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Source: *The Public Historian*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (November 2011), pp. 35-62

Published by: University of California Press on behalf of the National Council on Public History

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/tph.2011.33.4.35>

Accessed: 30-08-2017 01:40 UTC

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# Relics of Reconciliation: The Confederate Museum and Civil War Memory in the New South

REIKO HILLYER

**Abstract:** This article examines the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS), an organization of elite white women in Richmond, Virginia who founded the Confederate Museum in the 1890s. Faced with the plunder of Civil War relics and cultural homogenization on northern terms, the CMLS founded the Confederate Museum to document and defend the Confederate cause and to uphold the antebellum mores that the New South's business ethos threatened to erode. In the end, however, the museum's version of the Lost Cause served the New South. By focusing on military sacrifice, the Confederate Museum aided the process of sectional reconciliation. By depicting slavery as benevolent, the museum's exhibits reinforced the notion that Jim Crow was a just and effective means of managing postwar southern society. Lastly, by glorifying the common soldier and portraying the South as "solid," the museum promoted obedience to the mandates of industrial capitalism. Thus, the Confederate Museum both critiqued and eased the economic transformations of the New South.

**Key words:** Civil War, Lost Cause, Confederate Women, Richmond, Libby Prison, New South

IN 1888, A BAND OF BUSINESSMEN FROM CHICAGO purchased a former Confederate prison from the city of Richmond, Virginia. The Chicago men—

*The Public Historian*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 35–62 (November 2011). ISSN: 0272-3433, electronic ISSN 1533-8576.

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who had ties to the insurance, oil, and sporting goods industries—dismantled the entire structure, loaded its pieces onto over fifty railroad cars, and transported them to Chicago. Once in Chicago, the old Prison was rebuilt. Surrounded by a faux-medieval wall, filled with over 100,000 relics from both the North and South, the Libby Prison War Museum opened in 1889. The *Chicago Herald* referred to the removal of Libby Prison from Richmond as a “rape of the famous old war relic from the banks of the placid James.”<sup>1</sup> But the men behind the Chicago museum insisted that they intended no offense. Rather, they were committed to offering a fair representation of the war from both northern and southern points of view. Indeed, through their display of relics from both sides of the conflict, the Chicago museum men hoped to reinforce the notion that “the country is whole.”<sup>2</sup> Despite claims to good will, however, the speculator who orchestrated the prison’s purchase, William H. Gray, betrayed an air of northern arrogance when he said that in response to the removal of the historic structure, Richmond’s residents “may kick, but it will do them no good.”<sup>3</sup>

Richmond’s residents, especially its elite white women, kicked indeed. The new Confederate Museum in Richmond, founded by the Confederate Memorial Literary Society in 1896, was the South’s response to the Libby Prison Civil War Museum, and, in some ways, the response of its founders to the industrialization and commercialization that constituted “the New South.”<sup>4</sup> Faced with the plunder of Civil War relics from the South and the threat of cultural homogenization on northern terms, the women of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS) created the Confederate Museum to document and defend the Confederate cause. The Confederate Museum enshrined the history of the Confederacy to vindicate the Lost Cause and preserve the antebellum mores that the New South’s business ethos appeared to displace.

But even as the CMLS criticized the commercialization and northernization characteristic of the New South, the Confederate Museum, too, served the New South’s social order. By portraying slavery as benevolent, the mu-

1. *Chicago Herald*, September 21, 1889.

2. Libby Prison War Museum Association, “A Trip Through the Libby Prison War Museum, Chicago” (Chicago, 1893); 3. Virginia Historical Society (hereafter VHS).

3. “Libby Prison, Chicago.” *Chicago Tribune*, February 5, 1888.

4. I am using C. Vann Woodward’s definition of the “New South.” Though the term began as a propagandistic slogan wielded by business-oriented southern leaders and their northern allies in the decades following the end of Reconstruction, historians have come to use the term “New South” both to refer to a time period (roughly 1877–1913) and to describe a particular shift in the southern economy towards industrialization. In the New South, the fate of the southern economy was in the hands of northern capitalists—“empire builders”—who, with the help of a new entrepreneurial leadership class in the South, exploited the South’s raw materials and cheap labor and maintained control of the region’s profits. As a result, the South became a “colony” of the North and became increasingly poor and underdeveloped in comparison to the North. This period is also distinguished by the rise of Jim Crow legislation and racist violence and their acceptance by the federal government. C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951).

seum justified Jim Crow; by depicting the white South as “solid,” the museum called for deference from a discontented working class; by emphasizing military valor and sacrifice, the museum gained sympathy from the North and thus fostered sectional reconciliation. Offended by the hubris of Yankee “raiders,” humiliated by the North’s financial prowess, and recognizing that those who controlled historic objects could control historical interpretation, the CMLS sought to redeem Confederate nationalism by repatriating Confederate relics.<sup>5</sup> In the end, however, by using relics to conjure both sentiment and science, the curators of the museum demonstrated that their version of the Lost Cause could be a vehicle for both Confederate vindication and sectional reconciliation.

There is a rich literature examining how the promoters of the Lost Cause glorified the defeated Confederacy through rhetoric, works of history and literature, and commemorative activity.<sup>6</sup> Such scholarship has established the main tenets of the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War: slavery was a benevolent institution that played little part in causing the sectional conflict; the Confederacy rightfully and nobly fought only to defend “states’ rights” against northern invasion; during Reconstruction, Yankee aggressors, bent on destroying southern society, imposed negro domination upon a prostrate region. More recently, scholars of Civil War memory have turned their attention to the realm of visual culture, analyzing how Lost Cause ideologues made their beliefs material through the construction of monuments, architecture, and tourist attractions.<sup>7</sup> By erecting commemorative sculpture and reviving antebellum architectural styles, southern elites lent authority to their version of the past and laid claim to the public landscapes of the present. Historians have also begun to appreciate the role that white women have played in directing and guarding the memory of the Confederacy.<sup>8</sup> From

5. The Chicago speculators are referred to as “raiders” and “mercenaries” in “Libby: A Museum. Ex-Prisoners of War Object to the Change,” *Anderson Intelligencer*, March 8, 1888.

6. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Thomas Lawrence Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows, *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865–1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865–1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Fred A. Bailey, “The Textbooks of the ‘Lost Cause’: Censorship and the Creation of Southern State Histories,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (Fall 1991): 507–533; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

7. Catherine Bishir, “Landmarks of Power: Building a Southern past in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1885–1915,” in *Where these Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

8. Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Grace Elizabeth

mourning activities to the education of southern white youth, southern white women shaped public memory of the Lost Cause and refashioned military defeat as moral victory. Further, historians analyzing the process of sectional reconciliation have examined how and why northern whites yielded to the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War. David Blight's work has been particularly influential in explaining how the South won the war of public memory and in demonstrating how the triumph of sectional healing helped to forestall democracy.<sup>9</sup>

Less attention has been paid to the role of the history museum in the formation of the Lost Cause, arguably an influential site in shaping public perceptions of the past. Examining the Confederate Museum's selective display of material objects illuminates the didactic purpose of museums and how its founders used artifacts to narrate their version of history in service of their present. "Relics and records are symbols," as one South Carolinian declared in 1897. "There is a subtle spirit in these," she warned, "and if we do not . . . bind it to our uses we will have bread without salt."<sup>10</sup> Considering the exhibits and design of the Confederate Museum offers us a fine-grained look at the vehicles of Lost Cause ideology and reminds us of the power of objects to fix the meaning of the war.

But looking closely at the history of the Confederate Museum allows us to do more than identify another arrow in the quiver of Lost Cause evangelism. First, some scholars—training their eyes on northern museums—have argued that Gilded Age museums underwrote the development of consumer culture. The Confederate Museum, on the other hand, demonstrates the South's par-

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Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "White Women and the Politics of Historical Memory in the New South, 1880–1920," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Though beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note the work historians have done to uncover how African Americans struggled to reshape the legacy of the Civil War in the face of Confederate (and eventually Union) interpretation. On African-American historical memory of the Civil War, see David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Mitchell Allen Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808–1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Meta Warrick's 1907 'Negro Tableaux' and (Re)Presenting African American Historical Memory," *Journal of American History* 89 (March 2003): 1368–1400.

9. Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865–1901* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

10. "Mrs. Thomas Taylor in South Carolina Daughters," *Confederate Veteran* 5 (January 1897): 14. Quoted in Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 181, footnote 52.)

ticular ambivalence about the advance of commercial capitalism.<sup>11</sup> If the museums and world's fairs of the Gilded Age offered three-dimensional narratives of progress from barbarism to civilization, the Confederate Museum expressed a critique of the commercialized present and a celebration of a nobler past.<sup>12</sup> Using the space of the museum as a bulwark against "Yankeefication" and commercialization, the founders of the Confederate Museum created a myth of southern virtue and sacrifice that could domesticate the effects of industrial development in the South.

Secondly, the case study of the Confederate Museum refines our understanding of the Lost Cause as an epistemology as well as an ideology. The notion that the Old South myth enabled the New South's economic development has become conventional wisdom; few historians, if any, have yet to contradict C. Vann Woodward's 1951 statement that "the bitter mixture of recantation and heresy" that constituted the New South creed "could never have been swallowed so readily had it not been dissolved in the syrup of romanticism."<sup>13</sup> But the women who founded the Confederate Museum did not see themselves merely as purveyors of romance. While their collection and exhibition of relics was a self-conscious display of sentiment—sentiment which appeared to be lacking in northern commercial culture—the founders of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society also believed that they were engaged in systematic historical work and validated their interpretation of the Civil War with the patina of science. These women did not see themselves solely as professional mourners, but as pioneers of record-keeping.<sup>14</sup> As the museum became the chief regional repository for the artifacts of the Lost Cause, its

11. Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising, and Popular Taste," in *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Russell W. Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (New York: Routledge, 1995); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Robert Rydell, "The Culture of Imperial Abundance: World's Fairs in the Making of American Culture," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989). Essays in the recent anthology, *Dixie Emporium*, consider the South's relationship with consumerism. Karen Cox argues that between 1890 and 1930, white Southerners used Confederate imagery to market consumer goods, and the "nation's consumers ate it up with a spoon." Though surely the Confederate Museum directly or indirectly encouraged the commodification of Confederate souvenirs, the women of the CMLS would have wanted to keep their hands clean of commercialism. Karen L. Cox, "Branding Dixie: The Selling of the American South, 1890–1930," in *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South*, ed. Anthony J. Stanonis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 66.

12. Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Simon Bonner, "Object Lessons: The Work of Ethnological Museums and Collections," in *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880–1920*, ed. Simon Bonner (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1989); Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

13. Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 158. Another classic assertion of how the Old South facilitated the transition to the new is Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

14. As Fitzhugh Brundage has observed, the first state-funded archives in the South would not be established until 1900 in Alabama. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 108.

founders portrayed romance as rationality and countered what they perceived to be northern encroachment upon both the memory of the war and the direction of the future.

### ***“Why may they not give Mount Vernon to Massachusetts?”***

Second only to Andersonville Prison in notoriety, Libby Prison had been a tourist destination in Richmond since the end of the Civil War. By 1885, the former site of “destitution and wretchedness” had been converted into a fertilizer warehouse.<sup>15</sup> One New Yorker, prostrated by the putrid odor coming from the former prison, remarked, “It seems fitting that this place of torment and misery of other times, should continue to be one of abhorrence and disgust to the present day.”<sup>16</sup> Despite its noxious transformation, the removal and resurrection of the Libby Prison War Museum provoked controversy among both those interested in sectional reconciliation and those who remained bitter.<sup>17</sup> Both Southerners and Northerners feared that preserving the former Confederate prison as a tourist attraction would hinder the reconciliation process by opening old wounds and fanning sectional antagonism. Other opposition stemmed from disapproval of profiting from the horrors of war. Exhibiting the prison “like a curiosity in a dime museum” for the “benefit of a clique of vulgar speculators,” one *New York Times* journalist wrote, was “justly offensive.”<sup>18</sup> Such skepticism reflected a more general distaste for the crass commercialization of the Gilded Age. Observers North and South detected the commercial motives behind the Libby Prison scheme, declaring, “No considerations of sentiment have any weight with Chicago. With her it is only a question of money, and she misses no opportunity to let people know that she has plenty of that.”<sup>19</sup> One New York observer joked, “The tomb of Virgil, just outside Naples, is for sale at a moderate figure. If the owner wants to realize a handsome sum for it he ought to get the Chicago syndicates to bid for it.”<sup>20</sup>

The sale and transport of Libby Prison to Chicago suggested that Yankee victors could loot the South’s historical artifacts and deprive Southerners of a connection to their past. In 1889, the year that the Libby Prison War Museum opened in Chicago, the *Atlanta Constitution* argued, “The historic landmarks of the South should be kept where they are,” rather than “be sold to the Barnums of the North.”<sup>21</sup> As early as the 1860s, it became common prac-

15. “Horrors of the Richmond Prisons,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1863.

16. Louise Smith Squier, *Sketches of Southern Scenes* (New York: Pratt and Son, 1885), 64.

17. Will Parmiter Kent, *The Story of Libby Prison, Also Some Perils and Sufferings of Certain of its Inmates* (Chicago: Libby Prison War Museum Association, n.d.), 6. Pamphlet Collection, Museum of the Confederacy (hereafter MOC), 6.

18. *New York Times*, February 15, 1888, 4.

19. *Chicago Herald*, September 21, 1889.

20. *New York Tribune*, quoted in Kent, *The Story of Libby Prison*, 10.

21. “Save the Battlefields,” *Atlanta Constitution*, reprinted in *The Washington Post*, April 30, 1889, 4.

tice for Yankee veterans and northern tourists to squirrel away relics from southern battlefields and prisons. In 1865, a group visiting the Richmond area from Troy, New York collected bayonets, shells, and Confederate money. Upon arriving at the “loathsome” Libby Prison, even they were astonished to see “eager chip-hunters” already dismantling a door to one of the prison cells and taking pieces of the door as souvenirs.<sup>22</sup> At a battlefield outside Richmond, a member of an 1875 party from Bridgeport, Connecticut dug up a “piece of shin bone of what was supposed to have been a rebel soldier” and his travel companion pulled a tooth from a sun-bleached human jawbone.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, Southerners began to take notice of what they saw as Yankees’ pillaging of southern relics. In response to a trend of northern merchants placing advertisements in southern papers for “Confederate relics,” one Daughter of the Confederacy protested, “What are our people thinking of? Are they selling these relics that should be held as sacred treasures in every Southern household to enterprising relic hunters, who in turn place them in museums in the North, and charge the seller a big price to visit and see what they considered worthless?”<sup>24</sup> One Richmond woman considered the Yankee theft of local monuments and relics to be an even greater humiliation than northern military and political domination. “If they can obliterate at one blow our ancient boundaries, and erect a new state by consent of the sham representatives,” she demanded, referring to the creation of West Virginia during the war, “why may they not give Mount Vernon to Massachusetts?”<sup>25</sup> Because of the connection between political and physical plunder, unreconstructed Southerners would have cringed indeed if they had heard the Chicago relic collector Charles Gunther’s claim that the Libby Prison Museum “is the only good collection of Confederate relics in the United States. They haven’t anything like it in the South.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, when Mrs. Jefferson Davis began writing a biography of her husband, she was forced to ask the managers of Libby Prison Museum for copies of her husband’s manuscripts.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the fact that many former Confederates and their descendants were selling relics to their conquerors because of financial necessity only added to the sense of humiliation. Charles Gunther, the Chicago caramel manufacturer whose Civil War collection formed the core of the Libby Prison Museum’s exhibits, received numerous letters in the 1880s and 90s from former Confederates eager to sell their souvenirs for some much-needed cash. Mrs. J. W. Morris of Appomattox, Virginia, desperate to build a new school, begged Gun-

22. *Journal of an Excursion from Troy, N.Y. to Gen. Carr’s Head Quarters, at Wilson’s Landing, during the Month of May, 1865. By one of the party* (Privately Printed, 1871), 27, 43.

23. Unidentified Author, *Journal of Ten Days Travel on Board the Steamer Frances, Left Bridgeport, September 7, 1875*. Unpublished, 27–29, VHS.

24. “Keep War Relics in the South,” *Confederate Veteran* 3 (January 1895): 23.

25. “The Jewels of Virginia: A Lecture,” delivered by invitation of the Hollywood Memorial Association, by Col. George Wythe Munford. In *Old Dominion*, “A Collection of Pamphlets, excerpts, confederate money, etc. relating to Virginia” (n.p., n.d.), 5–6, VHS.

26. Quoted in “Want West Side Museum,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1906.

27. “Notes and Comments,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 22, 1890.



ther to buy a pipe previously owned by the Confederate General Jubal Early. Mrs. Morris had the land and the lumber to build her school, but faced with the new free labor system, could “get no workmen without the cash to pay for their labor.” Mrs. Morris pleaded, “[G]ive me something, I need money! More than I do relics.”<sup>28</sup>

### *Saving the Confederate White House*

Soon after speculators unloaded the bricks of Libby Prison in Chicago in 1888–89, the Richmond City Council discussed plans to raze Jefferson Davis’s former Richmond mansion and erect a new school on the site.<sup>29</sup> The *New York Times* drew a correlation between the removal of the prison from Richmond and the pending destruction of the Davis mansion: “Libby Prison has gone to Chicago, and the demolition of the ‘Jeff Davis House’ would remove the most conspicuous souvenir of the Confederacy in Richmond.” The *Times* warned, “[S]ome of the Chicago relic seekers will offer to purchase the material in the old house to remove to that city and re-erect there with Libby Prison.”<sup>30</sup>

This threat was not lost on Joseph Bryan, Virginia businessman and editor of the Richmond *Daily Times*. Bryan saw the Libby Prison sale as a cautionary tale: He considered it “a serious error” because he believed that “[s]uch landmarks should be retained . . . as a most important means of inculcating patriotic or heroic sentiments in our people.” Lest Richmond become “an historical city . . . without historical monuments,” Bryan urged the preservation of the Jefferson Davis mansion. Bryan made his argument by envisioning how a city “without historical monuments” would appear to northern tourists. Taking as his mouthpiece a hypothetical African American hackman, Bryan wrote: “‘What are we drivers going to tell our Northern visitors when dey come down here? No Libby Prison and no Jeff Davis Mansion? Oh, no, dat will never do. Why de Davis House has put hundreds of dollars in our pockets!’” Admitting that the argument was “the narrowest view of the cause,” Bryan asked, nonetheless, “is it not worthy of careful attention?”<sup>31</sup> By displacing commercial motives onto a fictional black hackman, Bryan portrayed the preservation of the Confederate White House as an act of virtue.

Emboldened by Bryan’s pleadings, a group of elite white Richmond women formed the Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS), an off-

28. Mrs. J. W. Morris to Charles Gunther, Letter, September 2, 1895, Charles Gunther Papers, Chicago Historical Society (CHS).

29. John M. Coski and Amy R. Feely, “A Monument to Southern Womanhood: The Founding Generation of the Confederate Museum,” in *A Woman’s War: Southern Women, Civil War, and the Confederate Legacy*, ed. Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr. and Kym S. Rice (Richmond: Museum of the Confederacy and the University Press of Virginia, 1996), 134.

30. “May Follow Libby Prison,” *New York Times*, November 26, 1889, 4.

31. Joseph Bryan, “The Preservation of Our Historical Landmarks,” *Richmond Daily Times*, November 28, 1889. Thank you to John Coski for bringing this clipping to my attention.

shoot of the Hollywood Memorial Association.<sup>32</sup> Led by Isobel Lamont Stewart Bryan, the wife of Joseph Bryan and heir to one of wealthiest families in Richmond, the CMLS negotiated with the city to save what had become known as the “Confederate White House” from demolition. In 1891, the Richmond city council agreed to deed the Jefferson Davis mansion to the CMLS, and, after several years of fundraising, relic-gathering, and repairing, the CMLS re-opened the building as the Confederate Museum in 1896. This was not the first or only museum of Confederate relics in the South; in 1891 the Louisiana Historical Association, composed largely of Confederate veterans, opened Confederate Memorial Hall in New Orleans with 15,000 relics.<sup>33</sup> The CMLS regarded its work as distinctive, however, because it sought to consolidate relics from the entire South.<sup>34</sup> These genteel women congratulated themselves on their self-sacrifice and saw their act of preservation as a virtuous antidote to the vulgarities of the Libby Prison scheme in Chicago.

The CMLS believed that not only were Northerners ransacking the southern landscape of its sacred landmarks, but that the history of the late war was in danger of domination by prejudiced northern interpretation. The Confederate Memorial Literary Society was determined to counter the victors’ version of the Civil War and seized upon the Confederate Museum as a chance to prove to “all true men and women” that “[the Confederates] were right, immortally right, and that the conquerors were wrong, eternally wrong.”<sup>35</sup> The Confederate Museum’s founders argued that the museum’s treasures were “mute evidences of the righteousness of our cause” and that the collection was an opportunity to present “striking object lessons of . . . heroism and endurance,” where pilgrims from all over the nation would gather to learn the truth about the glories of the Confederacy.<sup>36</sup>

### ***“Spartan Wives and Mothers”: The Confederate Memorial Literary Society***

The ladies of the CMLS had generally been raised in Confederate households and married Confederate veterans. Descended from Colonel William Byrd, CMLS president Isobel Bryan grew up in an affluent family and, as a young girl, had been a special pet of Robert E. Lee. Isabel Maury, first house regent of the museum, came from a family that had close ties to Jefferson Davis. Another founding member, Janet Weaver Randolph, was deeply af-

32. Coski and Feely, “A Monument to Southern Womanhood,” 134.

33. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 116; Coski and Feely, “A Monument to Southern Womanhood,” 147.

34. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, 163.

35. Speech by a Confederate veteran at the Confederate Museum’s opening in 1896, quoted in Coski and Feely, “A Monument to Southern Womanhood,” 131.

36. Confederate Museum Yearbook, 1912, 31–32, MOC; Mrs. A. W. Garber, ed., *In Memoriam Sempiternam* (Richmond: Confederate Memorial Literary Society, 1896), 29.

fectured by her parents' support of the Confederacy and became actively involved in memorial activities after the war.<sup>37</sup> Many of these women belonged to several traditionalist organizations such as the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In fact, Janet Randolph served as the UDC's official historian. A microcosm of Richmond's postwar elite, these women sought to temper the transformative effects of the New South by enshrining the distinctive virtues of the Confederate past.

Preserving Confederate relics was an extension of the ritual mourning activities that Confederate women had undertaken during and after the Civil War. In the 1860s, throughout the South, Confederate women initiated Ladies' Memorial Associations to assure the proper burial of the Confederate dead. By the 1890s, members of the next generation of elite white southern women had organized the Daughters of the Confederacy. Extending their work and influence beyond memorializing the dead, their stated aim was to preserve and disseminate Confederate culture and the ideals of the Lost Cause.<sup>38</sup> These women's organizations helped to ease white Southerners' adjustment to loss, shape the meaning of the Civil War for white Southerners, and transform the southern landscape through the systematic erection of monuments.<sup>39</sup> The founding of the Confederate Museum by an offshoot of Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery Memorial Association followed this pattern. By the 1890s, Richmond women's mourning activities had expanded to include historic preservation and education and had evolved from mere memorialization into a protest against Yankee interpretations of the meaning of the Civil War. The women of the CMLS, like other Confederate daughters, dedicated themselves to the social guardianship of white youth. The organization, according to its admirers in the *Richmond Times*, embarked on its work so that the "children of the Confederacy may be trained to devote their lives to research and a true record of the history of the South has made through all the past, from 1607 to the present day."<sup>40</sup>

The women of the CMLS drew upon their roles as keepers of tradition in laying claim to a new source of cultural authority through recording and narrating public memory.<sup>41</sup> Southern white men regarded the public-spirited

37. Coski and Feely, "A Monument to Southern Womanhood," 141–44.

38. The United Daughters of the Confederacy was founded in 1894. Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 2.

39. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy*, 4–8, 38–45, 127–35; Bishir, "Landmarks of Power"; Cox, *Dixie's Daughters*.

40. "The Year's Work in Behalf of Confederate Museum," *Richmond Times*, December 28, 1902, Confederate Memorial Literary Society (CMLS) Scrapbooks, 1902–1907, MOC.

41. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 16. One can also regard the work of elite Confederate women in the context of the growth of women's club activities in the late nineteenth century, both North and South. Brundage, *The Southern Past*, 25; Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). See also the pages of the *Confederate Veteran*.

work of the CMLS as an entirely appropriate extension of the devotion and sacrifice that Confederate women were thought to have manifested during the Civil War. Stories of Confederate women's unflinching loyalty began to appear during the war, and southern publications and speeches continued to be saturated with odes to the South's "martyr-heroines."<sup>42</sup> Decades after Appomattox, at the dedication of the Confederate Museum in 1896, Virginia's Governor O'Ferrall honored the fortitude of Confederate women during the war, proclaiming,

[T]hose Spartan wives and mothers, with husbands or sons, or both, at the front, directed the farming operations, supporting their families at home and supplying the armies; they sewed, knitted, wove, and spun. . . . [A]mid flame, carnage, death and lamentations, though their land was reddening with blood, and their loved ones were falling like leaves in autumn, they stood like heroines—firm, steadfast, constant.<sup>43</sup>

O'Ferrall then connected Confederate heroines' wartime devotion to their daughters' efforts to create the Confederate Museum. By interpreting the Confederate Museum as the natural offspring of the work of "Spartan wives and mothers" during the war, Richmond's elite white men and women suggested that the museum was a monument to the devotion of the CMLS itself. As one historian has written, "the founders [of the Confederate Museum] were not merely paying homage to their foremothers; they were commemorating their own lives."<sup>44</sup> By collecting and guarding Confederate relics, the ladies of the CMLS shored up their own authority as heroic servants of the Lost Cause.

### *"Amid the roar and strain of this active and engrossing age"*

By preserving Confederate memory, the women of the CMLS did more than rehabilitate the reputation of their defeated fathers and husbands and commemorate their own virtue. When they condemned the commercialism of Chicago speculators—the "Barnums of the North"—the museum women also censured the increasing commercialism of their own region. The New South's industrialization and urbanization had ushered in changes that troubled many white Southerners. Many Southerners resisted the invasion of northern industrial culture and denounced the "money-mania" of the New South, recoiling rather than rejoicing at the buzz of the saw and the clang of the railroad.<sup>45</sup> Equally unsettled by the economic and social transformations

42. Drew Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and Narratives of War," in *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 173; General Bradley T. Johnson Speech, quoted in *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 47. Drew Faust interprets the wartime rhetoric as attempts to enlist loyalty as well as honor it, as "prescriptive rather than descriptive." Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 174.

43. Governor O'Ferrall, dedication speech, quoted in *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 39.

44. Coski and Feely, "A Monument to Southern Womanhood," 141.

45. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 85.

wrought by southern industrialization, the women of the CMLS claimed a special role in denouncing the New South creed. Their position as guardians of memory, their exclusion from the corrupt spheres of business and politics, and their wartime sacrifices granted them particular authority in cautioning against the excesses of the New South.

In their labor of love, the Confederate Museum founders claimed to counteract the love of Mammon. In their glorification of military sacrifice, they provided a warning against the moral decay caused by industrial capitalism. While the new men of the New South boasted of the untapped economic opportunity in the South, the leaders of the CMLS reminisced about the days when “[a]ristocracy . . . was gauged by manners and morals and not by the size of a bank account.”<sup>46</sup> While southern boosters heralded the pluck and bustle of their city streets, the CMLS lamented the loss of “the social graces, the charming manners, the art of letter writing, the gift of conversation. It is now hurry, hurry, to keep up with the telegraph, the telephone, the type writer, the phonograph, the automobile, the moving picture shows, yes, and the flying machine, too.”<sup>47</sup> Far from celebrating industrial progress, the Confederate Museum honored the virtues and manners that industrialization threatened to destroy. In the minds of the CMLS, displaying objects such as the “rough, wooded tray in which the coarse meal or flour was kneaded into bread” during wartime spoke eloquently about the sacrifice, endurance, and honor increasingly rare in the New South.<sup>48</sup>

It was all the more important “[a]mid the roar and strain of this terribly active and engrossing age,” claimed the president of the CMLS, that the records of the past be preserved.<sup>49</sup> But records and relics would not merely serve as historical evidence. The relics’ very pricelessness, their authenticity and their singularity, would serve as a foil to the world outside the museum walls, where, according to the CMLS, “the worship of the golden calf engrosses the majority.”<sup>50</sup> Whereas elsewhere relics were being pillaged, sold, and manufactured by mercenary sorts, the Confederate Museum sought to preserve relics not only from decay and loss, but also from commercialization. Though it was most likely a lack of funds rather than moral purity that prevented the CMLS from purchasing relics—the organization relied on donations instead—the museum’s existence was itself proof that not everything had a price; the invaluable objects enshrined in its cases were metonyms for the sanctity of the cause they represented. Though some historians have interpreted late-

46. Address, Mildred Lewis Rutherford, “The Civilization of the Old South: What Made It: What Destroyed It: What Has Replaced It,” Dallas, Texas. November 9, 1916, 11, MOC.

47. Rutherford, “The Civilization of the Old South,” 39–40.

48. *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 30.

49. “Address by the President of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 17, 1905. CMLS Scrapbook, 1902–1907, MOC.

50. “Address by the President of the Confederate Memorial Literary Society,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 17, 1905. CMLS Scrapbook, 1902–1907, MOC.

nineteenth-century museums as themselves embodiments of a culture of acquisitiveness, the CMLS saw itself as providing a bulwark against that culture.<sup>51</sup>

The CMLS built its shrine not only as a reaction against commercialism, but also as a reaction against cultural homogenization. Through their collections, the CMLS argued for the preservation of regional difference as well as for sectional vindication. Implicitly and explicitly denouncing the materialism of the North and its growing influence on the South, the CMLS used its collections and publications as opportunities to extol what they saw as the distinguishing features of the Old South. Unlike their male counterparts who abandoned their manners and principles in order to emulate the entrepreneurial Yankee, the women of the CMLS warned against the intrusion of northern values on which the New South economy depended. One Richmond UDC member, Anna Raines, sympathetic to the work of the CMLS, rejected the reconciliationist sentiment that threatened to drown out southern distinctiveness and southern principles. "I am pained to see and realize," she wrote to a UDC sister, "that so many of our people have accepted and are preaching the Creed that there is no North or South, but one nation . . . NO true Southerner can ever embrace this new religion . . . and those WHO DO should be ostracized by the Daughters of the Confederacy."<sup>52</sup> As southern white theologians like Robert Lewis Dabney warned Southerners against "becom[ing] like the conquerors," so too the CMLS believed the museum could both vindicate the cause of the conquered and help preserve its distinct characteristics.<sup>53</sup>

### ***Object Lessons at the Confederate Museum***

The founders of the Confederate Museum were invested in maintaining the distinctiveness of both their region and their museum. In her letter rejecting an invitation to join the American Association of Museums, a national organization founded in 1906 to set standards and best practices for museums in the United States, Susie Harrison, a house regent of the Confederate Museum, wrote: "[Our] work is a voluntary one done by the women of the South for love of the Sacred Cause. . . . [T]his museum is so entirely different from most museums that [we] don't see how we can co-operate with others."<sup>54</sup> However hyperbolic Harrison's claim might have been, the museum's exhibition design did deviate from contemporary practice in several

51. Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876–1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 13.

52. Letter from Mrs. L. H. Haines to Mrs. M. C. Goodlett, April 29, 1894. Mildred Rutherford Scrapbooks, vol. 2, MOC.

53. Robert L. Dabney, *The New South: A Discourse Delivered at the Annual Commencement of Sampden Sidney [sic] College*, June 15, 1882, quoted in Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 86.

54. Susie Harrison, draft of letter to Laurence Vail Coleman, 1927, exact date unknown. Confederate Museum Archives, Box II-1, Correspondence, 1890s–1940s, MOC.

significant ways. Influenced by display techniques at world's fairs and the ideologies of imperialism and capitalism that undergirded them, museum curators in the late nineteenth century generally tended to organize their exhibits in such a way as to demonstrate the evolution of human progress from barbarism to civilization. George Brown Goode, director of the National Museum at the Smithsonian Institution, helped to institutionalize and promote this practice. Goode devoted much of his career to encouraging museums to transform themselves from cabinets of disordered bric-a-brac to "a house full of ideas, arranged with the strictest attention to system."<sup>55</sup> According to Goode and his associates, there were two basic ways to organize ethnographic, natural history, and history collections. The first was geographic or ethnographical, a method by which collections were grouped according to geographic or ethnic origin; the second was "synoptic," by which cultural artifacts would reflect the progress of a civilization.<sup>56</sup>

The CMLS's selective adoption of these practices expressed the society's political mission. One could regard the CMLS exhibits as geographic, in the sense that cases and rooms were classified according to state of origin. The arrangement of exhibits by state, however, was as much ideological as taxonomic; given the Confederacy's basis in the compact theory of government, displays of each state's individual contribution to the cause reinforced the theoretical sovereignty of each Confederate state.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, the establishment of a separate "Solid South" room articulated a sense of Confederate nationalism and unity. Had the CMLS followed contemporary museum practice more closely, it might have, for example, grouped certain types of weaponry together, or offered a chronological account of the history of the Confederacy. The fact that the exhibits were decidedly not synoptic signifies the message that the CMLS was attempting to communicate. Whereas a number of other contemporary museums of history, culture, and technology expressed a teleological understanding of material and social progress, the implied narrative of the Confederate Museum was one of decline in the face of predation by wicked Yankees. Rather than a triumphalist story that culminated in the present, the Confederate Museum's message was that the Old South had been the pinnacle of civilization. The introduction of northern mores, not simply the invasion by northern troops, inspired the CMLS to claim and preserve the Confederacy's eroding cultural distinctiveness and social superiority through the selective celebration of the past.

The CMLS sought to substantiate their version of the Civil War with "ob-

55. Quoted in Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 20.

56. Steven Lubar and Kathleen M. Kendrick, *Legacies: Collecting America's History at the Smithsonian* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 128; Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 5.

57. Of course, the reversal of Reconstruction depended upon a resurgence of the principle of states' rights. One Richmond journalist argued that though "the right of secession no longer exists . . . the States are as 'sovereign' now as they were before the war." "The Call to the South," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, May 12, 1907.

jective” historical facts through the presentation of classified physical evidence. If the self-sacrifice of Confederate women contrasted with the crude materialism of the Chicago speculators, their systematic approach to museum display contrasted with the clutter characteristic of antebellum museums. Adopting what historian Steven Conn has called an “object-based epistemology,” the CMLS believed that the orderly specimens of Confederate valor would provide a reasoned defense of Confederate righteousness to counteract Yankee slander.<sup>58</sup>

Through displays of rusty pistols and tattered slouch hats, the curators of the Confederate Museum hoped to arouse sentiment and reverence as well as rational thought. Being in the presence of sacred relics would allow observers to experience the past more directly and stir historical imagination. The CMLS perceived no conflict between sentiment and science. The organization saw itself as providing “authenticated data” of the “principles and patriotism which actuated our statesmen and leaders,” and the “struggle for their constitutional rights.”<sup>59</sup> Repeatedly, the publications of the CMLS employed the scientific language of the day and expressed the faith the organization had in uncovering objective historical truth through the collection and display of physical evidence. The museum curators carefully arranged their objects in the most state-of-the-art dustproof and mothproof cases; they recruited Confederate veterans to act as museum guides, perhaps in the hopes that the veterans’ presence and anecdotes would provide a more authentic, direct experience.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the CMLS combined the sentimental and the scientific, or, to borrow from historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, the “sensible and the intelligible.”<sup>61</sup> Drawing upon the evocative power of relics as well as their scientific aura, the CMLS could appeal to emotion and imagination while claiming historical objectivity.<sup>62</sup>

58. Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, 4.

59. Confederate Museum Yearbook, 1912, 31–32, MOC.

60. Coski, “A Century of Collecting,” 6, 11.

61. Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Pasts: Sensible and Intelligible” (Unpublished talk delivered at Portland State University, April 25, 2005).

62. The newly emerging class of professional male southern historians criticized the defensiveness of Lost Cause advocates and distinguished themselves from “unscientific” female amateurs, but CMLS members did not see themselves as purely defensive or sentimental. Though unlike professional historical organizations such as the Southern Historical Association, the CMLS was aggressively “pro-South” and vigilantly worked to purge dissenting views, it saw itself as compiling objective historical truth, solemnly providing a repository of encyclopedic facts as well as sentimental associations. Furthermore, the CMLS expected that researchers would use their collections as a reliable historical archive. Lastly, despite professional historians’ disdain of female amateurs on intellectual and sexist grounds, college professors producing scholarship on the South wrote to members of the CMLS to seek approval of their work. See, for example, Mr. Dodd to Isabel Maury, 1908, Isabel Maury Papers, M-620, MOC. On the rise of professional history in the South, see Bethany Leigh Johnson, “Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past: Professional History in the American South, 1896–1961” (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 2001). The shift in historic preservation from “personalism” to “professionalism” as the field came to be taken over by men is also explored in James M. Lindgren, “A New Departure in Historic Patriotic Work: Personalism, Professionalism, and Conflicting Concepts of Material Culture in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *The Public Historian* 18 (Spring 1996): 41–



Beyond proving the Confederacy's military valor, the CMLS hoped to correct Northerners' prejudices about southern slavery. First, the CMLS insisted that the war was not fought over slavery, but over the pure and righteous constitutional principle of state sovereignty. One CMLS treatise, "Explainings of Objection to 'Rebel,'" argued that in seceding from the United States, white Southerners had conserved the tenets of the American Revolution; the federal government, not the Confederacy, had committed treason in its aggressive attempt to coerce the South back into the Union.<sup>63</sup> To counter the "standing taunt to-day that Virginia, with the other Southern States, seceded to protect slavery," the CMLS printed and distributed pamphlets that included tables of slave ownership in Virginia in 1861. Because, according to the CMLS, "only one Virginian in four in 1860 was directly interested in the perpetuation of slavery," the "table itself is a sufficient refutation" of the charge that the Confederacy's goal was to preserve slavery. Once again employing the patina of science, the CMLS used charts and numbers to advance its interpretation of the meaning of the Civil War.<sup>64</sup>

Though the CMLS vigorously disputed the accusation that slavery was central to the Confederate cause, the organization still felt compelled to defend the system. But the CMLS expressed distaste and support for slavery at the same time. On the one hand, the CMLS handbooks for secondary school teachers argued, "Slavery had come into Virginia against the wishes of the Colonists," and that "By 1830, Virginia was anxious to be rid of slavery."<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, in a dedication speech on the opening day of the museum, former Confederate General Bradley T. Johnson praised slavery for developing "a society which, for intelligence, culture, chivalry, justice, honor and truth, has never been excelled in this world, and it produced a race of negroes the most civilized since the building of the great Pyramid(s) . . . and the most Christianized since the crucifixion of our Lord."<sup>66</sup> Museum officials called upon ex-slaves to romanticize their own enslavement, recruiting them to perform music for a fundraising barn dance. The event was designed to replicate the Old South, an era when, according to the local press, "such a thing as 'hard times' were not known."<sup>67</sup>

The members of the CMLS gathered and produced documents purporting to illustrate the benevolence of slavery, reinforcing the theme of the faithful slave found elsewhere in contemporary popular literature and minstrelsy. Janet Randolph, one of the CMLS's most influential members, recalled in a

60. But again, what distinguishes the CMLS is that it saw itself as successfully (and perhaps paradoxically) combining sentiment and objectivity.

63. Rev. S. A. Steel, Columbia S.C. "Explainings of Objection to 'Rebel,'" Published by Confederate Museum, 1913. CMLS Print Pieces, Confederate Museum Archives, Box V-1, MOC.

64. "Slavery in Virginia in 1861," in *Memorial Day Annual*, 1912, 61. CMLS print pieces, Confederate Museum Archives, Box V-1, MOC.

65. "Slavery in Virginia in 1861," 61. CMLS Print Pieces, Confederate Museum Archives, Box V-1, MOC.

66. *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 45.

67. *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 14, 1903.

pamphlet that in “Old Virginia,” her “little darkeys” were “anxious to serve,” and that harvest time was filled with song and dance, fiddle and banjo.<sup>68</sup> To support claims of the benevolence of slavery, the museum exhibited documents such as an “Address on Religious Instruction of Negroes,” “American Slavery Justified,” and the music to a song called “Old Black Joe.”<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the museum women were determined to prove that slaves were loyal during the war, which, in turn, would prove that the slave system as a whole had been beneficent. Objects like the etching “Slaves Concealing Their Master from a [Yankee] Search Party,” an article about “Kitt, Slave Girl Who Refused Freedom,” and homespun wares such as clothing or shoes made by slaves during the war all suggested slaves’ loyalty to their masters and their support of the Confederacy.<sup>70</sup>

Curators also displayed evidence designed to expose the disingenuousness of the North’s commitment to abolition. The Georgia Room pointedly exhibited a book entitled “The History of Slavery in Massachusetts.”<sup>71</sup> CMLS publications chided both the hypocrisy and materialism of the North by asserting that northern slavery, “found to be unprofitable as an economic organization, was rapidly eliminated from the Northern society, which was and is based on the idea of profit and loss.”<sup>72</sup> The museum women seemed to derive particular satisfaction from discrediting abolitionism. The CMLS collected articles that announced the discovery of a slave dungeon in Philadelphia and denounced Harriet Beecher Stowe as a fraud. Furthermore, the museum’s publications frequently charged that white Southerners, not Northerners, were the Negroes’ true friends. In one particularly wishful case, UDC historian Mildred Rutherford transcribed a poem that depicted a former slave declaring that he wished the Confederacy had won the war, singing, “I killed a chance o’ Yankees, I’d like to kills some mo.”<sup>73</sup>

The romanticization of slavery not only redeemed white Southerners’ past; it legitimated the Jim Crow present. The Confederate Museum provided the basis for the argument that emancipation and Reconstruction had been folly and that white Southerners continued to be the victims of predatory Negroes and Yankees. The museum’s tropes of faithful slaves, unscrupulous Northerners, and the destruction of a harmonious social order by Yankee invasion and oppression all converged in a rationale for continued Anglo-Saxon supremacy. If, according to the museum’s version of slavery, white rule was proper and uplifting for its subjects, then Jim Crow was an enlightened policy for peace and stability. Through their museum collections, the CMLS

68. Janet Randolph, “A Remembrance of Farm Life in Old Virginia.” Janet Randolph, Writings Folder, MOC.

69. “Remembrances of Farm Life in Virginia,” Janet Randolph Papers, Writings Folder, MOC.

70. Rutherford Scrapbooks, VI. XLVI: *The Institution of Slavery and Plantation Days*, 23; Confederate Museum Yearbook, 1912, 68.

71. *Confederate Museum Accession Records*, Office of the Registrar; Catalogue, 90, 97, MOC.

72. *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 45.

73. Mildred Lewis Rutherford Scrapbooks, Volume XLVI, *The Institution of Slavery and Plantation Days*, MOC; “The Southern Wagon,” C-3 CMLS Scrapbook, 1902–1907, MOC.

attempted to provide material evidence that supported the contemporary establishment of Jim Crow laws as necessary to harmonious social relations.

The chronological range of the museum's holdings expressed the curators' interest in validating Jim Crow. Though the CMLS founded the museum to commemorate the Confederacy, its collections were not limited to items from the Confederacy's actual lifespan (1861–1865). While the CMLS ladies denounced emancipation and Reconstruction through their justifications of slavery and secession, they considered the present state of the “race problem” to be within their purview, and used their authority as guardians of “authenticated data” to create an archive in support of Jim Crow. The CMLS stocked its collections with documents relating to the Ku Klux Klan, and titles such as *The University of the South and the Race Problem*, *The Negro as a Political and Social Factor*, and *Shall the Negro Be Educated or Suppressed*.<sup>74</sup> Such volumes bolstered the CMLS's supposed expertise on the subject and institutionalized the museum's interpretation of the past as the most apposite medium through which to view the present.

Some CMLS ladies even went so far as to condone lynching, a phenomenon virtually unknown during the Civil War.<sup>75</sup> In a CMLS scrapbook, next to a clipping from the *Times-Dispatch* with the headline, “Girl Sacrificed to Negro Brute,” Isobel Maury of the CMLS scribbled, “Too horrible to record, but feel it imperative to give the facts that lead to lynching.” Maury continued, “So swayed by passion, by bitterness to the South, Reason lay dormant, and the negroes of the South were given full political power—with the refined, cultured, Christian men of the South.”<sup>76</sup> It was the passion of Reconstruction governments and of licentious blacks, not the passion of vigilantes, that caused lynching. According to Maury, “the facts” of Negroes' barbarism helped to explain, if not justify, contemporary efforts to terrorize black people.

### ***Solidifying the South***

The museum's exhibitions depicted a white South unified during and after the Civil War by featuring a “Solid South” room, a specious declaration of the South's cohesiveness. Just as secession had required the Confederacy to build a southern consensus and national identity, the museum enshrined the supposed consensus of the past as a hortatory statement about the New South present. The Solid South room was an outlet for the donations of Confederate daughters who no longer lived in the South.<sup>77</sup> Though this arrangement served the practical purpose of assembling relics from locales as far-flung as

74. Tennessee Room Papers of Mrs. Randolph, Correspondence Folder, MOC.

75. See for example Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

76. C-3 CMLS Scrapbook, 1902–1907, MOC.

77. *Annual Report of the CMLS to the Convention of the UDC assembled in San Francisco*, October, 1905, 3. MOC.

New York, San Francisco, and Utah, it also suggested that the “Solid South” knew no geographic boundaries, and that advocates of the Lost Cause had national support. The CMLS’s pleas to southern states to contribute relics to the Solid South room simultaneously appealed to state rivalry and Confederate patriotism, and they helped to create a sense of national unity from the ashes of a defeated nation. Though she understood that states might want to keep their own relics, Isobel Bryan “deplore[d] that here in the Museum in the ‘Capital of the Confederacy,’ there should be any state seemingly behind the others; then all stood shoulder to shoulder in the ever-thrilling period of ’61–’65, and the even darker days that followed.”<sup>78</sup> Pleading with Tennesseans to send relics to the Confederate Museum, Janet Randolph pronounced, “The White House of this Confederacy, in the capital, is the only fitting place for the relics of our loved cause.”<sup>79</sup> Departing from the South’s erstwhile suspicion of centralized authority, the CMLS sought to consolidate Confederate memory within the museum’s walls, arguing that theirs was “not a local work . . . it will be the glory of the whole.”<sup>80</sup> The CMLS’s devotion to state sovereignty did not include the prerogative of individual states to guard their own memories.

The CMLS also promoted an exaggerated notion of Confederate unity by allotting rooms to the border states of Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri, even though these states had been loyal to the Union during the war. The Missouri room testified that that Missouri’s “heart was loyal to the cause so nobly lost,” and its curators attributed the room’s meager count of relics to Missourians’ reluctance to part with links to their glorious past.<sup>81</sup> Likewise, during the unveiling of a stained glass window for the Maryland room, the keynote speaker insisted that “[T]here was never a time when Virginia or the South had any cause to doubt that Maryland’s heart was in the right place.”<sup>82</sup> In a bold denial of dissent and heterogeneity within the South, the Confederate Museum’s founders declared, “From Maryland to Texas, from the Ohio River to the Gulf of Mexico, one burning patriotism, one lofty hope, animated the whole stretch of country, and during those long, weary years of 1860–’65 welded into one, for all time, our people.”<sup>83</sup> The Confederate Museum exhibits, narrated by such declarations, provided a unifying civic culture based on Confederate heroism and white supremacy across state borders and throughout border states.

78. *Report of the President, Mrs. Joseph Bryan*. Confederate Museum Yearbook, 1907, 9. MOC.

79. Janet Weaver Randolph, “Confederate Memorial,” unidentified newspaper clipping, February 26, 1899. Tennessee Room Papers, Janet Weaver Randolph Papers, MOC. Remarkably, Randolph refers to “this Confederacy,” as if the Confederacy itself still existed.

80. *Report from the Regent and Vice Regent of Solid South Room*, Museum of the Confederacy, Solid South Room Papers of Minnie Baughman, II, 7. Ca. 1900–1920, MOC.

81. “Woman’s Work,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, December 17, 1907.

82. Address of W. E. Evans at Unveiling of Maryland Room Window, c. 1908, 6. CLMS Miscellaneous files, MOC.

83. *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 94.

The CMLS further attempted to hold at bay the social decline and conflict brought on by the new industrial order by celebrating the virtuous common soldier as an icon of the South. Though ladies' memorial associations had honored unknown soldiers in the 1860s and 1870s, generally, more formal Confederate commemorations featured military officers and civic leaders rather than enlisted men. Beginning in the 1870s and 1880s, in courthouse squares throughout the region, stone and bronze monuments increasingly commemorated the devotion of the Confederate soldier.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, in the Confederate Museum, portraits, locks of hair, and blood-stained handkerchiefs paid homage to high-ranking Confederate officials, but the museum also collected thousands of relics that memorialized the daily sufferings of the ordinary infantryman: canteens, a piccolo, bibles, bullet-pocked flags, the remains of coffee rations, a snuff box, and a "housewife"—a sewing kit.<sup>85</sup> Poems and speeches read at donation ceremonies sang of the dauntless young soldier who responded to the clarion call of patriotism and volunteered to protect his fire-side.<sup>86</sup> These paeans to the footsoldier provided examples of character and sacrifice, offering inspiration and comfort in the face of industrialization. As one historian has written of Confederate soldiers' monuments in Franklin, Tennessee, monuments to ordinary Confederate soldiers were efforts to "instill a sense of moral behavior in a world where character seemed to be all but abandoned for the interests of corporate commercialization and personal pleasure."<sup>87</sup> The content of the "moral behavior" was duty, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline—qualities thought to be disappearing in the New South.<sup>88</sup>

The Confederate Museum did not simply narrate its version of the past; it commented upon the present. The museum opened in a city plagued by class

84. John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 130; Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 175–77.

85. *Catalogue of the Confederate Museum* (Richmond: I. N. Jones, Printer, 1898).

86. Emma Tyree, "A Relic of the War." Lines dedicated to her husband upon donating his Confederate Sabre to the Confederate Museum, 1896. CMLS Miscellaneous files, MOC; Address of John Prentiss Poe at the unveiling of the Memorial Window in the Maryland Room, May 13, 1905, 1. CMLS Miscellaneous files, MOC.

87. David Currey, "The Virtuous Soldier: Constructing a Usable Past in Franklin, Tennessee," in *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, ed. Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 142.

88. Outside the walls of the Confederate White House, political leaders in Virginia had been calling upon the sacrifices of the common soldier to enlist party allegiance as well as inspire moral uplift. After the Readjuster coalition of black and white Virginians gained control of the Virginia state legislature in 1879, Conservatives used the figure of the crippled veteran to cleave that alliance. Blair, *Cities of the Dead*, 131. In 1889, Jubal Early, an ex-Confederate, drew upon wartime Confederate valor to address current political divisions in his Memorial Day address. Though the immediate threat of the Readjusters had passed, Early warned his audience "that the Confederate who has deserted since the war is infinitely worse than the one who deserted during the war, for the former has gone over to the enemy at no personal risk to himself, and simply for the motives of gain." Implicitly defining conservative Democratic policies as the greater good, white conservatives trotted out the crippled white soldier and memories of a shared Civil War experience to attain political obedience and sacrifice from the common white folk of Virginia. "Address of Gen. Early," *Winchester Times Extra*, June 7, 1889. Quoted in Blair, *Cities of the Dead*, 132.

conflict and in an era when a Populist revolt threatened to challenge traditional hierarchies and realign American politics. Joseph Bryan, railroad executive, supporter of the Confederate Museum and husband of one of its founders, expressed the alarm of his class when he described Populist theories as dangerous to property rights, "Socialistic & centralizing."<sup>89</sup> In the museum exhibits, extolling the loyalty of the common soldier who never let "the sacred banner drop from his nerveless hand" blurred the social divisions that had festered during the war and muted the upheavals of the present.<sup>90</sup> But, like the New South boosters whose hustle-bustle they deplored, the CMLS portrayed a South free of social unrest. Just as the common soldier devoted himself to something higher than his own self-interest, the worn boots and battered swords on display at the Confederate Museum suggested, so too should workers in New South industries accept their lot and defer to their betters. The CMLS hoped that the museum's three-dimensional "sermons" would "give tongue to loyalty, valor and merit, self sacrifice and devotion to duty, as will arise up for us in the future, sons worthy of the sires whose deeds we seek to commemorate."<sup>91</sup> If the faithful slave was central to the mythic past that justified the Jim Crow present, then the faithful Confederate soldier might encourage obedient behavior among the working classes of the New South. As one contemporary observer remarked of a sculpture honoring a generic citizen-soldier, "[I]t represents no knightly or warrior class, but the heroic manhood that can one day build cities or railways."<sup>92</sup> Though the CMLS may have been ambivalent about cities and railways, it was unequivocal in its belief that the builders of cities and railways should be as knightly and disciplined as soldiers in war. Thus, as art historian Kirk Savage has written of soldiers' monuments, the idea of the heroic common soldier presented a paradox. On the one hand, to be a soldier was to "test one's manhood"; on the other hand, to be a soldier was to "become a virtual slave."<sup>93</sup> The museum's homage to these common soldiers and their unwavering sense of duty sidestepped the paradox; the CMLS could celebrate the rank and file without advocating democracy.

The Confederate Museum's portrayal of a unified Confederacy and unflagging devotion also expunged the history of Confederate women's own ambivalence about the southern cause. As the Civil War dragged on, many slaveholding women became disillusioned with the Confederate cause. Burdened by material sacrifice, the task of managing slaves, and mounting casualties, they began to question their loyalty to the Confederacy and even encouraged

89. Joseph Bryan to Robert Beverley, Letters, 28 March 1894 and 6 June 1894, Bryan Letterbook. Quoted in James Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 19.

90. Louise Wigfall Wright, Unveiling of Memorial Window in Maryland Room, May 13, 1905. Miscellaneous CMLS Files, MOC.

91. Confederate Museum *Yearbook*, 1910, 32, MOC.

92. *New York Times*, June 23, 1874. Quoted in Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 176.

93. Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 167.

their menfolk to desert. At the Confederate Museum, however, displays of fundraising quilts and Confederate battle flags made by the hands of Confederate women during the war belied such ambivalence; exhibits of homespun clothing, presented as examples of material privation, women's labors on the homefront, and badges of honor in the face of a blockade of Yankee goods, obscured the fact that many slaveholding women were mortified and vexed by the prospect of engaging in home production.<sup>94</sup> Others had been humiliated by dressing beneath their status. A Virginia lady, Myrta Lockett Avery, recalled that though she felt some affection for the straw and shuck bonnet that she wore during the war, she threw it away because she was "so tired of make-shifts—and got new ones as soon as we could."<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, the museum's homemade palmetto hats and calico dresses, symbols of the pride, patriotism, and resourcefulness of white elite women, were most likely manufactured by slaves and poor women.<sup>96</sup> The portrayal of homespun as willing sacrifice concealed elite white women's resentment at having to do such degrading work. UDC historian Mildred Rutherford complained that because of the disruptions of war and eventual emancipation, "The women of the Old South were forced to cook, to wash and iron . . . to do the most menial forms of household drudgery."<sup>97</sup> Myrta Lockett Avery moaned, "Women who had been social queens, who had . . . a retinue of servants happy to obey their behests and needing nothing, now found themselves reduced to a harder case than their negroes had ever known."<sup>98</sup> Late in the war, some upper-class Richmond women rebelled against the prescriptions of wartime frugality by engaging in reckless indulgence, throwing lavish parties or even shoplifting.<sup>99</sup> The tribulations of the homefront notwithstanding, the displays at the museum conveyed a unity and conviction among white women that had actually worn quite thin during the war. One would not know from the museum exhibits that in 1863, in Richmond itself, desperately hungry citizens, mostly women, turned to rioting in order to obtain goods that wartime extortion had denied them. In some ways these rioters should have made the CMLS proud; they shared a concern for the intrusion of market values into southern society.<sup>100</sup> However, working-class women who had accused merchants of avarice, thus challenging the virtue of the southern elite

94. Drew Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 47.

95. Myrta Lockett Avery, *Dixie After the War: An Exposition of the Social Conditions Existing in the South During the Twelve Years Succeeding the Fall of Richmond* (New York: Doubleday, 1906), 147–48.

96. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 48.

97. Mildred Lewis Rutherford, "The Civilization of the Old South: What Made It: What Destroyed It: What Has Replaced It." Address Delivered in Dallas, Texas. Thursday, Nov. 9, 1916, 37. Rutherford Scrapbooks, MOC.

98. Avery, *Dixie After the War*, 150.

99. Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 197.

100. Drew Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 52–57.

and of the cause itself, did not fit into the CMLS's idea of genteel, unwavering sacrifice.<sup>101</sup>

There was no room in the Confederate Museum for dissent or doubt. The Confederate Museum was so emphatic in its insistence on the rightness of the southern cause that its passion often distorted logic. Richard Maury and his wife Isabel agreed that the Lost Cause was "victorious from the beginning"; a CMLS publication offered the tautology that if the Confederacy "was not destroyed, the industrial society of the North would be dominated by it."<sup>102</sup> One ex-Confederate general speaking at a museum-sponsored event asserted the axiom, "Success is worshipped, failure forgotten. That is the universal experience and the unvarying law of nature." And yet, the general observed, "Nowhere [but in the South] has a defeated side ever been so honored, or the unsuccessful so apotheosized." Therefore, based on ex-Confederates' prolific memorialization of their cause, he argued, "the fall of the Confederacy was a success and a triumph, for it cannot be that a universal law has been set aside for this sole exception."<sup>103</sup> In the Confederate Museum's version of events, the Confederacy's loss was cast as a victory.

### ***"It was not the cause of liberty to you": Common Causes and Reconciliation***

The CMLS women had founded the Confederate Museum, at least in part, as a rejoinder to the Libby Prison Museum. On an immediate level, the CMLS wanted to guard southern relics from Yankee plunderers, and on a grander level, the CMLS designed a museum that would celebrate and vindicate the southern point of view. At first, the CMLS appears to have been more concerned with righteousness than reunion, more interested in principle than profit. Thus, the historical narrative displayed at the Confederate Museum might suggest that the Civil War was not a past usable to the task of sectional reconciliation.

Despite the Confederate Museum's fervent Lost Cause underpinnings, however—its insistence on the rightness of its purpose, the benevolence of

101. None of this is to suggest that the Civil War did not require an extraordinary level of participation by women, unprecedented in the United States and unparalleled in the North. As Drew Faust has written, "the conflict demanded the mobilization of women, not for battle, but for civilian support services such as nursing, textile and clothing production, munitions and government office work, slave management, and even agriculture." This mobilization, Faust argues, required persuasion through rhetorical efforts to create an ideology of female patriotism and sacrifice. The CMLS perpetuated this ideology through the Confederate Museum. Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 172.

102. Richard Maury to Isabel Maury, October 16, 1899, Papers of House Regent Isabel Maury, Confederate Museum Archives Box II-2, MOC; *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 45. The latter document also claimed that Virginia had refused to "be a party to the breaking" of the Union, and that, "She never seceded from the Union, but, standing severe in her dignity, commanded the peace." *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 45–46.

103. *In Memoriam Sempiternam*, 43.



slavery, and unity among all white Southerners—the museum’s focus on military valor muted the politics of the war by stressing the universal experience of wartime sacrifice. Shoes and hats made of cornhusks illustrated resourcefulness amidst the privations of war; battle flags fashioned from bridal shawls celebrated the devotion of women on the homefront; soldiers’ playing cards, cooking utensils, bibles, and pocketwatches humanized those engaged in battle. In an odd combination of the concrete and the abstract, the banal objects of home and battle were transformed into expressions of devotion to cause, no matter what the cause. As a result, the Confederate Museum could become a center of reunion between white Northerners and Southerners.<sup>104</sup>

Many veterans from both the North and South continued to harbor bitterness towards each other well into the twentieth century. Some Republican newspapers criticized the display of rebel flags throughout the South, and some Union regiments refused to attend events commemorating Confederate leaders.<sup>105</sup> But old antagonisms had also softened. When Richmond residents unveiled a statue to Robert E. Lee in 1890, the *New York Times* claimed that though the war had cost “so many lives and so many heartburnings,” the event proved that “nothing but the best of feelings, not only towards each other but for all sections, prevailed.” *Times* editorials expressed admiration for Lee, and asserted that “Everybody ought to recognize now that there is no danger that the ‘issue’ will arise again, that the soldiers of the Confederacy may have been as conscientious as the soldiers of the Union.”<sup>106</sup> By then, neither “the issue” of treason nor the “issue” of blacks’ citizenship were the subject of much national political attention.

Throughout the 1890s, across the nation, former enemies gathered at sites of prior conflict, they sang both “Hail Columbia” and “Dixie,” they pledged “restored and enduring fraternity,” and they forged a “brotherhood . . . made better, braver, and grander by mutually cherished and imperishable memories.”<sup>107</sup> This “mutuality” was made possible because supposedly “imperishable” memories were being reshaped, and many Northerners were coming to embrace the southern interpretation of the war. Isobel Bryan, president of the Confederate Museum in its early years, did not exaggerate when she proudly announced that her museum “commends itself alike to friend and foe.”<sup>108</sup> Year after year, thousands of northern visitors poured into the halls of the Confederate Museum and were moved by the South’s “gallant struggle.” Indeed, in the first decade of the Confederate Museum, more than half of its

104. The inclination to celebrate the gallantry of individual soldiers on both sides proliferated in the 1880s and 1890s. The “Battles and Leaders” series published by *Century* magazine between 1884 and 1887, a series of articles written by war veterans, exemplifies the practice of focusing on shared experiences of combat without having to reflect upon the political questions that necessitated military service. See Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 174–75.

105. Blair, *Cities of the Dead*, 156–59.

106. *New York Times*, May 30, 1890.

107. “Reunions of Old Soldiers,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 21, 1889.

108. Confederate Museum Yearbook, 1907, 8, MOC.

visitors were from the North.<sup>109</sup> By the 1920s, a museum guard remarked that Northerners did not “seem to be able to find out enough about those days” of the war, and “they are just as interested in it as if it were about their own folks.”<sup>110</sup>

The Confederate Museum’s collections became a national storehouse for lay researchers eager to proselytize the righteousness of the southern cause. Northern writers of history textbooks, regarding the museum women as “ever-energetic fighter[s] for truth,” began turning to them as experts on Confederate history and asked for suggestions on how to portray the southern point of view, especially in regard to the “relation between the races.”<sup>111</sup> The museum received many letters from Northerners complimenting the CMLS on the museum and asking for historical information. One ex-Confederate residing in Philadelphia requested a copy of a Reconstruction-era photograph of a “negro jury” to show his “northern friends” because he thought it would be “a good object lesson to show these people, as an argument to prove our right to act in defense of threatened negro domination at that time.”<sup>112</sup> At rituals and reunions throughout the nation, “bred-in-the bone Yankees” spoke of the negro domination inflicted by Reconstruction and praised the valor of southern soldiers.<sup>113</sup> One northern journalist contended that in “the greater drama of Reconciliation and Reunion . . . the heroes begin to change places.”<sup>114</sup> Isobel Bryan, the founding mother of the Confederate Museum sighed, “It is a tremendous task to convert, one by one, all the Yankee nation,” but sure enough, the Yankee nation was converted. In a reversal of an old axiom, history was written by the losers.<sup>115</sup>

Though vindication, rather than reconciliation, seemed to be the CMLS’s primary goal, observers perceived the Confederate Museum as a vehicle for promoting greater understanding between North and South, on the CMLS’s terms. In one particularly melodramatic account in New York’s *Century* mag-

109. *Officer and Committee Reports*, Folder 1898, Confederate Museum Archives, Box I-6; Confederate Museum Yearbooks, 1907, 1910, 1911, 1912, MOC.

110. “Confederate White House Attracts Many Visitors.” Untitled Folder, Confederate Museum Archives Box II-4, MOC.

111. M. P. Andrews to Randolph, September 22, 1916. M.P. Andrews Correspondence, Randolph Papers, MOC.

112. Letter from John Jones, Museum Archives, Box II-1, Folder J, Correspondence Files, MOC.

113. Clipping, Charles Adams Address at Robert E. Lee Centennial, 1907, CLMS Miscellaneous File, MOC.

114. “Robert E. Lee,” *Outlook* 84 (December 1906): 956.

115. Historian Peter Novick argues that in the same time period, professional historians—though they did not advocate the right of secession—also conceded to the southern view of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, and that in fact, “the deliberate negotiation of a mutually acceptable version of the sectional conflict, of a consensual ‘usable past,’ was clearly a central strategy of the new professionals.” Novick explains, “In effecting the reconciliation, they had a powerful ally, whose contribution was indispensable: the pervasive racism which—across regions, classes, and political persuasions—dominated the thought of the period.” Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 74.

azine, a grieving, unreconstructed Confederate widow meets a northern man in the museum's Virginia Room. At first, the Virginian lady is troubled by the Yankee's intrusion into the home of Jefferson Davis. She resents that "the North had all the wealth now . . . while so many of the descendants of old Southern families were forced to earn their bread by occupations unworthy of them." Furthermore, upon chatting with the stranger, the woman discovers that the man has married—"taken away"—a southern girl, and the reader learns that the Confederate widow, too, had been "robbed" of her daughter. The northern man tells the lady that he wants to explain to his son that his "two grandfathers have been killed in the same battle, fighting on opposite sides," and that "there is no man can do a nobler thing than to give his life for his faith." The northern man admits that though he still believes the Union was right, moved by the relics in the museum "I see now that if [my father] had lived in the South, the same spirit would have carried him into the Confederate army." The woman is sympathetic to the man, but reminds him, "It was not the cause of liberty to you." The northern man does not argue. As the two talk further, the Confederate widow realizes that she is talking to her son-in-law, and moreover, the son of the man who killed her husband.<sup>116</sup> Reiterating the increasingly familiar tale of the love affair between a southern lady and a northern man, this encounter among the museum relics advanced the theme of mutual bravery extrapolated from politics. Furthermore, the romance paralleled the promise of the New South, as the wealthy northern man rescues the southern belle from her fall from wealth.<sup>117</sup>

Former foes were beginning to agree that "the war . . . was fought by men who were equally sincere, devoted, self-sacrificing, passionately loyal to their ideals of state and liberty," even though their views on "liberty" would seem mutually exclusive.<sup>118</sup> Henry Field, a northern clergyman and editor, went so far as to assert that the Civil War *cemented* the Union because it "caused the North and South to know each other better than ever before." The most important result of the war was not emancipation or equality but that "The North has come to respect the South—its vast resources; its power of organization, of resistance to forces that seemed overwhelming; and, above all, its courage and indomitable will."<sup>119</sup>

It should not be surprising that northern visitors would be open to—and even sympathetic towards—the white South's point of view. Decades before the museum opened, Republicans had withdrawn the last federal troops from the South, eventually allowing for the abrogation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the rise of Jim Crow. By the 1890s, the South had become a frontier for economic expansion that the practice of democracy

116. Arlo Bates, "In the Virginia Room," *Century Magazine* (June 1905): 227–32.

117. Nina Silber writes about some of these themes in reconciliationist literature in *The Romance of Reunion*, chapter 4.

118. "Robert E. Lee," *Outlook Magazine* 84 (December 1906): 955.

119. Henry M. Field, *Blood is Thicker than Water: A Few Days among our Southern Brethren* (New York: George Munro, 1886), 66.

would only hinder. In the newly unified nation, commercial relations would take precedence over sectional rivalry, and the language of economic progress would replace the language of political equality.<sup>120</sup> In the words of a Union veteran at a Blue-Gray reunion in Richmond, Virginia in 1881, “manufacturing . . . [is] destined to grow and spread . . . until the interest of each section—North, South, East and West—shall be identical.” According to this common interpretation, commerce would be both the cause and effect of sectional reconciliation, and brotherly affection among white Americans, forged by a deeper understanding of shared sacrifices, would solidify new relationships between northern capital and southern resources.

In the end, contrary to the fears of Richmond’s residents, the exhibits of the Libby Prison War Museum confirmed the North’s growing compassion for the their defeated brethren in the South. Unlike the partisanship inherent in the Confederate Museum’s founding mission, the Chicago promoters expressed a commitment to teaching visitors “the gallantry of both North and South.”<sup>121</sup> Echoing the Confederate Museum, Libby Prison Museum catalogues celebrated the valor of Confederate soldiers, and its publications praised Confederate treatment of Union prisoners and excused whatever privations the prisoners experienced as the unavoidable consequence of war.<sup>122</sup> Exhibits of chess-pieces and jewelry that Union prisoners had carved out of the bones of their dinner suggested the mundaneness and boredom, rather than the suffering, of the prisoner’s plight; one Libby Museum pamphlet tried to dispel any drama about imprisonment by asserting that the prisoner “is a soldier whose only sword is the knife with which he pares potatoes for his mess . . . [The] order of the day is washing his socks.” Even when the accompanying museum catalogues did highlight the more morbid aspects of the lives of Union prisoners—such as the “heavy beam suspended above [that] tells you that it was used as the gallows for some poor wretch who was hanged for mutiny”—the catalogue went on, “This may sound like a cruelty, but military laws must be rigid and enforced, and mutiny is an offense which can not go unpunished.”<sup>123</sup> Such comments effectively absolved Confederate guards of atrocities while simultaneously dramatizing the cost of war to white soldiers on both sides. By emphasizing allegedly essential truths of military life, Libby’s organizers quarantined their exhibits from political questions.

Furthermore, the Libby Prison War Museum (located in Abraham Lincoln’s home state) made very little reference to the causes of the war and was

120. For accounts of the Republican party’s abandonment of Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*.

121. “Want West Side Museum,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 1906, 5.

122. Will Parmiter Kent, *The Story of Libby Prison, Also Some Perils and Sufferings of Certain of its Inmates* (Chicago: Libby Prison War Museum Association, n.d.), 6–7. Pamphlet Collection, MOC.

123. Kent, *The Story of Libby Prison*, 13, 6–7.

almost entirely silent on the topic of slavery. Libby Museum objects related to slavery consisted of personal items that did not convey a larger context—John Brown’s spectacles, for example; objects of dubious authenticity, such as a piece of wood from “Uncle Tom’s Cabin;” or were mixed in with unrelated curiosities, as in the case of a daguerrotype of Frederick Douglass, which, displayed alongside two Incan shrunken heads, was stripped of much of its pedagogical and political power. Such hoaxes and incongruities prevented visitors from paying any sustained attention to the issue of slavery. In fact, the Libby Prison Museum’s silence and avowed neutrality on the causes and consequences of the Civil War did not equally legitimate both sides of the conflict. Instead, it had the effect of accepting the Confederate version of events: both slavery and emancipation were incidental to the war.

In Richmond and Chicago, mourning the past side by side, and paying homage to the heroism of both sides, the blue and gray came to agree upon the Confederate interpretation of the Civil War. Perhaps when the Confederate widow remarked to the Union veteran in the Confederate Museum, “It was not the cause of liberty to you,” she had captured a deep and disastrous truth.

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