Augusta Constitutionalist*, July 11, 1876, 1.

¹⁴ *Alexandria Louisiana Democrat*, July 26, 1876, 1; *Augusta Constitutionalist*, July 11, 1876, 1.

¹⁵ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 12, 1876, 1

¹⁶ See, for example, Louis S. Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Random House, 2005), 218-228. Warren also demonstrates how Cody’s contemporaries fused the idea of horsemanship

traits spread beyond the scope of the frontier. Victorian culture throughout America had placed a veneer of gentility over the harsher aspects of masculine behavior. Men still needed to have manly qualities, but they required refinement as well. Horsemanship and other martial skills helped define manhood. But men also had to demonstrate more refined aspects in Victorian America. Northerners saw the pursuit of economic success as an indicator of Victorian balance in a man. Southerners incorporated the code of chivalry and acceptable forms of behavior to demonstrate their own form of Victorian manhood. Both North and South and West, then, had a type of masculine figure steeped in Victorian cultural values.¹⁷ For Custer, embodying the values of the Southern cavalier did not prove problematic because the cultural concerns of northerners were very similar to those of the South. In fact, without similar modes of Victorian culture present in both regions, the South could not have accepted Custer as a cavalier as easily as it did. The fact that he fought against the Confederacy should have been enough to prevent him from entering the select fraternity of the southern cavalier. Instead, Custer consciously replicated the image of the southern cavalier precisely because that image had become so familiar to northerners.

The cavalier image that southerners pressed onto Custer and that he in turn set out to replicate created a means for the South to honor Custer. Southerners saw Custer not as a man confused about his gender, but one who represented the epitome of manhood because of the ease with which he portrayed both male and female characteristics. His posturing represented a man confident in his abilities and secure enough in his manhood to demonstrate more refined qualities. Although newspapers reports described a man who seemed to let his emotions bubble just below his calm facade, southerners understood the conflict as a sign of mastery and self-control possessed by Custer. Rather

and martial skill together when describing him. This combination demonstrated to Cody's audiences that he embodied Victorian notions of white American manhood.

¹⁷ William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, 147-148.

than a man who changed his personal styles to fit in when needed, southerners saw his bold dress as a sign of a man completely confident and in control of himself. This self-control defined the most important aspect of the cavalier for many southerners. By recognizing Custer as the cavalier figure, southerners saw him as a man who had mastery over his emotions and his actions. Thus it became easy for southerners to honor and respect other aspects of Custer's life. He possessed so many of the qualities of the cavalier hero—and spent part of his life cultivating the image—that southerners found little problem placing him in that distinctly southern tradition. Furthermore, Custer created an image for himself that aided in his acceptance by the South as cavalier because northerners and southerners shared so many common cultural values.

Shared values between northerners and southerners, however, did not solve the problems in the West. If northern military might had proven successful on the field during the Civil War, but not against the Plains Indians, how could Americans hope for victory in the West? Southerners thus worried about the skill of their Indian opponents, and how a Sioux warrior could possibly defeat the pinnacle of southern martial and male culture. To answer their own question, southerners sought to define the Indians against their impression of Custer and what he represented. By contrasting Custer with his opponents, southerners could also clarify their own conceptions of the cavalier. Necessarily, in order for the cavalier status to have meaning, Custer had to have perished at the hands of a worthy enemy. The news of Custer's death only reaffirmed many of the long-held beliefs that southerners held toward Indians. While some felt that the savages in the West should all be killed, others saw the plight of the Indians as one akin to the struggle that southerners experienced during the Civil War. Although most southerners felt compelled to respect the Indians and their struggle, white southerners still felt more loyal to their nation and their race.

Unlike the composed and gallant Custer, white southerners pictured the Sioux and their allies

as “wily and maddened savages,” who could only defeat Custer through “the cunning which is a characteristic of them.” Their victory could not be accounted to the bravery of their warriors, but only because their plans had “matured...with a great deal of skill, and that our soldiers had fell into the trap which was set for them.” Custer and the rest of the Seventh had not been outfought but tricked into a well-laid ambush by the Sioux. Southerners could not respect the fighting style of Indians because it relied on subterfuge rather than daring; trickery and not bravery. Due to his excitement and overconfidence, Custer charged the enemy as he had done so many times on battlefields during the Civil War. Yet unlike his opponents during that war, the Indians “led him into an ambushade,” where every member of his command, “were mercilessly slaughtered.” Other southerners found little problem praising Sioux warrior for their abilities. A correspondent of the *Charleston News and Courier* noted that “the trouble is we have underrated these Indians too much. They are fully as well armed as we are, and can shoot just as well. In an ambushade or ground fight they are stronger than our men.” Equipped with “an abundance of ammunition, the best approved guns, and all similar means of warfare,” the Sioux had become a dangerous enemy on the western plains. Although respecting the Sioux for the way they fought proved difficult, most southerners realized that in a fight, a warrior could stand his ground against a soldier and they learned to respect the fighting abilities of the plains Indians.¹⁸

Having acknowledged the prowess but cowardly tactics of the Sioux in battle, many southerners found that they could also empathize with their plight. Having fought against the near endless supply of northern manpower and matériel for four years, southerners understood firsthand the destructive capability of the federal army and the willingness of both the government and the civilian

¹⁸ *Atlanta Constitution*, July 7, 1876, 2; *Mobile Daily Tribune*, July 11, 1876, 2; *Charleston News and Courier*, July 10, 1876, 1; *Richmond Daily Whig*, July 8, 1876, 2.

population to use it for that purpose.¹⁹ The Sioux had “plenty of courage to resist what he considers wrong,” argued one writer in a letter to the editor, but felt that they had “been wronged,” and for that reason, he continued, “we are sorry for the killing of our troops, [but] we shall not blame the Indian for doing it.” The editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* declared that whites “cannot wonder at the Indian in what he is doing, he is justified by every right of being and by every equity which civilization claims as indispensable to the proper adjustment of private and public affairs.” In other words, even Indians had rights and could defend themselves and their homes when attacked. Furthermore, the Sioux knew that they had been “robbed, swindled and made to bear unutterable sufferings through [Grant’s policies]... Promises, treaties and laws have been broken in the interest of schemers against him. He resists and will fight to the end against further wrongs,” even though the entire South knew the outcome to the story of continued Sioux resistance. Despite their noble defense of home, the Sioux story contained within it “the undertones of inevitable defeat,” a lost cause on the plains.²⁰

Drawing on their own experience and applying those lessons to the conflict with the Indians, most southerners realized that the Indians had no chance at victory. No matter how many small victories the Indians could win, southerners knew from their own past that an inexhaustible supply of troops would eventually wear down and defeat the Indians. Southerners predicted two possible outcomes. Some thought the outcome would reflect the Confederacy’s experience: years of hardship and struggle would result in eventual surrender. Many envisioned the complete destruction of the Plains Indians: “A general Indian war will break out, and the end of that will be the killing out of the Indians.” Others, however, yearned for the destruction of the Sioux: “Everywhere one hears only demands for extermination. ‘Kill ‘em off like wild cats!’ is the general line of the policy canvassed by

¹⁹ See Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 387-404.

²⁰ *Mobile Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1876, 2; *Atlanta Constitution*, July 7, 1876, 3.

army people here, smarting under a sense of defeat and loss.” Texans felt that nothing would suit them “better than an opportunity to pay back...the murderous Indians...by men who know how to deal with the crafty savages.” By allowing “Texas a fair show at the exultant Sioux...there will be consternation and mourning in their wigwams before many moons have passed.” In New Orleans, the general opinion, “From the highest officer of the army up to the shortest private in the rear flank,” agreed that, “there is a unit of feeling that the war against the Indians must be one of extermination.” Others saw Custer’s defeat as the death knoll for the Sioux: “this calamity [Custer’s defeat] will accomplish only one thing: that is the wiping out of the poor Indian.”²¹

Despite the mixed reaction toward the eventual defeat of the Sioux, others directly compared the plight of the Plains Indians to that of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The editor of the *Mobile Tribune* wondered: “How can such a mass be provisioned? It is no trifling matter to feed so large a body of men.” Recalling the harshness of the war years, the editor reminded his readers that in their “own Confederate time, like the Indian, we were shut out from all the rest of the world.” Unlike the Indians, the South “had a fertile soil, which the slaves worked with estimable diligence... Their work delayed the final starvation of our armies; but it was not enough,” and the Confederates “were finally forced into capitulation.” The editor then drew on the past and reiterated Lost Cause beliefs in order to predict the outcome of the Indian conflict. He felt that if the Sioux and their allies, “if held in check a short time, might by the same kind of exigency, be forced into a pacific mood.”²² But by directly linking the Confederacy to the plight of the Plains Indians, the *Tribune*’s editor also sealed their fate. No amount of bravery, no matter the skill of the warriors, no nation could stand up to the endless supply of relentless troops clad in blue making war on the Indians.

²¹ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 1, 1876, 1; *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 16, 1876, 2, reprinted from *Galveston News*; *New Orleans Republican*, July 9, 1876, 1; *Charleston News and Courier*, July 7, 1876, 2.

²² *Mobile Daily Tribune*, July 8, 1876, 2; *Ibid.*, July 19, 1876, 2.

For most southerners, their respect for Indians could go only so far. They could comment on their bravery and deceitful tactics in battle and claim that the Indians were justified in defending their lands, but they could never side with Indians. Custer, after all, was white. For all of their complaints about the chaos unleashed on the South during Reconstruction, white southerners would not sympathize more with a Sioux Indian than a Yankee cavalry soldier. “The North alone shall not mourn this gallant soldier,” cried the editor of the *Richmond Whig*. “He belongs to all the Saxon race, and when he,” led his “bold dragoons” into their last battle, “where his sun of life forever set, we behold in him the true spirit of that living chivalry which cannot die, but shall live forever to illustrate the pride, the glory, and the grandeur of our imperishable race.” For all of the Indian’s positive qualities, for the noble defense of their homes, and for their skill in battle, these qualities mattered little because in the end, the Indians had killed a white man and they would suffer for doing so. White southerners also directly linked the racial problems in the West to their own brand of race-related problems, but still felt supremely confident that they could maintain the racial order. “Neither he [the Indian] much like our own colored man can stand against the white man,” opined one writer in Mobile. Although most in the South saw Indians as noble savages, they also directly linked the Indians to other races they saw as inferior, including southern blacks. And much like African Americans in the South, white southerners knew that the Indians would soon be dominated and controlled by whites.²³ White southerners saw race as the most important aspect in the definition of the cavalier. Although they could empathize with the Indians, their loyalties lay only with their fellow white Americans. Within the context of Reconstruction, former Confederates struggled to maintain political and social control over emancipated blacks. Within this framework, Custer’s death perfectly suited the South’s needs for a symbolic hero who could quell other races. That Custer died in this duty served to rally the South

²³*Richmond Daily Whig*, July 8, 1876, 2.

around him and further explains the ease with which they adopted him as a southern hero. Their response to his death mirrored their acceptance of Custer as a hero who fought to uphold the racial order.

That the news of Custer's death reached the nation so soon after the Centennial Fourth of July celebration also altered the ways that the South's responded to his death. The patriotic outburst associated with the Centennial Fourth intermixed with the news of Custer's and the racially charged Reconstruction politics to create a militaristic brand of southern patriotism. Southerners wanted to fight for the United States to prove their loyalty. Rather than a form of patriotism that rekindled Confederate or southern emotions, white southerners after the death of Custer felt a truly emotional response in their efforts to prove their allegiance to the United States. Southerners desired for the rest of the nation to know "that we are proud of our country; that it must remain a nation forever, and that it is worth living for, dying for when it needs defenders." When southerners volunteered to fight Indians, they indicated their willingness to rejoin the Union by displaying their patriotism and loyalty through martial prowess.²⁴

An enlistment craze began almost immediately after the news of Custer's death reached southern cities. On July 8, the Cleburne Rifles of Atlanta voted unanimously "to avenge the death of Custer" and tried to tender their services to the Secretary of War, J.D. Cameron. Responding the same day, Cameron thanked the company for their "patriotic motives" but said he could not accept the Cleburne Rifles because "there is at present no authority of law for accepting the services of volunteers." Custer's old friend T.L. Rosser wished "to be commissioned by my country to avenge the death of my gallant friend and old enemy," and return to "old Virginia and get my division, who once so fiercely fought" against Custer but had since "learned to respect, honor and appreciate the high

²⁴ Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary also argues that former Confederates sought to prove their loyalty to the United States through military service upon hearing of Custer's death. See her *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 115; *New Orleans Democrat*, July 4, 1876, 4.

soldierly qualities and exalted manhood of General Custer.” Much like Rosser, other troops who had once fought for the Confederacy sought to offer their services to the United States government: “A great deal of feeling is manifested here over the death of Custer and his comrades, and the old-time spirit of the south is fired...I could start at the head of two thousand Georgia volunteers in two days for the west,” noted a military man in Atlanta. The troops from Georgia would go to the frontier “with a desire to avenge the affront to our flag and the death of our soldiers, and they would fight as hard as they had fought for the ‘stars and bars.’” The officer continued: “It is very gratifying to witness the patriotism evinced at even this temporary disaster to the national flag.” The repeated use of “our” and “my” in the statements made by former Confederates suggested that these men had put aside allegiances to their region and again felt stronger bonds of American rather than Confederate patriotism. In Charleston, South Carolina, this feeling became perfectly articulated: “Custer was a gallant officer, and, now that by-gones are by-gones we deplore, as Americans, the loss of the brave soldiers who rode to death with him, under the ‘old Flag.’” The citizens of Charleston, though, “shocked and pained beyond measure,” reaffirmed their willingness to fight for their nation: “Judging from the impressions made upon some old ‘Rebels’ in Charleston by the news of our defeat in the Indian country,” the reporter declared that, “it would take only the shortest sort of brush with any troublesome neighbor to arouse in the South the ardent patriotism that, in years gone by, sent the South to the front in Mexico.” Ending his declaration, the editorialist confirmed, “This is our country. We have the right to abuse it if we choose; but we make common cause against the common enemy, whether he be redskin or white.”²⁵

For all of their patriotic affirmations, though, southerners could not join the army. Congress had passed a bill that allowed the president to accept volunteers into temporary federal service from the

²⁵ *Atlanta Constitution*, July 9, 1876, 3; *Raleigh Sentinel*, July 18, 1876, 2; *Little Rock Daily Arkansas Gazette*, July 16, 1876, 2; *Charleston News and Courier*, July 7, 1876, 3.

western states and territories. Seen as a means of cutting costs in an age of governmental retrenchment, the policy also made sense. Westerners knew the terrain and had been acclimated to the climate and lifestyle required to ride for days on end; furthermore, they lived closer to the front and could more easily reach the battlefield. Southerners saw this not only as a means of keeping the federal army in the South to ensure Republican rule, but also an affront purposefully perpetrated by the government. By not being allowed to fight, southerners could not prove their patriotism or loyalty to the federal government and felt slighted. Military service and civic duty had long been important aspects of southern culture before Custer's defeat. Military service and the fulfillment of duty equated honor. Likewise, southern men wanted a chance to show that they fought bravely and had not lost their honor after their defeat in the Civil War.²⁶

In truth, though, some southerners had enlisted with the federal army prior to the Little Big Horn—just not in large numbers. Even the Seventh Cavalry had several southerners in the ranks who died at the Little Big Horn. Custer had not wasted his time in Kentucky. He recruited several young soldiers who remained fiercely loyal to him throughout their lives. Of the officers in the Seventh at the Battle of the Little Big Horn with the rank of Second Lieutenant or higher, seven of the forty one men were born in the South. Even some of the enlisted men in the 7th came from southern states. Of the eight hundred and six men in the regiment, fifty-two came from below the Mason-Dixon Line. Although totaling less than ten percent of the effective strength of the 7th, the number of southerners, while nothing like the pre-Civil War numbers, did indicate that a number of southerners had entered federal service. Other regiments, the 2nd and the 4th cavalries also had similar proportions of southerners in their officer corps. The 2nd had six southern officers; the 4th eleven. With the exception

²⁶ *Congressional Record*, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 5012-5013. Initial authorization from Congress allowed the president to temporarily accept volunteers into service came on July 24. President Grant, however, desired to turn his newfound power into law when his advisors told him that the Indian Wars would last longer than originally planned. Congress, in the 2nd Session, denied him the power to expand the army permanently, not because of any deep-seated fear of military power, but because of budget cuts. See, *Record*, 2nd Session, 423, 754.

of a select few, most of these officers in these three regiments originated from Border States or states in the Upper South—Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, Arkansas and Tennessee. In the Seventh Cavalry, a 2nd lieutenant in Company H, Ernest Albert Garlington, had been born in South Carolina but entered West Point by appointment from the state of Georgia. Most surprisingly, his father, Albert Creswell had served in the Confederate Army as a major. Other officers in those three regiments hailed from the states of Alabama, Texas, and North Carolina. These officers, though, seemed the exception to the rule.²⁷

Some reports suggested that southern blacks would be able to enlist, which further angered white southerners. Not only would it allow blacks the honor of experiencing combat and performing their civic duty, but they would serve at the expense of white volunteers. A white newspaperman in Augusta, Georgia, thought that the enlistment of the Douglass Rifles, an all black militia company, would provide many blacks the opportunity “to distinguish themselves” in battle, “and perhaps get scalped” while doing so. If the government called for their service, the editor assured his readers, these “boys” would eagerly respond. The thought of black casualties seemed to encourage at least one editor.²⁸ But white southerners understood that military service also led to political empowerment. If African Americans enlisted to avenge the death of Custer—an enlistment based solely on civic duty and not racial loyalty—southern whites understood that limiting the political power of blacks would become more difficult. Rather than risk the chance of African American enlistment, white southerners ended their calls of volunteering and turned to removing the last remnants of the federal army from the South.

²⁷ War Department, *Official Army Register for January 1, 1876*, Adjutant General’s Office (Washington D.C., 1876) pp. 50-68; Kenneth Hammer, *Men With Custer: Biographies of the 7th Cavalry* (Fort Collins, CO: Old Army Press, 1972).

²⁸ *Augusta Constitutionalist*, July 11, 1876, 2.

White southerners saw Custer's defeat as a convenient means of expelling the federal army from the last three unreconstructed states, Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, as well as a way of preventing blacks from enlisting in the army. In these states, a limited number of Federal troops still occupied the capitol buildings and nominally, at least, sought to protect African Americans. Most white southerners considered the presence of federal troops, whose sole purpose of occupation, they felt, was to enforce the rights of African Americans to vote Republican, as a slight against the traditional southern political leadership. After Custer's death, southerners felt they could use his memory and his cavalier status in order to enact political change. The troops stationed in the three capital cities, although very few in number, represented more of symbolic occupation rather than harsh military rule. White southerners understood that the Army would only defeat the Indians "if the whole army is devoted to that purpose." By looking at the dead soldiers on the frontier, southerners understood that more soldiers would be needed to quell the Sioux. If the federal soldiers stationed in the South marched off to fight, white southerners knew they could easily regain their former political power and restore the antebellum racial order. Southerners soon began demanding that every federal soldier needed to be sent to the frontier: "Under the circumstances every soldier should be withdrawn from the Southern States, where they are not needed, save for the purpose of helping the wretched, tottering old republican organization to retain its defiling hold upon the South."²⁹ White and black alike realized that the withdrawal of federal troops spelled the end of Reconstruction and would restore white Democrats to power in the South. Without a troop presence, even a symbolic one, Reconstruction would end in the South and the policies of the Radical Republicans would die before they reached fruition.

²⁹ Brian Dippie has also argued that southerners attempted to exploit Custer's death for their own political motives, namely the removal of the army and the Democrat's return to power. See Brian Dippie, "The Southern Response to Custer's Last Stand," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 21, no. 2 (Spring 1971): 18-31. *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 7, 1876, 3; *Ibid.*, July 12, 1876, 2 *Charleston News and Courier*, July 7, 1876, 3.

Though their goal of expelling the federal army never came to fruition, southerners nevertheless found Custer's cavalier image a useful one. By linking their respect for Custer's sacrifice and his acceptance as a cavalier, southerners could use his memory to place blame on Grant and his administration for their failures with Indian policy in the West and their Reconstruction policies in the South. In New Orleans, S.W. Bennett, the cartoonist for the *Democrat* directly linked the stationing of soldiers in the South and the harsh treatment imposed on southerners by those troops to the massacre of Custer's men in the West. It implied that if those federal soldiers garrisoned in the South had been stationed in the West both the Indian problem and the southern political problems would have ended. Blaming Grant and other Republicans for Custer's death also provided another means for white

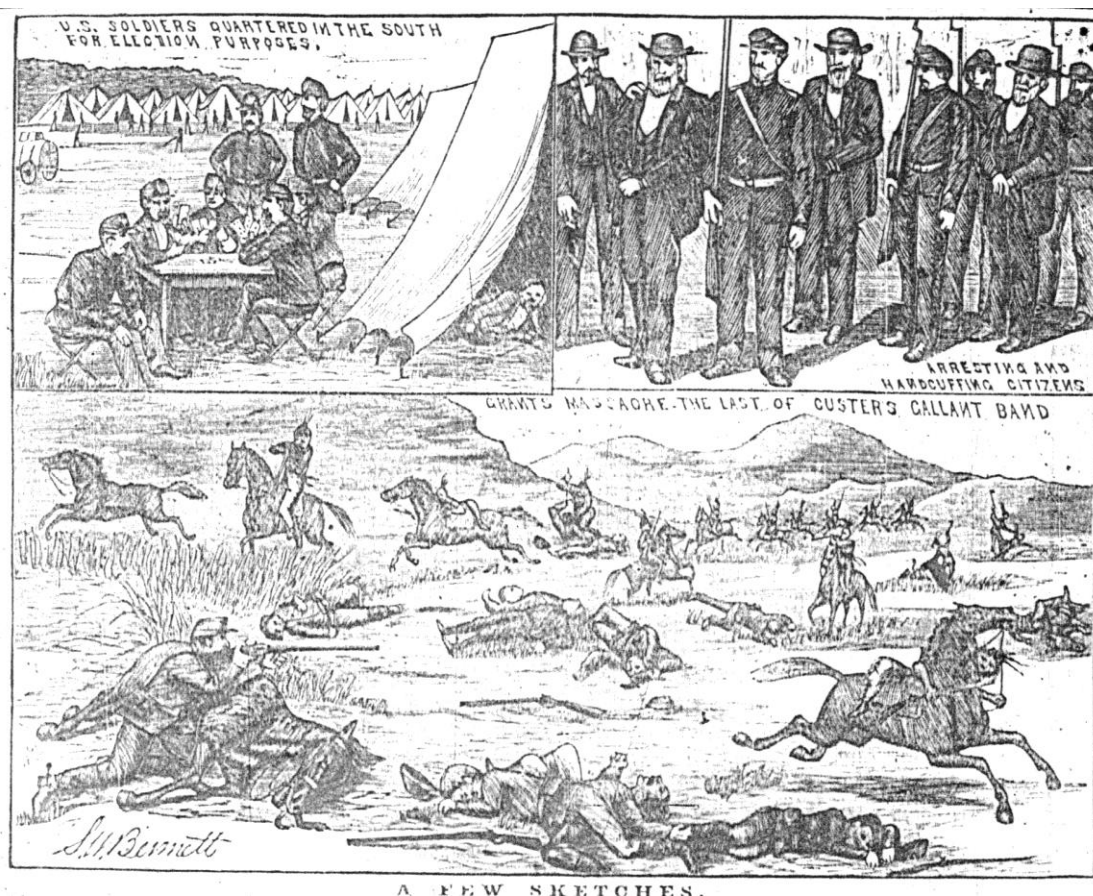


Fig. 1: *New Orleans Democrat*, July 16, 1876, 1. It reads: "U.S. Soldiers quartered in the South for election purposes. Arresting and handcuffing citizens. Grant's massacre. The Last of Custer's gallant band."

southerners to invoke the cavalier image and tie it to the Republican Party's racial policies. In Louisville, the *Courier-Journal* stated that the Republicans and "the other revolutionary and incendiary Radical leaders" should be held responsible for Custer's defeat because of their desire to "secure negro rule in the Southern States," they would have gone so far as to have "every soldier drawn out of Indian country and the frontier left unprotected." This statement belied tangible southern fears that the northern occupiers would never leave and that southern Democrats would never again control politics in the region. Southerners claimed that they only wanted a "living chance enjoyed by the North, to pursue its way unmolested by...Federal troops...We want a living chance to collect our resources and pay our debts denied us by the Republican policy and press, which, having failed to exterminate us, would knag us to death."³⁰

The "living chance" that southerners spoke of meant returning whites to political power and restoring the racial hierarchy that had defined southern life for more than two centuries before being overturned in 1865. As both a creation and a symbol of a mythic past, the cavalier image was used in order to help refashion the society that fostered its creation. Custer's cavalier image became a powerful force within the South because it could aid in the creation of a society that more closely resembled the antebellum South than the one that had come about after the Civil War. By accepting Custer as a southern hero, southerners used his image in an attempt to recreate antebellum society with whites in power over a subservient black population.

But when it became apparent that the troops stationed in the South would not leave to quell the Native Americans, southerners sought other means of accomplishing their goals of redemption. Others also began to tire of Custer. A lawyer in Kentucky remembered how Custer "destroyed so many

³⁰*New Orleans Democrat*, July 16, 1876, 1; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, July 10, 1876, 2; *Ibid.*, July 8, 1876, 3.

beautiful homes in Virginia” during the war. Recalling one such instance, the lawyer wrote of the hospitality of one Virginian who had invited Custer into her home to dine with her family. One of the children “came running into the house saying to her father that their factory was on fire. Custer coolly [sic] remarked ‘not to be disturbed that it was by his order.’” Although the Kentuckian wished that, “Genls. Sheridan and Sherman would go west to avenge the death of Genl. Custer,” he also wanted them to “take Genl. Butler along too” in hopes, perhaps, that Butler would meet the same fate as Custer. After about a month of intense newspaper coverage, the story of Custer’s death became relegated to minor notes on the last few pages of southern newspapers. Even before that, southerners tired of reading about him. “Are you tired yet of hearing Custer’s praises said and sung? We hope that the papers are as tired writing as we are reading about him.”³¹ With more important and equally shocking news emerging from the South, people had more urgent and pressing concerns. While the frontier battles against the Indians continually received coverage, Custer’s name faded from papers as his memory became less useful to the South as a means of achieving political power. Other means of Redemption and the restoration of white political power could be found in closer places than the plains of Wyoming. From Hamburg, South Carolina, for example, news soon arrived in the rest of the region that whites and blacks had fought and killed one another. The politically and racially motivated killings made it clear that whites would not tolerate black political power and would use violence to crush it. The upcoming presidential election between the Democrat Tilden and the Republican Hayes received even more attention from Southerners. While Custer’s legacy as a cavalier had failed to secure the traditional power of white southerners, most remained confident that with the upcoming election, Democrats all over the country would sweep the elections and restore political power into the hands of the white South.

³¹ Henry F. Turner to “Aunt”, July 21, 1876, Turner (Edward and Family) Papers, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, Hill Memorial Library, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA; C.L. Pettigrew to “My Dear Aunt,” July 23, 1876, Pettigrew Family Papers, Folder 309, Southern Historical Collection.

Despite the ephemeral nature of Custer's apotheosis in the South after his death, it was no less intense and emotional. Real, visceral emotions surfaced upon learning of his death, while the southern reaction displayed many of the important cultural beliefs of the South. Custer's military prowess, his chivalrous nature, his extravagant style, his esteem for the South, and the color of his skin all combined to create a potent image that had larger uses for the South in the nation. Even though the cavalier image had its roots in the antebellum south, those that resided in the postbellum world looked on Custer as the embodiment of the cavalier figure and used his image to create a society that resembled the one that gave rise to cavalier figure. Ultimately, white southerners saw Custer's death as a means of crushing any sort of racial resistance to white political and social power. Yet when the South did not achieve its goals, Custer's importance faded as other, more promising, situations for southern gain arose.

Quite unintentionally, however, by honoring a northerner with cavalier status, southerners weakened the distinctiveness of their military tradition and the cavalier. Though southerners claimed that their brand of militarism differed significantly from that of the North, the acceptance of Custer as the pinnacle of southern militancy proved otherwise. Granting Custer cavalier status had several undertones and implications. First, southerners recognized that cavaliers did not have to hail from the South; that bravery, chivalry, and honor did not solely define southerners. That a Yankee soldier could attain cavalier status demonstrated that not only was the South's military tradition not distinctive from the North's, but that it was also weaker. By accepting Custer into the pantheon of southern heroes, southerners tacitly admitted the superiority of northern soldiers. If southern cavaliers could not defeat northerner soldier, then perhaps the cavalier figure needed an injection of fresh blood to strengthen the image. Custer filled this role perfectly, except that he too suffered defeat. Yet by accepting Custer as a cavalier, southerners weakened the distinctiveness of the image and its eventual disappearance from

southern life. New ideas of manhood and military heroes would arise that displaced the cavalier to tales that veterans told their children until those children, in turn, could create a new form of southern military hero that drew on the past but represented their own beliefs and circumstances.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM CAVALIER TO VOLUNTEER

After George Armstrong Custer's death in 1876, southerners had named him, despite his service in the Union army, a cavalier. In 1898, southerners again faced the prospect of honoring a preeminent northern soldier, Theodore Roosevelt, who led his regiment of Rough Riders to several victories during the Spanish-American War. Honored for his bravery, his manhood, and his ability as an officer, Roosevelt received accolades similar to those showered on Custer, but never that of cavalier. In the age of one-party politics in the South, white Democrats disliked Republicans but found common ground with Roosevelt because of his martial prowess and his respect for southerners. Despite the esteem many southerners had for Roosevelt, he could not become a cavalier because fundamental changes had swept over the South that had inexorably altered the contours of southern life. Ideas of manhood, the importance of reconciliation, the Lost Cause celebrations, and race relations all evolved and their new forms likewise changed the nature of the cavalier image. Southerners still retained the image of the cavalier—a mounted white man struggling to defend his race while balancing the traits of manliness and womanliness—but it had become an image firmly rooted in the past. As a martial figure in a land held in thrall by the Civil War, the cavalier came to define traits and men of a bygone age. Modern men retained some of the cavalier's most enduring traits, but had also taken on harsher tones that lacked refinement.

Within the southern states, the Spanish-American War had unleashed a growing trend toward the veneration of the common man. No longer needing the symbolic leadership of the cavalier, southerners believed that volunteer soldiers could take up the banner of the cavalier. Rather than one figure representing the entire region, common white men became just as symbolically potent as the

cavalier had once been. Throughout the process of redefining the importance of the volunteer, however, southerners drew on several aspects of the cavalier image and applied those descriptive terms to the volunteers. All the while, southerners strove for a more emotional version of reconciliation, one which they believed they accomplished by fighting for America in the Spanish-American War. Southern militancy combined with the new symbolic power of the enlisted soldiers and bridged the gap between past and present; between the cavaliers of old and southern men at the dawn of the twentieth century.

The real assault on the cavalier image came not as the Rough Riders charged up the slopes of Kettle Hill, but in the 1880s as fundamental shifts occurred in southern life. In a speech delivered in 1884 at the unveiling of the Robert E. Lee statue in New Orleans, Charles Fenner, the president of the monument association, waxed romantic about the qualities of the Confederacy's most famous general. Robert E. Lee, according to Fenner, descended from an "illustrious ancestry...every record of which indicates a race of hereditary gentlemen." From the first Lee, Launcelot, who had invaded England with William the Conqueror to Robert, the cavalier blood of the Lee family "had not degenerated as it percolated through the centuries." For Fenner, Lee remained the consummate image of the cavalier, but even Fenner's peroration reflected the many changes occurring within the South. Fenner believed that the Confederate celebration had to vindicate its heroes so that their cause would not lose its "merit and grace and beauty." In other words, southerners had to rescue the Confederate heroes of the past from their reputation as traitors to the United States. To do so, Fenner thought, Southerners could not "afford to sink our heroes to the level of mere prize-fighters, who deluged a continent in blood without...lawful cause." The Confederate celebration had to justify not only the South's actions, but also its heroes. "Mere brute courage, and even the highest military skill, are not, of themselves, fit subjects for commemoration in brass," argued Fenner. For those militant qualities to receive

commemoration, they had to have symbolic purpose attached to them.¹

For many southerners, the Confederate dead served many purposes—defiance, remembrance, or a celebration the past. In Atlanta, at a monument dedication to former Senator Benjamin Hill, the speaker J.C.C Black directly connected the mythic past of the cavaliers to the Confederates who fought in the Civil War. The southern soldiers after the war, Black remarked, “returned to their desolated homes like true cavaliers, willing to acknowledge their defeat, abide in good faith the terms of the surrender, accept all the legitimate results of the[war], respect the prowess of those who had conquered, and resume[d]” their lives. Average men in the South, Black continued, were “sons of the proud cavalier, bound together by common traditions, memories and sentiments.”² By binding the cavalier image to common Confederate veterans, Black tied the South’s mythic past with its recent past. He also provided, most importantly, the symbolic attachment required for celebrating more militant, rather than refined, values that Fenner sought. Volunteer soldiers could be celebrated not just for their service, but for their qualities as soldiers and men, even if they did not match those of the cavaliers of myth.

By tying the common soldier to the cavalier image, Black mirrored many of the changes occurring within the South. He followed a growing trend in southern society that venerated the common Confederate soldier for his role during the war. A change in the nature of Confederate celebration likewise contributed to the decline of the cavalier figure. The memory of the Civil War perpetuated by the Lost Cause intimately connected southern ideas of warfare and the nature of combat to the present generation. Though mostly portraying the Civil War through a lens of “moonlight and magnolias” romanticism, the Lost Cause began to change its form of celebration and its emphases in

¹ “Ceremonies Connected with the Unveiling of the Statue of General Robert E. Lee, at Lee Circle, New Orleans, Louisiana, February 22, 1884,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, XIV (1886): 64, 69.

² “Address of J.C.C. Black, at the Unveiling of the Hill Statue, Atlanta, Georgia, May 1, 1886,” *SHSP*, XIV (1886): 170, 178.

the 1880s. Earlier Lost Cause celebrations, all headed by wealthy whites, had given way to the United Confederate Veterans, an organization comprised of men from all ranks of the Confederate Army as well as all social classes. The UCV's emphasis on the common soldier could be seen not just in the celebrations that occurred all throughout the region, but in their depictions of soldiers as well. By democratizing and redefining the cavalier, southerners had essentially erased any need for a select group of cavaliers to represent the entire southern military tradition or the South itself.³

This view of the past mirrored the changes occurring within southern society during the 1880s. The process of redefining the cavalier, however, also ensured that no new cavaliers could emerge. As common soldiers came to dominate the means of remembering the war, it came as no surprise that the Confederate private became a more prominent figure in the Lost Cause. The importance of the Civil War generation in postbellum southern life had entrenched the idea that the last cavaliers fought in the Civil War; that the cavalier lingered as a figure of the past. The UCV's vision of the war became so prominent, in fact, that the older version of the cavalier became somewhat controversial. The cavalier, because of his aristocratic bearing, tended to divide white southern society along class lines. When discussing the adoption of the seal of the Confederacy as the seal of the Southern Historical Society, one member objected because the Confederacy's seal pictured George Washington mounted on a horse. The speaker felt "no admiration for the character of the cavalier," and he wanted to "discard all references to the cavalier of old, because it implies a division of society into two orders." The implied division, between rich and poor, would have been "an idea inconsistent with Confederate institutions." Although he still admired Washington, the author felt that applying cavalier status only to the wealthy would create rifts in white southern society. But by honoring the egalitarian elements of the cavalier

³ On the increasing importance of the UCV, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 104-114.

image, divisions within society would not exist because all men could achieve similar praise.⁴ Instead of a more aristocratic version of the cavalier, southern society democratized the many characteristics of the cavalier image and began applying the various terms to common soldiers. Postbellum southern whites began honoring the Civil War generation by bestowing many lowly soldiers with the title of cavalier, knowing full well that the older generation's experiences in wartimes made them more deserving of that title than any other generation in the South's history. They also succumbed to the fact that no new cavaliers could emerge. Changing concepts of manhood had all but eliminated the cultural context for a new cavalier, while legalized segregation had also erased any need for a cavalier figure to maintain the racial order. Instead, common men assumed that role and more symbolic ones as well.

Removed by a generation from the struggles of the Civil War, sectionalism still pervaded much of American political life. Although moves toward national unification had begun, lingering animosity remained between North and South. With the downfall of the Populists and the threat of biracial political order ended, white southerners once again enjoyed the fruits of white supremacy. Other problems at the close of the nineteenth century, however, arose to hamper white confidence and authority.

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, men in the burgeoning middle class had begun to fear the loss of their manhood, vitality, and virility. Rather than valuing traditionally manly traits, the growing middle class came to embrace the values of fiscal responsibility and practiced self-denial, prudence, and thrift in pursuit of economic security. Economic dependency coupled with the rise of immigration, the increasingly popular women's rights organizations, and the growth of an industrial economy in the later years of the nineteenth century created a class of men who did not own their own

⁴ "Seal of the Southern Historical Society," *SHSP*, XVI (1888): 422.

property, work their own land, or produce any discernible goods. Faced with threats to their manhood from working-class immigrants, blacks, and women petitioning for enfranchisement, middle-class whites sought a means to redefine their status as men who deserved not only their prosperity, but also their place in society.

The most successful way for middle-class men to reassert their manhood, argues historian Gail Bederman, lay in affirming their superiority over members of supposedly inferior races, namely African Americans and Indians. Individuals in late-nineteenth century America began to understand the world as a competition between races. Seeing themselves as the predominant American race, white men had to claim racial superiority to ensure their continued control of political power at home. Because the natural world evolved, according to Darwin, as a conflict for survival, many also began to understand the competition between nations in these terms. A Darwinian understanding of nature likewise permeated the interconnected ideas of manhood and civilization. By linking male supremacy to white supremacy, Bederman showed, Americans in the late nineteenth century had few qualms about exerting force on other societies with weaker men: the strength and qualities of a man, after all, represented the strengths and qualities of the civilization that created that man. If white American men became too effeminate or too lazy, American civilization could not progress as nature dictated. In order for the white race to advance its version of civilization it first needed masculine men capable of overcoming men of other races.⁵

Although Darwinian social theory permeated thought in turn of the century America, other influences played upon ideals of manhood as well. Most importantly in the South, Protestantism most directly conflicted with Darwinian theories: evangelicals believed that God directly controlled human events, not evolution. Evangelical Christianity had firmly entrenched itself in American life by the end

⁵ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-44.

of the nineteenth century, and the influence it had over millions of American men and women made it one of the most powerful institutions in everyday life. Evangelical faith stressed not only belief in salvation and an afterlife, but also acting in a manner befitting a Christian. Moderation, self-restraint, and humility topped the list of personal characteristics deemed desirable by evangelicals. In the South, though, most held different values based on conceptions of honor that clashed with the more pious worldview of evangelicals. Notions of sobriety and thrift that dominated the northern middle class held little sway for many southern men. Instead, southerners clung to older, and often times more violent concepts of honor as the most defining masculine characteristic. As the home became the center of emotional life, southern men sought deliverance from the more restrictive and feminine world of faith and home life and turned to leisure activities such as hunting, drinking, and attending the occasional cock-fights as a means of accomplishing this escape. In the eyes of southern evangelicals, these male retreats embodied sinfulness. To stamp out the southern man's sinful nature, evangelical culture, according to historian Ted Ownby, "strove to bring men closer to the temperament of women and children." By the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelicals had succeeded and had come to dominate southern culture and life.⁶

Thus, throughout the nation shifting patterns of economic change sparked the growth of the middle class, whose members feared a perceived loss of their manhood. In the South evangelicalism brought about an apparent loss of masculinity as the Christian values of self-restraint and humility became ingrained characteristics of southerners and replaced the more violent and honor-bound men of the past. Ironically, however, northern middle-class values and those of southern evangelicals closely mirrored one another. Although the reasons for the growing importance of these values differed—northerners sought economic prosperity, southerners their eternal salvation—the net result appeared

⁶ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1-18, quote on 14.

similar: a perceived loss of manhood.

With so much flux and insecurity surrounding the notions of American manhood, the cavalier image in the South underwent corresponding changes. Though the word “cavalier” itself did not disappear from the southern vernacular, its use took on different connotations than it had prior to Reconstruction. Instead of naming a single, great man a cavalier, southerners made cavalier status something available only to men in the past, and more specifically to men who had fought for the Confederacy. By restricting the cavalier to the southern past, southerners solidified the place and importance of the Confederate generation. Even when it came time for southern men to once again take up arms, they were defined not as cavaliers but as the embodiment of individualism and masculinity. Rather than define a man based on his chivalrous qualities, soldiers during the Spanish-American War were defined solely on their masculine qualities, especially bravery. The shift in meaning denoted a larger change occurring within southern society. No longer did the cavalier represent a legendary figure of the southern past able to symbolize the needs of an entire people; instead, the common soldier became the most highly regarded military figure.

Theodore Roosevelt most closely resembled the antebellum-style cavalier, but southerners never conferred upon him cavalier status. For southerners, Roosevelt certainly proved his bravery as a soldier, and represented the pinnacle of American military culture and white American manhood as well. But he was not a cavalier. At the outset of the Spanish-American War, the white South had little need for a cavalier figure to rally around: Democrats all but controlled southern politics; whites dominated southern society. The sole remaining issue—reconciliation with the North—did not require one man to represent the entire region. Instead, thousands of individual southern who enlisted acted as the basis of reunification along lines of military service. Southerners, by 1898, thought of themselves as Americans, and saw the war with Spain as the ultimate means of proving their loyalty.

Raised on stories of the bravery and gallantry of Confederate troops, Theodore Roosevelt often praised the martial abilities of Confederate soldiers. His mother, Martha Bulloch Roosevelt descended from a prominent planter family from Georgia. His mother, maternal grandmother, and aunt all lived with young Theodore during the Civil War years. The three Bulloch women—all ardent supporters of the southern cause—living in the Roosevelt household in New York during the war caused a certain amount of embarrassment for Theodore’s father, an equally passionate supporter for the Union cause, especially after his wife reportedly flew the Confederate battle flag from their home after a Confederate victory. Although Theodore Sr. desired to enlist, his family needed looking after as well. With four children to care for, and the possibility of having to make war against his in-laws, he hired a substitute and put his patriotic duties to use in the political rather than the military arena. With his father gone, his female relatives continuously fed the young Theodore with stories and memories from their youths in Georgia and tales of the family’s heroes during the Revolution.

His fascination with the past led to a childhood filled with reading from his father’s vast library. His youthful inquisitiveness, though, remained limited due to severe asthma and an unhealthy body. His natural curiosity could hardly be contained inside such a frail frame. When not suffering from asthma, Roosevelt enjoyed hiking, riding horses, and collecting all matter of flora and fauna. As a young boy, his father encouraged him to exercise because he felt that without a healthy body the mind could never thrive. He began a training regimen that included boxing and weight lifting. Despite the healthy proclivities of a growing boy, young Roosevelt seemed continuously ill and perpetually combating his illnesses.

As a young man, Roosevelt married in his early twenties and successfully ran for the state legislature in New York. His boundless energy and ambition soon came crashing down when his young wife died. To ease his depression and seek an outlet for his abundant energy, he traveled west,

to the frontier, and became enamored with the rough and tumble lifestyles of cowboys and ranchers. On the frontier, Roosevelt discovered a world that even his lively and vivid imagination would have had trouble envisioning. For him, the frontier represented a world full of possibilities and hope, a place to forget the cares of the past and forge a new life in a land that hinted at the greatness of the American nation, one as large and as boundless as the plains themselves. Vast tracts of untouched land, booming frontier towns, and other American citizens just as ambitious and enterprising as himself filled Roosevelt with the wonder and promise of the growing American nation. Over the course of several years, Roosevelt invested in his own cattle ranch and herd. The work exerted during his new venture transformed Roosevelt from thin and pallid looking into a rough and muscular man complete with suntan and mustache and miraculously cured of his debilitating asthma. His experience in Dakota confirmed for him the restorative powers of the frontier and the wonders of vigorous, manual work. For the rest of his days, Roosevelt became a staunch advocate for the benefits derived from leading a strenuous life.⁷

The reinvigoration of American manhood promoted by Roosevelt needed a testing ground. When Cuban rebels renewed their struggle for independence in 1895 against Spanish imperialists, the American government saw a chance to intervene and rid the western hemisphere of the last vestiges of Old World influence. In less than three years time, America committed to a war that supported the *Cuba Libre* movement. Americans clamored for war when confirmation arrived in the United States that the Spanish had caused the explosion that destroyed the *USS Maine* anchored in the port of Havana on February 15, 1898. Roosevelt, then the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, resigned from his position and sought a commission as an officer in the invasion force. Vowing to practice the type of

⁷ The most accessible source for Roosevelt's young life are: Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1979; Modern Library, 2001), 3-114; and, David McCullough, *Mornings on Horseback: The Story of an Extraordinary Family, a Vanished Way of Life and the Unique Child Who Became Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

lifestyle that he championed, Roosevelt saw war with Spain as an opportunity to put into action the benefits of the strenuous life on American manhood. He understood the upcoming conflict not only as a contest between nations, but as a contest between men. In order to prove his own manhood, Roosevelt needed to demonstrate his martial qualities against a formidable opponent.⁸

Using his stature as an important politician in New York and his high position within the Navy, Roosevelt secured for himself a lieutenant-colonelcy in a regiment of cavalry volunteers. By April, newspaper reports teemed with accounts of Roosevelt narrowing down the applicants for his select regiment. For every one applicant Roosevelt accepted, he supposedly rejected twenty potential recruits in order to hand-select only the hardiest men, but also those with the proper pedigree, for his regiment. Thus, his regiment, the First Volunteer Cavalry, or the Rough Riders, grew into an assortment of western cowboys, southern horsemen, college athletes, polo players, and blue-blooded aristocrats from New York. Undergoing training at a base outside San Antonio, the local press took an immediate liking to Roosevelt and his regiment.

By the end of May, the Rough Riders began their journey toward Tampa for embarkation to Cuba. Upon arriving in Florida, they soon learned that the transport ships did not have enough space for the horses of the enlisted men so only officers could transport their mounts and ride them into battle. Setting sail for Cuba on June 14, Roosevelt and his troops reached the island six days later and soon thereafter experienced their first taste of combat. On June 21, the Rough Riders disembarked at Baiquiri and soon thereafter “walked into a well laid Spanish ambushade.” That Roosevelt’s advance “did not end in the complete slaughter of the Americans was not due to any miscalculation in the plan of the Spaniards, for as perfect an ambushade as was ever formed in the brain of an Apache Indian was prepared,” but only the bravery and skill of Roosevelt prevented their demise. Having “walked

⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 170-215.

squarely into it,” the contingent of Rough Riders under Roosevelt’s direct command very methodically formed a line of battle and returned fire at their hidden enemies. With remarkable coolness, Roosevelt calmly walked the length of his line and encouraged his men to keep up their return fire. Their accurate and steady volleys soon forced the Spanish to retreat from their position. Although Roosevelt’s detachment consisted of less than half of the Rough Riders, his successful action—unbeknownst to Roosevelt at the time of the skirmish—paved the way for other American advances against the entire line of Spanish entrenchments. Though the reports confirmed that Roosevelt and his men had been surprised by the Spanish attack, American troops had actually been given reports by Cuban scouts that a large body of Spanish troops had hidden themselves on a nearby hill and lay in wait for the American advance. Yet Roosevelt and his men could not locate the Spanish troops because they had camouflaged themselves behind foliage and their smokeless powder did not betray their positions. The ability of the Rough Riders under the leadership of Roosevelt to overcome the Spanish troops, despite being completely exposed to their fire, became proof that these men, and Roosevelt in particular, represented the finest that American manhood had to offer. Indeed, offering the highest praise it could muster, the *Atlanta Constitution* confirmed that Roosevelt and his troops had “fought like men.”⁹

Roosevelt’s calm under pressure and his ability to lead his men to victory did not go without notice in the southern press. With their actions at Baiquiri, Roosevelt and his men “cover[ed] themselves with glory.” Roosevelt “led the charge with great bravery,” and, “scorned to hide...in the grass or underbrush as the enemy did, and ultimately...drove the enemy back toward Santiago, inflicting heavy losses upon them.” Despite having initially poured deadly fire into the Rough Riders, the hidden and entrenched Spanish fell back because they “were utterly unprepared” to meet the

⁹ *Atlanta Constitution*, June 27, 1898, 1; *Ibid.*, June 26, 1898, 1.

“desperate charge” led by Roosevelt. “The charge on the enemy,” according to a report in Jackson, Mississippi, “was most gallantly led by Roosevelt’s Rough Riders, who fought with the greatest valor and deadly effect.” Though southerners admired Roosevelt’s refusal to hide in the grass while under fire as courageous and his ability and effectiveness as a military commander as commendable, the praise seemed to stop there. These characteristics—leadership, bravery, and manliness—seemed like the sole qualities that interested southern newspapers and their readers. Perhaps the skirmish at Baiquiri did not permit Roosevelt the opportunity he needed to make an impact on the southern people.¹⁰

In the more famous and decisive Battle of San Juan Hill, which occurred on July 1, Roosevelt once again played a key role. The American forces had advanced to within miles of Santiago, the primary objective of the land campaign. The Spanish had entrenched the summits of a series of steep ridges called the San Juan Heights. In order to besiege successfully Santiago, the Americans knew that the heights above the town would have to come under the control of their forces. Roosevelt had little say in planning the attack on the heights, but he had an enormous amount of influence regarding the outcome of the battle. Originally positioned at the base of a hill he and his men named Kettle Hill, the Rough Riders suffered a number of casualties because their position lay exposed to Spanish artillery fire. Furthermore, the Rough Riders, along with the rest of the American forces, had been given no battle orders because the commander of the ground troops, General Wheeler, had become gravely ill and the new commander declined to order an attack. The chaotic command structure combined with the growing desperation of the troops provided Roosevelt the opportunity he needed to lead his men in a charge up the steep hill. Lacking orders, but not initiative, the Rough Riders and their commander handily swept the Spanish from Kettle Hill with no support from other infantry regiments or artillery.

¹⁰ *Charleston News and Courier*, June 25, 1898, 1; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, June 25, 1898, 1; *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, June 25, 1898, 1; *Jackson (MS) Daily Clarion Ledger*, June 25, 1.

Having witnessed the success of Roosevelt's regiment, an order for a general advance spread throughout the American lines at the base of the Heights. Leading his regiment once again on a head-on charge against an entrenched enemy on high ground, Roosevelt and his men somehow overwhelmed the Spanish and helped clear San Juan Heights of any Spanish presence. In the charge up San Juan Hill, the Rough Riders received crucial support from the Tenth Cavalry, a unit comprised entirely of black enlisted men but white officers. In the confused situation that occurred while fighting to take the hill, Roosevelt effectively assumed control of the Tenth as well as scatterings of other disjointed infantry units.¹¹

Though he played a much more important role in the decisive Battle of San Juan Heights, Roosevelt received very little individual praise for his role in the fight. Certainly he did not go without mention after the battle, but for the most part the focus of southern interest had shifted. The only substantial press Roosevelt did receive after the beginning of July came in the form of illustrations depicting military action. These illustrations exemplified not just his actions and bravery in combat, but the actions of all of the troops involved in the fighting. Even these illustrations, however, took the focus off of Roosevelt and made combat appear more egalitarian in nature by demonstrating the heroic nature of American soldiers. At the head of his men in an illustration from the *Charleston News and Courier*, Roosevelt seems stiff and posed. In comparison, the men appear vibrant, disorganized, and full of energy. Roosevelt, though, appears only as a figurehead for the great mass of American troops, the primary focus of the illustrator; instead of leading the men, they force him up the hill. Most significantly, a horse, the very essence and symbol of the cavalier figure, lay dead at Roosevelt's feet. Instead of towering physically and symbolically above his men, Roosevelt had been placed on equal footing with the soldiers. This more democratic view of warfare had

¹¹ For a more thorough treatment of Roosevelt's actions in the Spanish-American War see Ivan Musicant, *Empire By Default: The Spanish-American War and the Dawn of the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 371-431.

essentially erased any southern need for the antebellum-style cavalier figure.



Fig. 2: *Charleston News and Courier*, July 24, 1898, 13.

Most accounts took Roosevelt out of the equation altogether. One report noted that, “the American troops stormed the heights, and Spanish valor had to yield to the bulldog tenacity of and courage of the Anglo-Saxon.”¹² The report linked the courageousness of the American troops to the color of their skin, as well as explaining two traits that southerners found admirable in the common troops: bravery and determination. Rather than a heroic figure described for both gallantry and bravery, the mass of American troops had become labeled simply as brave and resilient. Gone were romantic trappings surrounding the description of soldiers, and in their place arose more egalitarian

¹² *Charleston News and Courier*, July 3, 1898, 1.

descriptions. An illustration from a paper in New Orleans demonstrated this more modern view of the citizen-soldier and the nature of battle. The common soldier's importance had completely erased Roosevelt and his role from its rendition of the fighting on San Juan Hill. Instead of a gallant Roosevelt leading the Rough Riders up the heights at San Juan, the illustration from the *Picayune* portrayed a more realistic vision of the combat—troops taking cover behind a mound of earthworks, an officer crouching to avoid enemy fire, and the wounded being carried away. Conspicuously lacking any sort of cavalier figure when

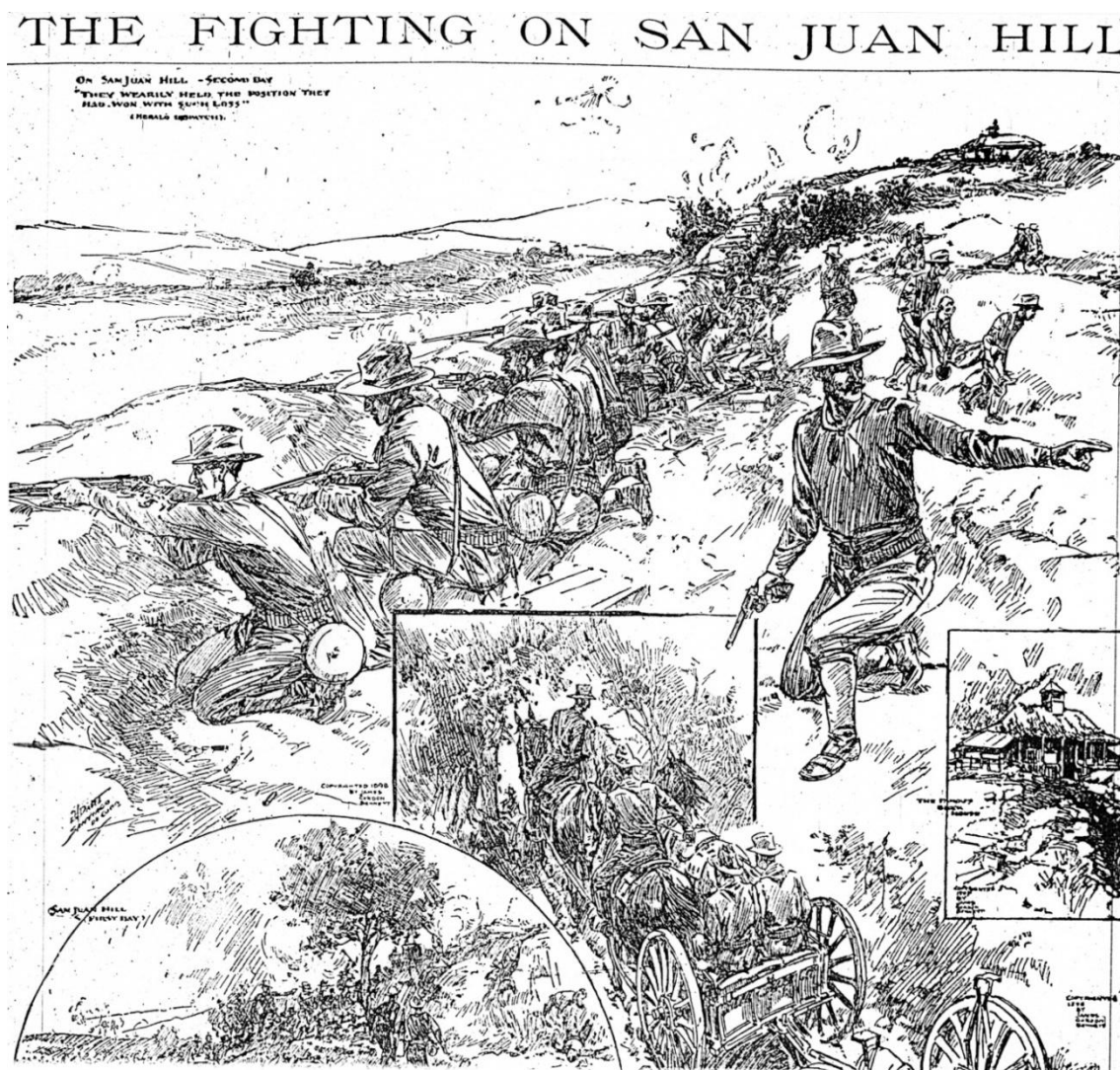


Fig. 3: *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, July 29, 1898, 6.

compared to the illustration from the *News and Courier*, the *Picayune's* work appeared more boring and tame, but also provided a more precise glimpse at modern warfare. Instead of charging up a barren hillside like the Rough Riders, these troops wisely seek shelter and continue the fight.

Instead of focusing on Roosevelt's exploits, the public's attention had turned to the common soldier who had volunteered to fight not for personal glory or political gain, but for a host of other reasons including the chance to prove their loyalty to the nation and to reclaim the manhood and honor that the South had lost at Appomattox. Southerners had begun to view the common soldier of the Spanish-American War in the same light as they had once viewed the cavalier figure from previous American wars. Southern volunteers, many believed, "are made of the stuff that makes heroism common."¹³ Southerners began using elements of the cavalier image—the embodiment of manhood, racial control, and the political usefulness of the volunteers—that applied to the late nineteenth century. Victorian descriptions of soldiers who embodied both manly and womanly traits had disappeared, as did the importance of chivalry, honor, and horsemanship. By 1898, the symbolic ties attached to the cavalier no longer served a purpose for the white South. Or, more specifically, a single, typified hero who could represent the beliefs of an entire region became unnecessary because individuals could play that role. The focus in the South had been taken away from the great men and the career soldiers and had turned to the common soldier, especially to the volunteers from the southern states. The volunteer soldiers represented a new style of hero, one rooted in the actions and beliefs of the common man, regardless of his position or standing in society.

The first aspect of the cavalier image that southerners found useful in describing the volunteer soldiers became the volunteer's embodiment of manhood. Just as Roosevelt espoused ideas about the superiority of a vigorous, white man, so too did southerners. No account of combat left out the actions

¹³ *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, July 5, 1898, 7.

of the volunteer troops or missed an opportunity to praise their abilities. Common epithets such as “vigorous,” “impetuous,” and “brave” filled many accounts of the volunteers from the southern states. Indeed, when McKinley issued a call for volunteers, southern papers noted how the president wanted “The War...to be pushed with Vigor.” Generals had a difficult time establishing firm picket lines because of the “impetuosity on the part of the gallant American soldiers” in their rush to engage the Spaniards. Their bravery, likewise, received commendation: “The troops bore themselves most gallantly in the hot fight in which they were engaged and by their steady valor completely demoralized the Spaniards.” Certainly cavaliers had been described for their bravery, but never their impetuosity. Southern society seemed to honor the recruits not just for their bravery, but for their willingness to disobey orders, to push a fight until they achieved victory. The idea of self-control that had figured so highly into the cavalier image did not factor into how southerners described the volunteer. Respecting the idea of individualism and vigorous manhood more than restraint and balance, southerners in 1898 saw the volunteer soldiers in Cuba as their idealized embodiment of manhood. Though the cavalier’s style of manhood differed from that of the volunteer, the southern citizen-soldier assumed the cavalier’s mantle as the realization of southern manhood.¹⁴

On several occasions, the southern recruits exemplified to those on the home front how the idealized version of manhood came into play in other areas besides the battlefield. One “little episode” occurred between recruits from Georgia and others from Michigan. The troops from Michigan “in a spirit of mischief” began to sing “Marching Through Georgia.” The Georgians appeared “perfectly cool, [but] they were really ‘hot in the collar,’ for they felt that the song was intended for their special benefit.” Feeling emboldened, the recruits from Michigan then began singing, “Hang Jeff Davis from a Sour Apple Tree.” This caused the Georgians to lose all sense of restraint and they descended upon

¹⁴ *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, May 9, 1898, 1; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, June 26, 1898, 10; *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, June 25, 1898, 1.

the northern troops “with their bare knuckles.” In an effort to reconcile, a military band from the two states met and played together “Marching Through Georgia.” According to the *Constitution*, “Sectionalism was certainly forgotten by these soldiers, some of the extreme north and others of the far south. They were all as one people, and when the bands played ‘Dixie’ the Michiganders yelled their applause as heartily as the Georgians cheered when the strains of ‘Yankee Doodle’ floated out over the camp.” When a trainload of Mississippi volunteers arrived in Chickamauga to train, they “gave their northern comrades the ‘rebel yell’ by way of assuring them that they were ready to fight with them to the last ditch.” Readers could understand that although animosities still existed between the two sections, the soldiers acted as a symbolic adhesive, bonding the nation together through their actions. But, unlike the cavalier figure, the volunteers did not possess self-control. Rather, the home front seemed to encourage and applaud their emotional and violent outbursts.¹⁵ These episodes also demonstrate how southern volunteers became much more than just the embodiment of manhood, they also came to symbolize reconciliation between north and south.

Anxieties about southern manhood came to the forefront when young men were turned away from military service because of physical ailments. The general belief existed that military service benefitted the physical well-being of recruits and likewise provided a gauge able to measure the loyalty and patriotism of their home states. However, in Georgia, hundreds of state militiamen could not serve in the war because they failed physical fitness tests. The editor of the *Constitution* bemoaned this fact, arguing that, “Tens of thousands of men who would be rejected today under the vigorous system of physical examination that has been set up, went through the [Civil] war, and came out sound and healthy men.” When E.A. Scott, a volunteer in the 1st Louisiana Volunteer Infantry, did pass his inspection, he seemed genuinely surprised especially because of his history of past ailments. Writing

¹⁵ E.A. Scott to Mrs. L.M. Scott, June 20, 1898, Scott (Eva and Family) Papers, LSU; *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1898, 3; *Ibid.*, June 25, 1898, 6; *Ibid.*, June 1, 1898, 5.

to his father, he proclaimed, "I have just finished my physical examination for entering the U.S. army and made a maximum on it & am the happiest man in the world for I thought their [sic] might be some little thing that would knock me out as I had never been examined by a physician." Scott also wanted his aunt to know that he "made perfect on lungs and heart for I know she has allways [sic] been anxious about my lungs." Drawing on their knowledge of military experience to understand that "weaklings grew strong" because of military service, southerners felt that instead of rejecting recruits, the army should accept more: "The trials of army life proved to be beneficial to the great majority of those who went to the front in spite of their disabilities, and made of them as good soldiers as any." Military service, then, would make men out of those otherwise doomed to live as "weaklings," and in turn, those men would make good soldiers and bring honor to their states and to the South. Many young men also tried to enlist, like the cadets at Clemson College, though more than two-hundred of the cadets were deemed too young to serve by the state and the cadets's "anxious parents...who do not want their boys to go to Cuba." By being rejected for service by recruitment officials, the cadets could neither prove their loyalty to the nation, nor would they undergo a rite of passage into manhood.

Even soldiers in the war commented on the restorative powers of military service. One of the Rough Riders, R.G. Knox of Louisiana, wrote to his mother that, "I don't think that I have enjoyed better health for the last 4 years...The sudden change is like a rapid ascent from a swamp to a mountain top. I think that my blood is as thin as water & at first I could hardly stand a bath in the cold surf but with the enormous appetite that one develops here, that difficulty is soon overcome." The trials faced in Cuba in military service had created a group of men who felt confident in their newfound toughness and manliness. When summing up his war experience in Cuba, Knox concluded that, "if Central American fevers and Spanish bullets had no effect on me, I must be thoroughly

immune.”¹⁶ Service in Cuba and the trials of military life coalesced into a singular and potent brand of manhood for southern volunteers.

As the embodiment of southern martial prowess and manhood, southern volunteers took on a more esoteric function of the cavalier image. Just as Custer had served as a political symbol for southern home rule and white supremacy, the citizen-soldiers in the South during the Spanish-American War came to symbolize the political realities of reconciliation. Although the citizen-soldiers had always played an important role in American militarism, their role during the conflict in Cuba became increasingly symbolic. American volunteers did not solely represent their nation, but they also signified a direct link to the bravery of Civil War veterans and the process of reconciliation itself. Even before any fighting began with Spanish troops, many understood the role of the Spanish-American War as a means for the South to exonerate itself for its role in the Civil War and to help restore national unity. During the Spanish-American War a national patriotism combined with a renewal of white manhood to bring about the completion of national reconciliation. Patriotism and reconciliation, though, became terms that only applied to whites. The new patriotism that had been forged by war in 1898 became just as segregated as other areas of American life.

The most expedient and symbolic way for the South to prove its national loyalty—by sending young troops to the front—proved very effective. This had the effect of not just bonding southerners to the American nation, but also demonstrating to the rest of the country that the South was ready to regain its standing in the nation. “It has been a common saying in the South almost ever since the days of reconstruction,” noted one editorialist, “that a war with a foreign Power was the one thing needful to weld the broken nation together.” Southerners, “have been conscious of the fact that whatever they

¹⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, June 3, 1898, 4; E.A. Scott to G.A. Scott, May 7, 1898, Scott (Eva and Family) Papers, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA.; *Houston Daily Post*, June 23, 1898, 4; *Charleston News and Courier*, May 4, 1898, 6; R.G. Knox to Gertrude Knox, August 26, 1898, J.P. Knox and Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 19, LSU; J.P. Knox to G.A. Knox, August 28, 1898, LSU.

might have against the North[,] the Northern people were none the less bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, and that only an opportunity was needed to show that blood was thicker than water.” When the opportunity southerners needed to prove their patriotism arrived, they embraced it wholeheartedly. Though each state had a quota of troops it had to raise based on population, more southerners enlisted than could be taken into service. According to the secretary of war R.A. Alger, southern volunteers comprised almost thirty percent of both the volunteer officer corps and of the volunteer soldiers. In all, more than forty-eight thousand southerners enlisted and served in the conflict with Cuba.¹⁷

Understanding that the volunteers fighting in the American uniform represented their home states and the South in general, southerners placed a great amount of pride on the number of recruits and their actions. Early calls for volunteers met remarkable success and volunteer regiments sprang up all over the South and the nation. The individual southern states often boasted about the number of soldiers that had enlisted and sent to the front. For example, Texans exhibited pride when recounting their contribution to the war effort: “The war is at last bringing us into better notice. It is becoming a prominent piece of general information that Texas was among the first to furnish her quotas and stands ready to comply with all further calls made upon her.” Furthermore, Texans felt that the enlistment of volunteers, “are matters for much State pride and gratification,” declared the *Houston Daily Post*. “We follow the blue-coated boys from our towns and fields with affectionate interest, and while we trust they may all come back to us safe and sound we feel that under whatever circumstances the Texans are tried the State’s old-time reputation for dash and heroism will be fully sustained.” In the capitol of Mississippi, some felt that, “All Jackson should turn out when the gallant soldier boys who have of their own volition volunteered to go to the front and fight for their country’s flag arrive. They are noble fellows.” In much the same way, South Carolina believed that its volunteers, “must have [their]

¹⁷ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 15, 1898, 5; R.A. Alger, *The Spanish-American War* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1901), 19-20.

proper place in,” the war, “not in horse play...but in the ranks and wherever there is fighting to be done.” Strongly supported by their home states, volunteers helped realize the vindication of Confederate and provided a tangible form of reconciliation based on military service.¹⁸

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the war for many southerners became the national, and not sectional, nature of the volunteer regiments, and the Rough Riders in particular. No other regiment symbolized so forcefully the martial nature of reconciliation. Roosevelt purposefully crafted his regiment to demonstrate the pervasive quality of American manhood. So enthused by the prospect of serving with such a famed regiment, John Astor of New York, reported the *Houston Daily Post*, “offered to bring with him a complete battery of rapid fire guns,” while the “most noted and experienced frontiersman of Texas,” Lee Hall, offered to have an entire squadron of Texas Rangers available for Roosevelt. Nearly three-quarters of the recruits, though, came from the West, and newspapers closely followed the interactions between the refined, eastern recruits and their more hardened western counterparts. The western Rough Riders along with, “A delegation of thirty-nine of the swell dressers, coach drivers, golf players and cotillion leaders of Fifth Avenue will formally abandon course dinners and hot baths and share the coarse blankets and fried bacon of the fierce men of the West.” The Texan press granted respect to the aristocratic troops from New York, noting that, “The New Yorkers left Fifth Avenue for the distinct purpose of seeing real military service and doing some real fighting and they are well fitted for it. They are all of fine physical stature and have been well trained in horsemanship on the polo field and fox chase.” The *Charleston News and Courier*, though, did not appear as kind to the recruits from New York, calling their enlistment into the Rough Riders, “One of the Queer Phases of the War Fever at the North.”¹⁹

¹⁸*Houston Daily Post*, June 23, 1898, 4; *Jackson (MS) Daily Clarion-Ledger*, May 3, 1898, 8; *Charleston News and Courier*, April 25, 1898, 4.

¹⁹ *Houston Daily Post*, May 14, 1898, 7; *Ibid.*, May 11, 1898, 3; *Charleston News and Courier*, July 24, 1898, 13.

The language employed by the Houston reporters, while obviously meant to mock the men from New York, also belied military concerns stemming from southern cultural values. The paper sought to allay suspicions that the northern volunteers were not fit for the task of soldiering, and that, most importantly, they wanted to fight. When the New Yorkers left all of the trappings of their civilized existence behind in New York, and planned on training and fighting with the rest of the men, despite the differences in background, they received applause from nay saying southerners. The Charleston paper, however, derided the New Yorkers and saw their only saving grace as the “three Southerners just back from cow punching in the West,” who had also enlisted in the Rough Riders. Whereas some Southern papers found the regiment’s makeup problematic, Roosevelt purposefully created a regiment comprised of men from all over the nation. “It has been Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt’s idea,” noted the *News and Courier*, “that the former leaders of the cotillion could learn more readily the use of the saber and revolver and become better horsemen by association with the cowboys who have lived in the saddle and slept on their firearms nearly all their lives.” Not only would the northerners learn how to fight, but the experiences would become formative ones for the cowboys who “might benefit from contact with the...men of leisure and derive from the companionship some of the good characteristics of ‘the pampered darling of society.’” One member of the Rough Riders noted the distinctive national flavor of his unit, and felt pride in its members: “Our regiment was picked from nearly every state in the Union & from every walk in life & they are undoubtedly a fine body of men.” Although the class distinction of the motley regiment dominated most reports, the reports of the Rough Riders showed a national cohesion not present in the U.S. military since the Mexican War. The interplay between northerners, southerners, and westerners embodied by the Rough Riders represented a renewed sense of nationalism and faith in those from

other parts of the country.²⁰

Though other historians, particularly Nina Silber, have argued that a union between Northern masculinity and southern femininity provided a model for reconciliation, soldiers during the Spanish-American War did not see this as the case. Based solely on military terms, reconciliation had to conform to preconceived notions about militarism. For their part, southerners who served in the Spanish-American War understood that southerners, despite defeat, still had a superior military tradition. Northern aristocrats, then, had to learn from southern and western warriors more advanced methods of making war. Coincidentally, from the northerners, those from the South and West were to learn how to behave like men of means and leisure. Southern manhood and martial skill provided a means of achieving reconciliation by teaching more effeminate Yankees how to act and fight like men.²¹

Green recruits sent to the front had to cope with not just deadly diseases and enemy troops, but also the pressures of their loved ones on the home front. In this case, American troops in the Spanish-American War had to prove not just their efficacy as soldiers, but also had to provide the long-sought reconciliation between north and south. Their trial by fire, though short compared to troops in the Civil War, confirmed among the southern people that fighting men had proven their manhood and qualities as soldiers. Southern volunteers also had to contend with the valiant image of Confederate soldiers held in the mind of the South. Rather than eclipsing the Confederate soldier, the Spanish-American War soldier effectively created a means of amicably facilitating reunion between veterans from both North and South—of bridging past with present. The younger generation of American

²⁰ *Ibid.*, May 6, 1898, 1; R.G. Knox to Gertrude Knox, August 28, 1898, J.P. Knox and Family Papers, Box 4, Folder 19, LSU. Most recently, Heather Cox Richardson has noted that the three regions of the nation— North, South, and West—combined to create one unique form of American nationalism after Reconstruction. See, Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

²¹ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

soldiers had to prove to the older one their prowess in battle to show that they deserved the laurels placed upon them by society. The *Charleston News and Courier* noted the role that the “heroes of 1898” had in fostering a sense of national reunification along military lines as well as the recognition given to them by older generations of soldiers: “Veterans bearing scars and mementos of battles fought nearly 40 years ago will line up in the streets with the young fellows....” Even in the North, the reporter noted, veterans “From the ranks of Custer’s old squadrons gray and grizzled ‘Wolverines’ will point to the empty sleeves brought from La Quasima [sic] and El Caney by beardless Rough Riders and exclaim, ‘Boys, you’ll do!’” The trial by fire that the beardless soldiers received inducted them into the southern pantheon of military heroes only after they received the support of veterans who could judge for themselves and the rest of the South the worthiness of their heirs. In turn, the troops fighting in Cuba should revere the “great and noble” Civil War veterans “with all of the honours and all the evidence of love and gratitude.” By doing this, the soldiers in Cuba would “honor themselves and honor the reunited country of which they are citizens to-day.” Because of the importance of Civil War veterans in American society, Spanish-American War troops had to receive their tacit approval in order to receive the laurels that the veterans of the “late unpleasantness” had garnered. But in order to fully receive the support of the veterans, the younger soldiers had to display the appropriate reverence toward the past. Not until they received acceptance by Civil War veterans for their bravery and service could the new generation of citizen-soldier take their place in society as heroes.²²

Once the volunteers had gained the support of the veterans in 1898, however, the rest of the South soon followed the lead of the Civil War veterans. The quality and ability of the soldiers who had enlisted to fight the Spanish provided a direct link to the Confederate past and allowed southerners to express patriotic sentiments toward the nation. “This war with Spain will not be like the war in this

²² *Charleston News and Courier*, September 4, 1898, 14; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, July 23, 1898, 4.

country more than thirty years ago,” began the editor of Charleston’s *News and Courier*. “There is no North or South in this struggle...but the whole country, all the States of the Southern Confederacy and of the United States, are equally responsible not for the occasion of the war, but for its success.”²³ Although it seemed that the editor felt that a separate southern nation still existed, he correctly noted the effect that the war would have on American patriotism. Southern soldiers serving in the American army produced the symbolic reunification of the American nation torn asunder by four years of civil war. Since the war’s end, both northerners and southerners alike had espoused reconciliation rhetoric and principles, but neither region felt a true emotional loyalty to the other. Literature, battlefield reunions between northern and southern soldiers, plays, and tours of the South all became popular modes of espousing ideas of reconciliation. But in the end, warfare against a common foe united North and South in a way that no amount of popular literature or sentiment could have. “The very last vestige of sectionalism,” wrote one reporter, “has been blown away in the smoke of guns aimed at a common foe.”²⁴

The role the military played in reunification proved fundamentally important. Because a war had split North and South apart, it seemed fitting that a war bring them back together. Uniting northerners and southerners, especially the veterans of the Civil War, the war with Spain became the capstone in the national quest of growth and renewal. Though the “motives which prompted the Southern militia to volunteer for the present war are not of recent origin...It is not true that the South has suddenly awakened to the realization that it is a part of the nation. As hard as it may be for the North to understand, the South would have responded to a call for volunteers twenty years ago.” Just like 1876, southerners in 1898 again sought to volunteer in the army to prove their loyalty to the

²³ *Charleston News and Courier*, April 25, 1898, 4.

²⁴ Silber, *The Romance of Reunion*, 39-92; *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1898, 4.

American government and their bravery on the battlefield. Yet unlike 1876, the government had no intention of preventing southerners from fighting. Instead, the national government relied heavily not just on southern recruits, but on southern states to provide rail transportation, lodging, and supplies for the troops. Because of the South's proximity to Cuba, southern ports were used as staging areas and training grounds for recruits from all across the country as well as points of embarkation for the invasion.²⁵

The increased federal presence in the southern states had many white southerners on edge. Memories evoked by blue-clad troops made it difficult for many to fully embrace the new patriotic sentiments that had begun surfacing in the South. While most found it easy to support the troops, others had problems celebrating their renewed ties to the American nation. Public displays of patriotism, even as the Fourth of July neared, proved scarce. In early June, one letter to the editor felt that merely feeling patriotic did not sufficiently prove patriotism. Southerners, especially, had to show their pride: "In this contest between a broad humanity and barbaric brutality no American should ever be out of range of the stars and stripes. Old Glory should be everywhere. On every school, on every public building, even on every church spire." Many southerners implored their brethren to put aside past differences and to celebrate the birth of the American nation. The editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* implored his readers to "Celebrate the Fourth!" After all, the editor proclaimed, southerners had just as much to do with the founding of the nation than northerners. He then remembered how southerners celebrated the holiday before the Civil War: with parades, the ringing of church bells, and the reading of the Declaration of Independence by a prominent citizen. The editor felt that southerners needed to rekindle that old spirit of patriotism: "Let us revive the old custom, therefore, and rejoice anew that the old flag floats over a free and united people." Those same

²⁵ *Charleston News and Courier*, July 15, 1898, 5.

sentiments were mirrored in New Orleans the day before the holiday began. For the newspaperman in Louisiana, the deep sense of patriotism now flowing throughout the South and the rest of the nation had always stirred the southern people. The soldiers in the Spanish-American War fought “with the same fierce, avenging courage as [soldiers] in the olden time.” Most importantly, however, the editor of the *Times-Democrat* equated patriotism to religion. “The essence of nationality,” he declared, “like the essence of religion, lies in the willing self-sacrifice for the achievement of a glorious end.” Self-sacrifice for the benefit of the army in Cuba would lead to emotional and patriotic fulfillment; something akin to a religious experience. Through these emotions “we can all feel that we are moving on higher levels, and thinking higher thoughts, than we could ever know in more quiet times.” That the patriotic outburst in the South had begun because of military action seemed to worry the editor. He feared that “fatal militarism” could consume the country if not checked by the people themselves.²⁶ Only through an authentic patriotism, one not dependent upon militarism, could the South truly regain its former stature in the American nation.

But for the majority of southerners, militaristic displays and military service equated patriotism. For most, military service offered an authentic form of patriotism, one that offered the young passage into manhood, a chance to prove their honor, bravery, and patriotism, and an opportunity to honor their Confederate forebears. Through enlistment and proclamations of patriotism, white southerners once again felt like respected members of national life. It became clear, however, that the patriotism that bound North and South together, did not in turn bind white and black. The heroes who emerged from the Spanish-American War only aided in the perpetuation of racial stereotypes.²⁷ Few black troops received public praise in the South. In fact, most white southerners questioned the loyalty of blacks to

²⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, June 2, 1898, 4; *Ibid.*, June 22, 1898, 4; *New Orleans Times-Democrat*, July 3, 1898, 4.

²⁷ The best treatments on the racialization of patriotism during the Spanish-American War are: Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For*, 129-149; and, David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 345-354.

the nation. In South Carolina, the *News and Courier* doubted whether blacks would volunteer for service. According to one reporter, “the country negro of this part of the State has no notion of taking part in the present trouble.” Though the reporter assured his readers that “some of them are somewhat jubilant over the...prospect of the white man being called off from home to uphold the honor of the country’s flag,” he then piqued his reader’s anxieties by mentioning the possibility that while the white men were away from home, African Americans would “become large property holders and live at their ease.” While this certainly rankled some readers, other, more grievous acts had been reported. In early May in Mobile, a black man shot and killed an Alabama National Guardsman in “a dispute over a bottle of soda water.” The black man, Louis Reed, fled the scene of the crime but the soldiers closely pursued him. Eventually found, Reed was nearly lynched by the irate soldiers but prevented when the police arrived on the scene and arrested the man. Another incident in Tampa in June also involved an altercation between men of two races. A Georgian by birth, Captain Jones had served on Tampa’s police force for several years. While on patrol, he arrested an intoxicated black soldier. Other black troops soon caught wind of what was occurring and went to aid their companion. The account told of Jones grappling with the prisoner with one hand, while fending off a mass of angry black men. When news of the story spread, Georgians wanted to avenge the affront to Jones. Nearly an entire regiment of Georgians volunteered for police duty, and “it was with difficulty that some of them were dissuaded from an attempt at annihilating the negro troops.” While the papers extolled the virtues of the white troops for their loyalty to one another, no mention had been made that the black troops had done exactly the same thing. Further, the report seemed to applaud their desire to kill the black troops for this affront to a member of the white race. These stories demonstrated to white southerners that even if blacks had volunteered for service, their motives differed from those of the white troops.²⁸

²⁸ *Charleston News and Courier*, May 5, 1898, 6; *Jackson Daily Clarion Ledger*, May 4, 1898, 2; *Atlanta*

Though overpowered, the image of Jones holding back a flood of blacks underscored the value that southerners placed on the strength and courage of white men. Racial control, then, became another aspect of the cavalier image that volunteer troops assumed. White American manhood had become such a potent symbol toward the end of the nineteenth century that the average southern white man could cut just as heroic a figure as even the most dashing cavalier. In the southern mind, any need for the cavalier image had disappeared because the average white southern man had come to represent all of the things that the postbellum cavalier had stood for—racial control, Democratic rule, and reconciliation between North and South. No doubt this shift in focus to the primacy of the common southern soldier accompanied several important changes in the nature of southern life, none more so than the triumph of white supremacy.

Southerners during Reconstruction saw the enfranchisement of blacks as a threat to their power and sought means to reestablish their political and social control. Two years prior to the American declaration of war against Spain, the Supreme Court upheld legalized racial segregation in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The separate but equal ruling ensured white domination of not just southern politics, but southern society as well. The cavalier figure, born from the plantation legends of the Old South, had always symbolized control over blacks. First as a plantation owner looking over the slaves he owned, then as a warrior fighting for southern independence and white dominance in the South, and finally as a soldier who represented the white south's attempt to thwart black Republican rule. After *Plessy*, any need for the cavalier had vanished because the anxieties that accompanied racialized political struggle had ended. But the shifting nature of the cavalier figure did not completely preclude the need for a cavalier-style hero to maintain social order. Instead, by democratizing the elements of the cavalier image, southerners essentially created a situation where any white man could act as that

Constitution, June 8, 1898, 3.

controlling force. No longer did the South have a need for a cavalier because the average white man could protect home and hearth just as well as the next southern man.

Despite Roosevelt's many qualities that southerners admired, he never received the title of cavalier. Southern society had firmly placed the last generation of cavaliers in the Civil War, and confirmed that no new cavaliers could receive recognition. However, military action in the Spanish-American War provided ample opportunity for a new generation of southerners to prove their manhood and their bravery. As they did so, it became apparent that antebellum notions of manhood had vanished as southerners praised the volunteers for their manly and aggressive nature, not their refined natures. Volunteer soldiers also provided symbolic reunification with the rest of the nation. Earning praise from Civil War veterans allowed the citizen-soldiers to act as the heralds of reconciliation. Finally, the empowered version of manhood and the brand of military reconciliation offered by the volunteers were explicitly for white citizens only. The southern volunteers took up another of the cavalier's tenets by promoting a version of manhood and patriotism that solely applied to whites

CHAPTER THREE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE VOLUNTEER IMAGE

On June 21, 1916, a detachment of the Tenth Cavalry suffered heavy casualties at the hands of Mexican troops at Carrizal, a small village in northern Mexico. After the battle, southerners clamored for war to protect the honor of the United States, but clarified that they did not seek revenge, only punishment. Though Mexican officials asserted that the Tenth had precipitated the conflict at Carrizal, most white southerners refused to believe the charges. Guilt at Carrizal would have robbed the South of its *casus belli* and its chance to punish the perpetrators. When some Americans did confirm that Charles Boyd, the white commander of the black regular troops, had begun the fight, it mattered little to most southerners. Even though the Tenth cavalry consisted of black troops, white southerners sought to avenge their deaths because ties of nationalism trumped those of race in the call for war. Southern blacks appeared even more affronted. As tensions between the United States and Mexico mounted, President Wilson called for volunteers to defend the border, southerners, both white and black, rushed to enlist. Once Carranza agreed to release the prisoners, southerners contented themselves with continued intervention in Mexico because it provided a war-like opportunity for a new generation of volunteers to prove their mettle and their patriotism. The ensuing discourse among white southerners utilized elements of the cavalier image to define and lionize a new generation of citizen-soldiers. Ultimately, the resulting composite image of the volunteers effectively replaced that of the cavalier in southern society. African Americans in the South, however, revived the cavalier image and used it to push for civil rights. Their efforts became even more concerted when blacks sought to volunteer in large numbers and combined elements of the cavalier image with the importance of volunteerism.

In March, 1916, an expeditionary force of the United States army had advanced south from

Texas into Mexican territory in search of Pancho Villa. The revolutionary bandit and his supporters had murdered more than a dozen American businessmen and then, on March 9, raided Columbus, New Mexico, all in an effort to make the United States intervene in the chaotic political situation of revolutionary Mexico. Villa assumed that an American military presence would sufficiently discredit the presidency of Venustiano Carranza, and the Mexican people would subsequently flock to him to expel the gringo invaders. Quite possibly, President Woodrow Wilson felt that Germany—in the midst of waging war against Britain and France—supported Villa and that the attack on Columbus had been devised in an effort to attract American attention to its own borders and not to intervention in Europe. Some surmised that by sending troops into Mexico, Wilson intended to send a message to belligerent nations everywhere. More likely, the president simply sought to stabilize the border and bring a fugitive to justice. Whatever his motives, Wilson assigned John J. Pershing the task of tracking down Villa by leading a large detachment of troops, called the Punitive Expedition of 1916, into Mexico. With more than four thousand troops under his command, along with an assortment of primitive airplanes and motorized support vehicles, Pershing's expedition marched into the harsh desert of northern Mexico in search of Villa and his supporters. Despite lingering doubts about interfering in a foreign nation, Wilson issued orders to Pershing that prohibited him from entering towns without the permission of the local residents; nor could Pershing engage the federal forces supporting Carranza.¹

In the chaotic situation of revolutionary Mexico, however, determining friend from foe proved increasingly difficult for Pershing and his men. The Mexican citizenry loyal to Carranza mustered only lukewarm support for Pershing and the Americans, while the Villistas and other revolutionaries became increasingly hostile toward American troops on Mexican soil. All the while, Villistas raided,

¹ Accounts of the Battle of Carrizal and the background of the Punitive Expedition can be found in: Joseph Allen Stout, *Border Conflict: Villistas, Carrancistas, and the Punitive Expedition, 1915-1920* (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1999) as well as John S. D. Eisenhower's *Intervention! The United States and the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1993).

fought, and killed the supporters of Carranza, and vice versa, while American troops vainly sought out Villa in the arid and barren deserts of Chihuahua. Realizing that Villa and his guerrillas evaded and outmaneuvered large concentrations of troops, Pershing began sending smaller units on patrols to search for any sign of Villa's whereabouts. Toward the end of May, growing Mexican anger at the American presence led Carranza to issue an order that required his commanders to prevent further American advance into Mexico by using military means.

By June, an already confused and tense situation grew worse. Angered at Carranza's recalcitrance, on June 18, Wilson called out one-hundred thousand men from the National Guard to line the border in preparation for war. Only three days later a detachment of the Tenth Cavalry received word that Villa had been spotted in the town of Carrizal. To capture the bandit, parts of troops C and K Troops headed in that direction early on June 21. When they arrived at Carrizal, Captain Charles Boyd met with the garrison commander and told him that the cavalry only wished to pass through the town to continue its pursuit of Villa. The Mexican commander told Boyd that his orders required him to deny American troops entrance into any towns and to prevent them from moving any further south. Undeterred and confident that a show of force would chase off the federal garrison, Boyd ordered his cavalymen to dismount from their horses and march toward Carrizal.

Having to cross nearly six hundred yards of rough, open ground on foot before they reached the entrenched Mexican line, the men of the Tenth stood little chance when several hundred Mexican soldiers opened fire on only eighty dismounted cavalry and three officers. Concealed during the meeting between the officers, machine guns ripped into the dismounted cavalymen and sent them searching for cover from the deadly barrage. Boyd suffered several injuries in the first few minutes of the fight and died soon thereafter. The remaining two officers both received wounds and soon were no longer able to fight. The leaderless soldiers, nevertheless, continued to fight, and managed to take out

one of the machine gun placements. After sustaining even more casualties, part of K troop retreated in confusion and panic while the rest remained stranded or pinned down. Ten soldiers died during the brief fight, a dozen more suffered wounds, and Mexican forces captured an additional twenty-three. Despite their disadvantage, the American troops inflicted forty-five casualties and even killed the garrison commander.

Pershing received news only slowly and in fragments as wounded soldiers limped back to American lines. Even before he had sent word of the defeat to his superiors in San Antonio and Washington, Mexican newspapers began cabling reports north. The American public first heard word of the defeat, then, not from American officials, but from Mexican sources.² Many Americans saw the defeat as an affront to the nation's honor and demanded justice. The national response became more complicated, however, when news broke that the commander of the cavalry detachment, and not Mexican soldiers, had precipitated the confrontation; furthermore, the American unit involved at Carrizal, the Tenth Cavalry, was comprised of black troops. Though commanded by white officers, African Americans did the majority of the fighting and dying at Carrizal.

White southerners clearly explained their desire for war as one to defend national honor and not for retaliation. Though they hoped for war, they only wanted it declared if "it would not be through the motives of revenge for the murder of American citizens." The nation's honor would suffer, many southern whites believed, if the nation went to war solely for revenge. "The United States will not engage in a war of revenge and retaliation," affirmed one editor, because "the task of conquering Mexico would not be one of formidable prospects." War with Mexico for motives of revenge would only heap disgrace on the United States "because it would be a case of the strongest people in the world overcoming and despoiling the weakest." A war of revenge would furthermore transform battle

² See, for example, Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 298-300.

into the “indefinite occupation of the country,” an endeavor that should not be “lightly undertaken or considered.” Though calling for war, southern whites wanted to ensure that the United States only declare war for the correct and moral reasons. Preserving honor required a just war, free from the taint of revenge, against a worthy opponent.³

Southern whites therefore rested their hopes for a war on proving Mexican guilt for instigating the attack at Carrizal. “Whether the clash which occurred at Carrizal will be recalled as the first of a war between Mexico and the United States depended largely on discovering which side was responsible,” claimed the editor of the *Houston Daily Post*. Throughout the negotiations between the U.S. and Mexico, most southerners assumed Boyd’s innocence in the matter and the majority of early battlefield reports confirmed this belief. The first account to arrive in the United States from an American source—and no doubt more reliable—came from a soldier who happened to cross paths with a portion of the Mexican unit involved in the battle. On board a train a day after Carrizal, the soldier “heard Mexicans boasting that they had decoyed the Americans into action by the use of a flag of truce.” Other fragmentary reports agreed, claiming that American troops had been “annihilated by a well prepared plan.” Even Pershing himself did not want to believe that Boyd had started the fight. The commander had met with Boyd just before his expedition left and reminded Boyd that the United States had not declared war and that its soldiers should not do anything to hasten that decision. Once more survivors made their way back to Pershing’s camp, however, the story began to change. One soldier present at the battle, a Mormon scout, Lem Spillsbury, blamed Boyd for the disaster because he had been “imbued with the idea that an action would bring him quick promotion, and also that the Mexicans would back down on a show of force.” Though more and more of the soldiers present at the battle blamed Boyd for what had befallen them, most white southerners refused to condemn Boyd for

³ *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 28, 1916, 11; *The State*, July 7, 1916, 4; *Dallas Morning News*, July 4, 1916, 8.

his decisions. Having already determined their position on the matter, white southerners called for war to punish the Mexican forces and to maintain national honor.⁴

Fortunately for both nations, neither leader sought a conflict: Wilson because he clung to notions of neutrality; Carranza because he still had not consolidated enough power to conduct a war. Unbeknownst to the public, the two leaders had opened a line of negotiation between their military officers, and by July 1 Wilson decided against outright war against Mexico. The white South likewise mirrored the Democratic president's tone and ended its more belligerent attitude by changing its call for war to one for continued intervention. "Do not get the idea," one editor advised his readers, "that the Mexican situation involves war in a technical sense, for it does not. It involves intervention, and intervention includes all the physical aspects of war," but it differed fundamentally from an actual war. Though partly semantic, the switch to intervention carried with it several key distinctions. Like war, intervention allowed for the continued presence of American troops within Mexican borders and the further punishment of Mexico for wrongdoing. Unlike war, which Americans believed could have only ended in the conquest of territory, intervention would allow the United States to help reform Mexico without the cost of war. Just as southerners sought a moral high ground when calling for war, they also sought one for the purpose of intervening in Mexico's Revolution.

Though no longer calling for war, white southerners nonetheless saw the killing of American troops in Mexico as a punishable offense. However, the black troops of the Tenth posed a problem for white southerners. Lacking any sort of commitment to racial equality, they nevertheless had long venerated those in uniform, and it appeared that the southern military tradition dominated the region's response. The soldiers in the Tenth seemed to be held in high esteem for their service, rather than scorned because of their race. Far from being purely rhetorical, the concern shown for the captured

⁴ *Houston Daily Post*, June 22, 1916, 1; *Ibid*, June 22, 1916, 3; *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, June 25, 1916, 1; *Biloxi Daily Herald*, June 24, 1916, 1; *Columbus Enquirer Sun*, June 30, 1916, 4; *Houston Daily Post*, June 23, 1916, 1.

and killed black troopers appeared genuine. Very few references arose that would have belied the fact that the soldiers who fought and died at Carrizal were African American. Initial reports called the Tenth cavalry a “Negro” regiment, but after a few days, that modifier gave way to “American.”⁵ More southern white papers reminded their readers that the troops of the Tenth were American rather than black and in most instances white papers referred to the Tenth as an American unit. By categorizing black troops as “American” rather than using race to describe them signaled that white southerners respected the service of African American troops.⁶ Because white southerners respected black troops for their military service, they more easily found common ground to honor the men of the Tenth. Southern papers noted how Pershing described the Tenth as having “showed the greatest courage” during combat and even held the “field for five hours though greatly outnumbered.”⁷ Patriotic ties and not racial divisions dominated much of the response that the white South had for black cavalymen. White respect for black fighting men also provided another reason for punishing Mexico: American, and not African American, blood had been shed. For the United States to maintain respect abroad, it had to show that killing American soldiers—even black ones—would not go unpunished.

While most reports focused on the bravery of the black soldiers, others had more sinister undertones that revealed a tinge of racism. Many reports referred to the black troops who had escaped the battle with their lives, but who had not returned to camp as quickly as many reporters would have liked, as “stragglers.” Though common in military parlance, especially during the Civil War, the frequency of the usage of “straggler” to describe the survivors of the battle evoked some notion of a poor black work ethic. Many southern white papers also hinted at the cowardice and untrustworthy

⁵ See, for example, the *Houston Daily Post*, June 22, 1916, 1 and the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, June 22, 1916, 1.

⁶ The *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1916, 1 called the Tenth “U.S.” and “American”; *Houston Daily Post*, June 26, 1916, 1, referred to the prisoners as Americans; the *Kingsport Times*, June 29, 1916 reported on the “Massacre of Americans” in Mexico; the *Charlotte Observer*, June 22, 1916, also noted that “American” soldiers had been killed.

⁷ *Columbus Ledger*, June 25, 1916, 1; *Lexington Herald*, June 23, 1916, 1

nature of stragglers. In Columbia, South Carolina, the editor of *The State*, consistently referred to survivors as “stragglers.” In Biloxi, reports that the stragglers were “confused” about the details of the battle explained any inconsistencies in official accounts. Furthermore, only the enlisted men, the black men, could be stragglers. Pershing’s early intelligence regarding the outcome of the battle originated with “the statements of stragglers,” and he could not complete an official report because “no word had come from the officers of the shattered detachment.”⁸ The use of “straggler” to define the enlisted men of the Tenth seemed to betray any sort of commonality that whites found with African American military service.

Straggler took on an even more ominous tone when Captain Morey, the lone officer to survive the battle, made his way back to American lines. Called the “hero of Carrizal,” Morey had been left to die in the desert from severe “loss of blood and thirst.” Military officials feared that he had been killed or captured, and when it became apparent that none of the “stragglers” knew of Morey’s whereabouts, Pershing began a search for him. Several regiments had difficulty locating him, but finally, Pershing’s men found Morey “hiding in a hole near the scene of the fight at Carrizal.” Instead of calling Morey a straggler or chastising his choice of concealment, he became a hero for his role in the fight and for his ability to survive.⁹ Morey’s status as an officer, no doubt, helped his standing amongst white southerners who had long respected military officers, as did the color of his skin. Yet despite his exalted position, southerners did not use any of the elements of the cavalier image to describe him. Simply labeling him a hero, southerners kept their praise for Morey to a minimum. Most soldiers in the Punitive Expedition—all members of the regular army—received similar treatment from the white southern press after Carrizal. Though discussed in the press, white soldiers, and even Pershing, never received unabashed praise nor were they defined using the cavalier image.

⁸ *The State*, June 23, 1916, 3; *Biloxi Daily Herald*, June 24, 1916, 4. *Lexington Herald*, June 24, 1916, 3.

⁹ *Houston Daily Post*, June 26, 1916, 1.

Instead, following the examples set by southerners in 1898, most of the white southern commendation went to volunteer soldiers who had left their lives behind in order to protect the nation in a time of danger. Intervention in Mexico allowed many young volunteers to prove their manhood, their patriotism, and a chance to carry on a strong southern tradition of military service. Southerners sought to protract the situation so that volunteers could enlist and take part in conflict that would supply a proving ground for a new generation of southerners. Just as southerners had glorified those who rushed to enlist at the outset of the Spanish-American War, they again sought in 1916 to honor the common soldiers who went to the front. When Atlantans broke a single-day enlistment record, members of the community proposed to hold a picnic in celebration of their city's accomplishment. The citizens of Biloxi held a war parade for the company of men it mustered. And when the troops left for the front, huge crowds gathered, like the one in Columbus, Georgia, to see the boys off.¹⁰

The support shown for the troops and the public's enthusiasm for a new generation of heroes likewise steered much of the discussion about the common soldiers. Newspapers throughout the South celebrated the volunteer soldiers. The *Houston Post* used many adjectives to describe one young volunteer, Rufus Van Zandt, similar to those used to describe Custer in 1876: "daredeviltry, dash, courage, 'pep' and ginger." Furthermore, Van Zandt exhibited skill in "Western feats," namely riding a horse. Though Van Zandt seemed to embody all of the traits necessary for a cavalier, he never received that distinction. Rather than call Van Zandt or any of the other volunteers a cavalier, southern whites used the most important elements of the cavalier image—bravery, honor, and the embodiment of manhood—to define the new generation of southern volunteers. The paper noted that Van Zandt did not appear "any braver nor any more gallant than any other Texas soldier." Even though he had been singled out for praise, Van Zandt did not represent a rarity, but the standard, among the

¹⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, June 22, 1916, 1; *Biloxi Daily Herald*, June 24, 1916, 1; *Columbus Ledger*, June 25, 1916, 1.

volunteers. If Van Zandt represented the traits of the cavalier, and if every volunteer resembled Van Zandt, then the volunteers themselves also exhibited the traits of the cavalier, and had, in fact, come to replace the cavalier in southern society. White southerners developed a new image of the volunteer which employed many of the characteristics once reserved for the cavalier.¹¹

Most white southerners began describing the volunteers by using several components of the cavalier image. First, however, most white southerners began to place the volunteers within a historical context that granted them equal footing with the cavaliers of the past. Tradition became a watchword, and to carry on distinctly southern traditions, young men from all over the South saw volunteering for military service as integral to both the volunteer and cavalier. To honor their military forbears and to recreate the glory of the Civil War, younger southerners reformed old Confederate units like the First Tennessee and the Washington Artillery of New Orleans. Even the generation too old to serve noted the strong tradition of volunteerism present in the younger generation: “Scenes of the past week have recalled vividly to the present generation the similar scenes back in 1898 and to the older citizens the tenses days in the sixties. Many of the boys now marching away were babes in arms or mere toddlers when the Maine was blown up.” Older southerners agreed that a conflict with Mexico perpetuated the timeworn practice of volunteering: “They are nobly maintaining the traditions of the American people, generation after generation responding to the call of country as unflinchingly and devotedly as their fathers in ’98 or their forebears in ’61.” The connections between past and present grew only stronger as more men volunteered and were sent to camps for training. “Given proper handling...and not too much of the martinet in their officers...they’ll prove America still has in abundance the stuff that stuck it out through Valley Forge, flung itself on the altars of an unending glory at Gettysburg, and ‘only started to fight’ with John Paul Jones.” The past evinced a pull not just

¹¹ *Houston Post*, June 25, 1916, 21.

for those enlisting, but also for those who encouraged young southerners to volunteer. Not only would the young volunteers serve their nation, but they would carry on the traditions passed down to them from their predecessors. By linking the volunteers to the southern tradition of military service, white southerners also linked them to aspects of the cavalier image rooted in the American past.¹²

Other components of the cavalier image came into use when describing the volunteers. Just as Custer the cavalier had represented the pinnacle of Victorian manhood in 1876, and volunteers in 1898 represented a more masculine vision of manhood, the qualities that the volunteers embodied in 1916 represented the pinnacle of southern manhood. However, accounts of the volunteers rarely mentioned an idealized vision of manhood. Instead, most southerners seemed to agree that volunteering for military service provided a transformative experience; a coming of age from boyhood to manhood. Those who enlisted for military service and gained honor were placed both into manhood and into the southern military tradition as well. In Columbus, Georgia, one editorialist felt especially proud of the “gallant boys” marching off to the front. “A few days ago, these heroes were just boys among us; today they are pillars to sustain the country’s honor,” the writer began. Having passed into manhood by securing honor, they also took part in the southern military tradition: “Able are these valiant soldiers that have taken on a burden their fathers carried in war a half century ago.” The author found it likely that the new volunteers “will add to the glories of their fathers,” and that “they will be soldiers of the south in whatever position they are placed.” Others felt that new generation of soldiers had a responsibility “to preserve the noble traditions, the glorious history, the white chivalry of the men and time that made up the Confederacy...to expose the villainy of Reconstruction and keep in the minds of this generation that it had mothers and fathers who mounted a high and sublime...sacrifice.”¹³ Military

¹² *Atlanta Constitution*, June 25, 1916, 11; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 27, 1916, 6; *Macon Daily Telegraph*, June 24, 1916, 4.

¹³ *Columbus Ledger*, June 25, 1916, 1; *Macon Daily Telegraph*, July 5, 1916, 4.

service, then, not only offered a passage into manhood for young volunteers, it also allowed them to take their place beside their martial forbears.

The act of volunteering became associated not just with a passage into manhood, but also with bravery and honor, other key components of the cavalier image. Modern warfare, one editor argued, had erased “the so-called [sic] glory of war.” Because Americans had seen “war in all its stark grisliness,” the soldiers who willingly volunteered for duty wrought “all the more honor” for facing “with full knowledge and grim resolution” the dangers that modern warfare entailed. Others agreed, noting how “modern methods...have largely stripped war of...the days of dashing open field fighting...by the era of grubbing, where the infantryman digs his ditch.” Despite the changing nature of modern warfare, southerners still expected their “gallant sons” to enlist, even though the very nature of combat had become impersonal and anything but honorable. The act of volunteering, however, transcended the inherent dishonorable nature of combat by proving both bravery and honor. In Charlotte, one mother proudly boasted that three of her seven sons had volunteered, and “the others are ready when called.” Volunteering not only provided examples of individual bravery, it offered tangible rewards. In Biloxi, one young woman refused to marry her suitor until he had “proven to her that he is no coward and had answered the call of his country.” One businessman who witnessed the encounter between the couple agreed with the young woman, but also commended the young man, who he felt “should be praised for his love for duty and may he return with the highest honors to claim his bride-to-be who will await his home coming.” Bravery and honor became important descriptors of the volunteers as they left their homes for the front.¹⁴ Of course, the cavalier image did not have a monopoly on bravery, but it remained one of the necessary elements of the image. Though most volunteer soldiers were characterized as brave, this did not necessarily mean that white southerners

¹⁴ *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 27, 1916, 6; *The State*, June 21, 1916, 4; *Charlotte Observer*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Biloxi Daily Herald*, June 26, 1916, 2.

used an aspect of the cavalier image to define them. But in their descriptions of soldiers after Carrizal, only the volunteers received such recognition. Only rarely did the members of the Tenth receive similar praise, and the rest of the regular army received almost no recognition at all. While bravery has served as a universal attribute for soldiers, white southerners used it in a particular manner after Carrizal.

The democratization of the cavalier figure in southern white society represented the culmination of nearly four decades of change in how the cavalier image had been used in white southern society. From bestowing the title of cavalier onto a northern soldier, to entrenching the image in the past, and finally to bestowing the image onto the common man, the cavalier image had undergone many changes. Though whites had several heroes from the Punitive Expedition, none captured their imaginations like the volunteer soldier. Even officers in the Regular Army and Tenth Cavalry received minimal praise compared to the volunteer force that never saw combat. Because of the importance of both the cavalier image and the volunteer soldier in southern culture, the two had melded in the minds of southerners to form an image that defined citizen-soldiers. Regular soldiers and officers, though respected and revered, never became associated with the newly minted volunteer image.

The importance of the volunteer image became so important in southern society, that even African Americans came to accept and perpetuate the volunteer image. In the South the degradations of Jim Crow segregation had created restrictions on black life, and basic civil rights afforded by the Constitution were ignored by the southern states in order to ensure white supremacy. In times of national crisis, blacks have demonstrated loyalty through service and have tried to convert their actions into increased rights and more humane treatment. A prevalent belief in the black community held that military service would eventually translate into political and civil rights. By employing the volunteer

image, African Americans in the South could more effectively petition their white counterparts for rights based on service.¹⁵

For African Americans the massacre of black troops served as a rallying cry. Upon learning of the Tenth's defeat, many blacks called for war against Mexico not only to protect American honor abroad but to further black political motives. By providing an outlet for black patriotism, war would allow blacks to demonstrate their patriotism and to press for rights they felt they deserved. Because military service could possibly translate into better life for blacks throughout the country, the black response to the death of African American troops was not surprising. Having many of the hopes of their race resting on the performance of the Tenth Cavalry, black southerners increasingly found ways to lionize the fallen soldiers and attempted to convert their sacrifice into political action. By employing several of the basic elements of the cavalier image to describe the dead soldiers, African Americans in the South drew upon a traditionally white figure—one that had often been associated with the repression of blacks—and transformed it into an image designed to appeal to whites in order to earn rights for all blacks. In order to prove their patriotism, African Americans in the South also turned to volunteering when Wilson called for troops. Black southerners drew on prior military service to strengthen their claims for equality. By combining elements of the cavalier image and applying it to the Tenth Cavalry as well as to the volunteers, African Americans in the South used two important customs in the southern military tradition to call for rights.

Overall, the elements of the cavalier image that blacks utilized to discuss the members of the Tenth remained much closer to the romanticized prose that southerners had used to describe Custer. The “valor of the Tenth Cavalry,” the *Baltimore Afro American* reported, won “genuine applause” from all sections of the country. Their actions, many believed, demonstrated “the stuff out of which

¹⁵ Other historians have noted that African Americans have tied service to increased rights. See, for example, Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York: Praeger, 1974).

these gallant men [were] made,” and left, “no room for doubt that they are soldiers of the highest order and reflect great credit upon their country and their race.” Aside from declaring the cavalry soldiers brave and gallant, southern blacks invoked other aspects of the cavalier image to describe the members of the Tenth. African American newspapers also reported the skill of the troopers in battle, as well as their horsemanship, two defining characteristics of the cavalier. “Most of them are good shots with rifle and pistol. Marksmanship in the army carries with it additional pay, and the black troopers have high rating for their ability to put a bullet true to the mark.” Not only did skill with a rifle carry with it practical purposes in the form of monetary value, but it also translated into usefulness on the battlefield; the Tenth’s marksmanship at Carrizal proved so accurate that even “General Gomez, the Mexican commander, fell a victim of their bullets.” Though the importance of the horse in defining the cavalier had waned over the years, blacks still found it necessary to describe the Tenth’s abilities and skills as horsemen. The black cavalrymen, noted one reporter, “are good horsemen, both in the matter of riding and in the care of their horses.”¹⁶ Because the Tenth fought on foot at Carrizal, however, the horse did not play as large a role in defining the men as cavaliers as did their conduct during the battle. Southern blacks felt that the soldiers of the Tenth “faced danger as though they were going to a picnic, and even sang in the midst of the machine guns and crack rifles of the Mexicans.” Their ease and nonchalance in battle garnered the respects of the black community that evinced pride in the fact that, “In the face of danger they [did] not flinch” and acted “as gallantly and bravely as did that gallant [Three] Hundred at the gap of Thermopylea [sic].” Others noted “how they laughed and joked in contempt of death while a storm of bullets fell around them.” Certainly, the men “must have known that most of them were doomed, yet with deadly aim and coolness sold their lives dearly.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7; *Atlanta Independent*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Richmond Planet*, July 8, 1916, 2.

¹⁷ *Atlanta Independent*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 1, 1916, 4.

The public acknowledgement of their ease in battle, their gallantry, and their skill in the arts of warfare all likened the black cavalymen to the cavalier image. Though never called cavaliers, African Americans applied the cavalier image to the men of the Tenth.

Because of the high honors bestowed upon the Tenth, black southerners sought war against Mexico. For most blacks in the South, the killing of black troops constituted “an act of war, and we can not see how the United States could avoid going to war with Mexico, in view of the fact that...her soldiers...were shot down like dogs.” Because of the killing of American troops, some firmly believed that “war between the United States and Mexico is inevitable.” African Americans offered two explanations for their desire to invade their southern neighbor. First, the southern black press explained, the honor and good name of America lay in the nation’s response to a military setback abroad. “In the eyes of the world,” one editorial in the *Atlanta Independent* began, “we would be looked upon as cowards.” The rest of the world “would no more respect the United States flag” unless the president and Congress authorized war to avenge the fallen soldiers and the good name of America. “This country has always been jealous of her honor and dignity,” noted the editor, “and other countries have always respected her; but if this act goes unpunished, the United States will be looked upon as a second rate power, and the smallest and weakest nation will hold us in the utmost contempt.” Blacks renewed their patriotism and assured whites that although, “their complexions are dark there is no lack of Americanism in their hearts...The flag is their flag—the flag of Lincoln, not of Vardaman, and they are the first to defend it.”¹⁸

Aside from calling for war to protect the honor and reputation of the United States, southern blacks proffered a second, and ultimately more important explanation for their desire to go to war. Blacks desired to prove their loyalty and worth to a nation that had long taken them for granted. By

¹⁸ *Atlanta Independent*, June 24, 1916, 4; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7.

describing the Tenth in terms of the cavalier, African Americans could also demonstrate to white southern society the sincerity of their pleas for justice. Southern blacks felt that the rampant racism prevalent within their region denied them, even soldiers, simple rights and respect granted to other members of society. “Instead of the abridgement of his rights and the constant attempt to curtail him in his privileges,” one editor wrote, “there ought to be a disposition to accord him every right and privilege to which he is entitled by the Constitution and laws of his country.” A declaration of war would provide black men an opportunity to prove their bravery and loyalty to a nation that continually denied them their rights. Blacks had “always been willing to fight for old glory, notwithstanding the fact that old glory has not always accorded them the protection and recognition which they deserve.” Despite the fact “that the race to which they belong has never had a square deal,” the editor of the *Atlanta Independent* passionately proclaimed, African Americans “have stood by their country in every conflict.” Though “their rights have been and are abridged, and they receive less consideration than the most ignorant foreigner...they have responded to their country’s call and laid their lives upon its altar.” Furthermore, the editor demonstrated that, “In nearly every State in the South the Negro is denied admission into the militia because of race prejudice. They treat him as though he is not a citizen, but a slave. No fair minded American will deny that this is unjust, unfair and unAmerican.” Others southern blacks also spoke of their situation in similar terms: “For a people, who are willing to fight and die for their country, are entitled to all the rights and immunities of which the country is capable,” one editor argued. “No privilege should be withheld from them, for duty well performed, deserves correspondingly equal and exact justice. And to deny them this is unfair and unjust.”¹⁹ Just as white southerners adopted Custer as a cavalier figure to further their own political agenda, black southerners likewise employed elements of the cavalier image in 1916.

¹⁹ *Atlanta Independent*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Ibid*, June 24, 1916, 4.

Black southerners also tied present service to past actions in order to strengthen the emerging volunteer image. “The first man killed in the Revolution was a Negro,” noted Emmett J. Scott, secretary of the Tuskegee Institute. “The Negro people take pride in the fact that it was the charge of Negro troops at San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War that turned the tide there, and that Negroes have fought bravely in every war in which this country has engaged.” Scott continued, and further demonstrated the historical precedent set by black soldiers: “The Negro was with Jackson at New Orleans, with Perry on Lake Erie, and 180,000 Negro soldiers served in the Civil War.” Others agreed with Scott, noting that “The Negro soldier has always been willing to fight and die for his country. In every war that has been waged in this country, from the Revolutionary down to the present, he has never failed to offer his life on the altar of his country.” Despite suffering defeat at the hands of the Mexican forces at Carrizal, blacks felt pride in the conduct of their troops and their desire to continue the legacy left by thousands of former soldiers. Most agreed that the “glory of the Carrizal fight is the glory of the Afro-American. The Tenth Cavalry show[ed] itself worthy of the honor accorded its brothers who fought at San Juan, and of its fathers who fought at Fort Wagner.”²⁰

Other links between past and present became even more concrete. “We colored men would go and fight...for the country whose soil has been enriched with the blood and tears of our fathers and our father’s fathers.” Another editorial understood black desires and how many “long[ed] for an opportunity to serve his country as others are serving it, but wants, and must have before he will do so, equal privileges, like protection and the same opportunity to develop along military lines that are accorded to others.” The editor even reiterated the pervasiveness of his beliefs: “This is the attitude not only of the educated, intelligent class of Negroes, it is the feeling held generally by every Negro.”²¹

²⁰ *Richmond Planet*, July 1, 1916, 1; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 1, 1916, 4.

²¹ *Baltimore Afro American*, July 1, 1916, 1; *Atlanta Independent*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 1, 1916, 4; from the *Indianapolis Ledger*, reprinted in *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7; from the *Savannah*

Finally, one writer noted how “the seven great wonders of the world pale in significance in the minds of many people...compared with the sight of thousands of black men marching perhaps to death to defend a country that holds for them but prejudice and the lynching mob.” The reporter knew that in order for so many African Americans to risk their lives in the service to such a nation, there had to be a “bright light gleaming somewhere, a light that would lead them out of the oppressor’s reach.” Blacks, argued the editor, “realize[d] that we are going not to fight the white man’s battles but our own as well.” African Americans understood the importance of past military service not just as an isolated historical event, but as a series of events that would eventually culminate in equality for all blacks and take them beyond the “oppressor’s reach.” Just as their ancestors had fought to earn freedom for themselves and for generations to come, blacks in the twentieth century would fight to provide rights and equality for themselves and their posterity.

Though highly respected for their service and sacrifice, the soldiers of the Tenth Cavalry and the use of the cavalier image had limits in the call for black equality. Five decades of service in the Regular Army had done little to increase the rights of blacks. In 1916, blacks effectively used both elements of the cavalier image when describing regular enlisted men as well as the volunteers who offered their services. Just as whites saw the common volunteer and enlisted man as more potent and symbolic; blacks also used it to make their case for equality more forceful. The aspects of the cavalier image used to describe the Tenth connected to the volunteering spirit of black men and both promised a better future through military service. Thus, when most southern blacks could not enlist much less form local militias, after the defeat of the Tenth many blacks condemned this restriction. Denying black men the option to serve also prevented the ultimate goal of social equality. Even before the killing of troops at Carrizal, blacks sought to enlist. In anticipation of war, governors called for

Tribune, reprinted in *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7; from the *Chicago Defender*, reprinted in the *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7.

volunteers and militia companies to fill state ranks.²² African Americans, conspicuously absent from the ranks of the National Guard in the South, thought that their inability to enlist offered another example of the unjust system aligned against them. “The calling out of the militia of the various States brings out [t]he fact that in but few of the commonwealth are colored men taken into the National Guard.” Trying to discover the roots of such obvious exclusion, the *Baltimore Afro American* noted the immediate effects that Redemption had on black military service: “As soon as the Democrats gained control of the Southern States several decades ago, they began dismantling the colored troops. Now, not one State south of the Potomac boasts of colored militia.” Even the National Guard regiments that had formed when governors called out their state regiments had to discharge their black members when Wilson nationalized the Guard. The Secretary of War explained that he did not desire any “mixed companies.” All of the black volunteers discharged from those units served as cooks; though the order advised blacks to form segregated regiments of their own, southern blacks could not do so because of the restrictions Democrats had placed upon the formation of black militias.²³

Lacking the ability to form regiments of their own did not prevent African Americans in the South from offering to volunteer. Emmet Scott of Tuskegee assured President Wilson that black volunteers numbered “a hundred thousand or more,” and that these men eagerly awaited the opportunity to serve their country. Though many blacks had reported for duty outside the South, they had been turned away “on account of physical defects, lack of stamina, poor vision, bad teeth or some other cause that would make them presumably unfit for duty.” Despite the number of recruits that had been turned away, African Americans reported gleefully about the “progress made by recruiting

²² Eisenhower, *Intervention!*, 281-287. Though several of his commanders wanted to send the entire Guard to the U.S.-Mexico border as early as April, Wilson decided to wait in hopes that patience would not provoke Carranza to expel Pershing’s men. However, on May 6, a band of Villistas raided a small Texas town and effectively convinced Wilson to send the Guard to the border.

²³ *Baltimore Afro American*, June 24, 1916, 1; *Ibid.*, July 1, 1916, 1;

officers in completing the muster of the National Guard Regiments,” and how “the white companies are having trouble filling their ranks” while black divisions in Ohio and Washington D.C. became the first to reach full strength. Volunteers would not solely credit their race, but also “to the country whose uniforms they wear.” Black volunteers would prove, just as the Tenth had, “valor and manliness,” and would “furnish a sufficient answer to the narrow minded race haters who judge men not by what they are, but how they look.” The majority of African American saw volunteering not as a means of capturing personal glory, but as a method of further advancing blacks as a whole by proving to their detractors their positive qualities. All the while, blacks continued to link the elements of the cavalier image of the Tenth and that of the volunteers to the prospect for future rights.²⁴

Though African Americans employed several aspects of the cavalier image when discussing the Tenth, the major focus had shifted to the volunteers and their inability to fight. The response of the black press to the denial of volunteers demonstrated the importance of the citizen-soldier to prospect of equality. In the process of defining the importance of the black volunteers, a new composite image of the volunteer did emerge that closely mirrored the white volunteer image. By connecting ideas of volunteerism to equality, black southerners democratized elements of the cavalier image to push for further rights.

The volunteer image held that military service provided a transition between boyhood and manhood. Such a transformative experience defined a generation of men and likewise made the volunteer the pinnacle of southern manhood. Volunteers, according to popularly held beliefs, were brave, honorable, and manly, and all of these traits became associated with the volunteer image. The act of enlistment and serving also provided a direct link with the past; with the cavaliers of old.

Volunteerism drew on the past in order to provide the new image with resiliency. Just as the cavalier

²⁴ *Richmond Planet*, July 1, 1916, 1; *Ibid.*, July 1, 1916, 4; *Baltimore Afro American*, July 8, 1916, 7. Interestingly enough, many southern white newspapers also printed Scott’s prediction about “a hundred thousand” blacks willing to enlist, probably as a cautionary tale. See, for example, the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, June 24, 1916, 1.

had provided symbolic power to notions of white supremacy and political legitimacy for white southerners, its various elements became a tool, ironically enough, used by black southerners to push for political rights. In fact, black southerners used the new volunteer image to describe their own volunteers in 1916, but also to describe, albeit in more romanticized prose, the regular troops who had fallen at Carrizal.

CONCLUSION

As the definitive image of white southern manhood prior in the antebellum South, the cavalier had emerged from the Civil War defeated but not forgotten. More than a decade after Appomattox, southerners named George Armstrong Custer a cavalier for his heroic sacrifice at the Little Big Horn, they did so primarily because of the symbolic political uses that southerners found for his death but naming Custer a cavalier also came easier for southerners because he represented the pinnacle of Victorian manliness, then popular within the United States. He embodied an ambiguous duality between manly and womanly characteristics associated with the cavalier image. After 1876, the Victorian values that had given rise to and sustained the cavalier had become passé in southern society. More modern values that celebrated the individual had gained momentum within the South, and the types of military heroes lionized reflected the cultural shift. As southern cultural mores changed, the cavalier image did not.

In 1898, the cultural patterns that praised the virtues of common men were unleashed during the Spanish-American War. In a situation very similar to Custer's in 1876, southerners had the opportunity to proclaim Theodore Roosevelt a cavalier; they did not. The major political issue of the day—reconciliation between North and South—could not be carried out solely by one man atop a horse, southerners realized. Instead of honoring Roosevelt with the title of cavalier, southerners lionized the thousands of individual southern volunteers from all across the region who served the nation and whose sacrifices provided tangible evidence of reconciliation. The volunteers during the Spanish-American War, though never called cavaliers, received many accolades similar with the cavaliers of old. Called brave, honorable, and dutiful, southern volunteers also came to embody a more masculine version of manhood than had little room for the ambiguities of the chivalric cavalier.

Roosevelt and the thousands of southern volunteers presented a more aggressive, coarse, and violent manhood that effectively replaced Victorian notions of manliness.

By 1916, the notions of refined or genteel manhood had all but disappeared, especially in the case of volunteer soldiers. During the Punitive Expedition against Mexico, southerners celebrated volunteers more for their sacrifice than their manhood, but most agreed that military service acted as a rite of passage into manhood. The idea was so pervasive that African Americans in the South also began extolling the virtues of both volunteer and regular soldiers who served in the army because of the possible political consequences such veneration brought.

Just as modern ideas had an affect upon the cavalier image, so too did the modern battlefield. After 1916, the U.S. Army stopped using horses in combat and robbed the cavalier of its most important aspect. The waning importance of the horse in combat signaled the changing nature of warfare itself. Modern warfare essentially made the cavalier outdated. Carrizal, in fact, showcased much of the modern technology that made cavalry units obsolete. Cavalry proved no match for machine guns, and the traditional scouting role of cavalry had been replaced by airplanes. Texas, a state that prided itself on its tradition of strong horsemen, did not want to be left behind and demanded airplanes for its National Guard brigade.¹

Modern warfare and the veneration of volunteers fit together nicely. As total war emerged, nations relied on the mobilization of the entire population to wage a popular war against an enemy that would do the same. As more and more citizens became volunteer soldiers, the home front needed a way to honor their service and sacrifice. The creation of a volunteer image served that purpose. For southern whites, it allowed them to connect the current generation going off to fight with their Confederate forbears. Black southerners also connected the service of volunteers to the past military

¹ See, for example, *Houston Daily Post*, June 25, 1916, 15.

struggles, especially the Civil War, but did so in order to strive for equality and more humane treatment.

Though replaced by the volunteer image, the cavalier had not completely disappeared from the southern vernacular. Most southerners would have agreed that the last generation of cavaliers served in the Civil War, and often used the epithet to describe Confederate soldiers. Indeed, during the Spanish-American War, accounts of all types confirmed that Confederate soldiers demonstrated the finest qualities of the cavalier while in battle. The cavalier as a warrior had been firmly entrenched in the past, but southerners also began to draw on it for everyday uses. In 1898, a bicycle maker in Missouri sold a cavalier model.² It also served as a name for many thoroughbred racehorses.³ In 1916, a popular face cream for women, called Madam Cavalier, as well as women's Cavalier gloves, were advertised in newspapers and sold across the South.⁴ Both conformed to the idea of an effeminate, Victorian styled cavalier, only the advertisers had made the products associated with the cavalier completely feminine. While the cavalier had become a vaunted military figure of the past, the word itself came into common usage as an advertising ploy. The more popular usage suggested a new role for the cavalier. It served as a tool of nostalgia that harkened back to an idealized and romanticized Old South, but it also fit into the burgeoning consumer culture of late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. The cavalier, especially the South's use of Custer as the cavalier, had been used as a figure that represented a bygone age, but it had been used within a certain cultural framework. By making the cavalier image into a commodity, the image lost much of its potency and historical relevancy which only hastened the speed that southerners adopted the volunteer image and dropped the

² *Kansas City Star*, February 21, 1898, 12;

³ See, for example, the *Lexington Morning Herald*, May 25, 1898, 7, though nearly every newspaper covered horse races, and many races featured at least participant with the name of Cavalier.

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, January 30, 1916, 5; *Kansas City Star*, February 18, 1916, 2.

cavalier image when they described the region's soldiers.

Still honored for their role and bravery during the Civil War, cavaliers held a vaunted position within the South's strong military tradition. Their status, though, had been relegated to the past. No new cavaliers could emerge because the values of southern society that underscored and strengthened the cavalier image had changed. Though it had not disappeared altogether from the South, the cavalier came to refer to an age and to a class of men that no longer existed. The more democratic nature of society and warfare coalesced to ultimately weaken the symbolic power of the cavalier. As a more egalitarian idea of warfare emerged, southerners came to embrace it just as wholeheartedly as they had embraced the cavalier in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Overall, the alteration of the cavalier image came about because of three trends. First, southern society placed more emphasis on individualism and the common man, robbing the cavalier image of its aristocratic bearing. Second, changing notions of manhood had made notions of Victorian manhood obsolete. In its place, a brand of masculinity, favored by Theodore Roosevelt, that championed vigorous exertion and violence. The refined and genteel aspects of the cavalier no longer mattered to most southerners. This included the refinement of chivalry and the romanticism attached to mounted warfare. With the horse withdrawn from the picture, volunteer soldiers fighting on foot became just as important as any other soldiers on the battlefield. Finally, the very nature of warfare reflected the changes occurring within society and made the cavalier obsolete. Total war required the mobilization of a huge number of soldiers which empowered the egalitarian nature of the volunteer image, but also stripped the cavalier of his role as well. Modern technology had all but eliminated cavalry units from the battlefield.

What remained from the cavalier image was reworked into a new image that reflected the needs of southerners at the time. Notions of bravery, honor, and skill in battle persisted, as did the idea that

the volunteer represented the pinnacle of southern manhood, but gone were the more aristocratic elements such as chivalry and horsemanship. The volunteer image, though, directly drew on the past, and especially the cavalier image, to empower it. The legacy and memory of past conflicts likewise provided the volunteer image with strength. Southerners looked to their military tradition, then, not to emphasize solely the efficacy of volunteer troops, but their revered place in society as well.

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