For Cause and Comrades

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES MCPHERSON

James M. McPherson is a renowned historian of the American Civil War. Raised in Minnesota, McPherson studied at Gustavus Adolphus College and then earned his PhD from Johns Hopkins University under another noted American historian, C. Vann Woodward. McPherson's earliest scholarship focused on abolitionism and social reform in the Civil War era. In 1988, McPherson won the Pulitzer Prize for *Battle Cry of Freedom*, a scholarly history of the Civil War which also gained a popular readership, selling over 600,000 copies. He has twice been a recipient of Gettysburg College's Lincoln Prize for nonfiction works on the Civil War, first for *For Cause and Comrades* (1998) and later for *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (2009). McPherson has actively worked for the preservation of Civil War battlefields and historic sites. He began teaching at Princeton University in 1962, where he remains an Emeritus Professor of United States History. McPherson currently lives in New Jersey with his wife Patricia.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

For Cause and Comrades focuses on the American Civil War, which was fought from April 1861 to April 1865 between secessionist states (the Confederacy) and those states that remained loyal to the United States Constitution (the Union). While various factors contributed to the outbreak of war, it was centrally fought over the seceding states' support for the institution of slavery within their borders. The Confederate States of America ultimately comprised 11 southern states—many of them dependent on an agricultural system sustained by slave labor—which rebelled against the United States government. Well over 600,000 people died over the course of the war, which was fought primarily in the South. The war ended when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, Virginia. After the defeat of the Confederacy, slavery was abolished and freed slaves slowly gained civil and political rights. James McPherson has remarked that the Civil War is fascinating to modern Americans partly because some of its core questions—like civil rights and the role of central government versus states' rights—remain relevant and controversial.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

McPherson's classic work *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (1988) examines similar themes found in *For Cause & Comrades*, focusing on the ideological divide between the Union and the Confederacy during the American Civil War. Additionally, McPherson cites John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976) as a general study of combat motivation and behavior that inspired him to research such topics as they pertain to the Civil War. Arguably the most influential fictional work of all time on Southern slavery is *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which Stowe wrote specifically to expose the horrors of slavery and which helped stir an abolitionist consciousness in the North in the decade before the war. A more recent work of influential Civil War fiction is Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Killer Angels* (1974), which explores the motivations of both Union and Confederate historical figures.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War
- **When Written:** 1996
- **When Published:** 1997
- **Genre:** Nonfiction; American History
- **Setting**: Civil War-Era United States
- **Point of View:** First Person; Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Pop History. Along with Ken Burns's popular PBS documentary, *The Civil War* (1990), James McPherson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom* helped stir popular interest in the Civil War-related books, tourism, and hobbyist reenactments.

Old Habits. In 2009, James McPherson joined a group of historians and other scholars in sending a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to refrain from the tradition of laying a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery's Confederate Memorial on Memorial Day. The letter argued that any recognition of the Confederates as heroes could be interpreted as a modern vindication of the Confederacy and would therefore be an insult to the historical suffering of African Americans. President Obama ultimately did send a wreath to be laid at the Confederate Memorial, as well as a second wreath to the African American Civil War Memorial.

PLOT SUMMARY

To a greater degree than in any other war, American Civil War

soldiers' letters and diaries provide ample evidence for their motivations to enlist in the war and to fight. Historian James McPherson has studied the writings of 1,076 soldiers, both Union and Confederate, in order to tell the story of why they fought—in their own words, whenever possible. McPherson's sample included 25,000 letters and 249 diaries, all of them uncensored and unpublished. In examining these documents, he considered three categories: initial motivation (why men enlisted), sustaining motivation (why they kept fighting), and combat motivation (what gave them courage to face danger on the battlefield).

During the first two years of the Civil War (1861–1862), the overwhelming majority of soldiers volunteered for service. Beyond initial patriotic fervor, both Union and Confederate soldiers saw themselves as enlisting to fight for liberty; as such, both sides saw themselves as fighting to preserve the legacy of the Founding Fathers. Both sides were also strongly influenced by duty, an important concept in Victorian America which was linked to contemporary views of masculinity.

If soldiers were initially eager to fight, expecting glory and adventure, their first experiences of battle tended to disillusion them. Though admitting fear was regarded as shameful, all soldiers had to learn how to manage the dread and terror of combat. McPherson identifies both external and internal motivations that enabled soldiers to do this. Outward means included training, discipline, and leadership. Though democratically minded, Americans were reluctant to obediently accept discipline—instead, they tended to respect courageous officers who displayed a willingness to share their men's burdens and dangers. Ultimately, however, McPherson finds internal motivations to have been more powerfully sustaining. Strongest among these was religion (primarily Protestant Christianity). Many soldiers wrote of a fatalistic sense of God controlling events on the battlefield, yet in its more optimistic expressions, this resignation—along with a pervasive belief in eternal life after death—seemed to embolden many soldiers to fight bravely. Both Union and Confederate soldiers also expressed an unwavering conviction that God was on their side of the conflict.

Christian teachings against killing proved difficult for many soldiers to reconcile with the brutality of war. At the same time, however, the cultural emphasis on honor, and the associated dread of cowardice and disgrace, propelled many into combat. Since many regiments were made up of men from the same community, lifelong relationships—and fear of becoming known as a coward back home—helped reinforce a sense of brotherhood, which in turn heightened combat motivation. This "band of brothers" atmosphere motivated many to reenlist, even after years of hard fighting.

Though what McPherson calls "primary group cohesion" was a significant factor, ideological commitments were also vital to sustaining motivation and combat motivation. McPherson holds that Civil War soldiers were often politically engaged when they enlisted and they remained so throughout the course of the war. While Confederates' patriotism was sharpened by anger over Northern invasion of their home territories, Union soldiers also wrote passionately of what they saw as secessionists' treasonous breakup of the Union.

For both sides, reverence for their revolutionary forebears was a major element of patriotism. Yet, in what McPherson calls a "profound irony," Union and Confederate soldiers interpreted the legacy of 1776 in directly opposite ways: Union solders saw themselves as fighting for the preservation of the Union, whereas Confederates saw themselves as fighting for independence from President Lincoln's "tyranny." Confederates even spoke of resisting "enslavement" by the North while also explicitly citing the preservation of the institution of Southern slavery as a motivation. Even soldiers whose families did not own slaves sometimes spoke of fighting against the idea of racial equality.

While early Union enlistees rarely spoke of slavery—except insofar as abolishing slavery would weaken the Confederacy—meeting Southern slaves, observing economic stagnation, and sheltering runaway slaves contributed to a growing anti-slavery principle among Northerners. Unquestionably, racist attitudes were common among Union soldiers, and many initially resisted Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1862–1863, with some resenting a seeming shift in the war's aims. However, more minds were changed by the formation and successes of black Union regiments. By 1864, resistance to black regiments was a minority position, and when Lincoln ran for reelection on a strongly abolitionist platform he won with 80 percent of the soldier vote. Overall, McPherson sees a decided shift among Union soldiers from pragmatism (or even outright reluctance) to principle regarding slavery over the course of the war.

For both Union and Confederate soldiers, letters from home provided a major morale boost for men who felt torn between obligation to family and patriotic duty. Other events at home—like an allowance that drafted men could hire substitutes to fight for them, and the emergence of "Copperheads," or antiwar Peace Democrats—could be a significant drain on soldier morale. The Victorian code of honor supplied a grimmer motive of revenge for many soldiers, especially among Confederates who often spoke viciously of Yankees, and for Unions in border states where Confederate guerillas were active. McPherson describes revenge rhetoric as "the dark underside" of morale and motivation.

1864 was the most brutal year of fighting, and though soldier breakdown became more common, many—including early volunteers—remained ideologically committed or loyal to ideals of duty and honor, choosing to reenlist even during the war's bloodiest phases. By early 1865, the battered Confederacy, desperate to fight on, even grudgingly admitted a limited

number of black soldiers among their ranks. Boosted by Lincoln's reelection, Union morale held strong through the end of the war. McPherson concludes his study by quoting an Ohio captain who, toward the war's end, told his young son that he continued to fight "to secure for each and every American citizen of every race, the rights guaranteed [...] in the Declaration of Independence." He exhorted his young son to be worthy of that heritage, and McPherson says that contemporary Americans must constantly reexamine themselves, too, to ensure they are worthy of that same heritage.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

James McPherson – James McPherson (1936–) is the author of *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*. An emeritus professor of history at Princeton University, McPherson is one of the most celebrated scholars of the American Civil War. In *For Cause and Comrades*, he aims to make sense of what motivated the Union and Confederate Armies to fight in the Civil War and why the disillusionment that tends to overtake war-weary troops did not seem to affect Civil War soldiers in the same way. McPherson examines both internal and external motivations to provide a comprehensive understanding of what drove both sides to fight, ultimately concluding that a mixture of ideological convictions, religious faith, masculine duty, and a sense of brotherhood was crucial for both Northerners and Southerners.

Abraham Lincoln – Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) was the 16th president of the United States (1861–1865), serving for the duration of the Civil War. During Lincoln's presidency, the Union was preserved and slavery was ultimately abolished. En route to abolition, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation to legally free slaves in Confederate states. Though Lincoln was generally vilified by Confederate soldiers during the war, he was even controversial among Union soldiers, who didn't widely embrace the abolitionist cause until Lincoln ran for reelection in 1864. By that time, he received 80 percent of the Union soldier vote, helping clear the way for Union victory the following year. Lincoln was assassinated on April 15, 1865.

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain – Joshua Chamberlain (1828–1914) was a professor of rhetoric from Maine who became a decorated Union officer in the Civil War. He is particularly remembered for his courageous leadership at the Battle of Gettysburg, as well as for his eloquent recollections of the war. Chamberlain was wounded numerous times throughout the war, sometimes severely, but he survived.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Robert E. Lee – Robert E. Lee (1807–1870) was Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox, Virginia in 1865.

Ulysses S. Grant – Ulysses S. Grant (1822–1885) led the Union Army as Commanding General during the Civil War. Confederate Commander Robert E. Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox, Virginia, in 1865. Grant later became the 18th President of the United States.

Jefferson Davis – Jefferson Davis (1808–1889) served as president of the Confederate States of America from 1861 to 1865.

General Sherman – General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–1891) was a Union Army general who is best known for his destructive march through Georgia in 1864.

TERMS

Union – In the American Civil War, the Union referred to those states (a total of 20 free states as well as five border states which did not secede) which remained loyal to the United States Constitution under President **Abraham Lincoln**. The Union ultimately defeated the secessionist Confederate States of America.

Confederate – During the American Civil War, Confederates supported the Confederacy, or the Confederate States of America. The Confederacy formed after the 1860 election of **Abraham Lincoln**, whose platform opposed the expansion of slavery into Western territories. Seven Southern states, dependent on an agricultural economy sustained by slavery, seceded at this point, later to be joined by four other slaveholding states. The Civil War began after the Confederates attacked Union-held Fort Sumter, South Carolina in 1861. The Confederacy was led by **Jefferson Davis**, and its armies surrendered to the Union in 1865.

Emancipation Proclamation – The Emancipation Proclamation was an executive order issued by **Abraham Lincoln** on September 2, 1862 and it was effective as of January 1, 1863. It legally freed all slaves living in Confederate states, though it wasn't until an enslaved person escaped across Union lines, or Union troops advanced through a given Confederate territory, that he or she was permanently freed. Those who weren't freed in the aftermath of the Proclamation were freed by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified in December, 1865.

Abolition – The abolitionist movement sought to end slavery in the United States. Abolitionism was active in the United States for decades leading up to the Civil War, and activists favored different approaches, whether calling for an immediate or more gradual approach to abolishing slavery. **Abraham Lincoln** generally favored a gradualist approach and he did not embrace

a strongly abolitionist platform until 1864. Though relatively few soldiers who enlisted on the Union side favored abolition at the beginning of the war, McPherson that a notable pro-abolition shift came about by the end of the war.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

DUTY, HONOR, AND MASCULINITY

In *For Cause & Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, historian James McPherson seeks to understand the motives of the three million soldiers who fought in the Union and Confederate Armies during the American Civil War (1861–1865). To do so, he studies a "quasi-representative group of soldiers"—1,076 in total—"whose letters or diaries have survived." Put simply, McPherson wants to know *why* they fought, especially in a markedly democratic society in which most men volunteered for their service. Part of his answer lies in the fact that 1860s America was also a Victorian-era society in which concepts of duty, honor, and masculinity weighed heavily in the minds of fighting-age men. By considering soldiers' statements about duty against their Victorian historical backdrop, McPherson argues that duty, honor, and masculinity combined to create a powerful motive for fighting—not just by inspiring individuals to enlist, but by reinforcing a brotherly sense of unity and camaraderie.

Duty was a pervasive and socially-reinforced concept in the Victorian era. At this time, duty was understood to be "a binding moral obligation involving reciprocity." For a Union soldier, this might manifest in a sense of duty to the American **flag** under which one enjoys the privileges of freedom. In such a case, duty was construed as a matter of individual conscience. Confederate soldiers cared about duty, too, but they were more likely to describe "duty" in terms of "honor," which had more of a public dimension—i.e., one's reputation in the eyes of one's peers. In other words, "To shirk duty is a violation of conscience; to suffer dishonor is to be disgraced by public shame." Both of these factors—fidelity to one's conscience and the dread of dishonor—motivated soldiers to enter the war and remain committed in battle.

In Victorian society, honor and masculinity were also linked to a man's sense of duty. Whether Union or Confederate, soldiers' letters are filled with the desire to "prove one's self a man" by fulfilling one's duties honorably. Two versions of manhood were especially common in Victorian America: "the hard-drinking, gambling, whoring" man who shirked obligations, and the "sober, responsible, dutiful son or husband." In other words, real manhood was seen as upholding one's obligations for the sake of others, even at personal cost; self-indulgence, by contrast, was a deficient version of manhood that had to be overcome for honor's sake. Becoming a soldier helped a man prove, both to himself and others, that he was truly a man. Sometimes, war service helped a man transform from one version of masculinity to the other. For example, a wild young man from Baltimore "determined to enlist in the hope that I should [...] have an end put to my worthless and disgraceful career" of drinking and fighting, and he indeed found that the war "made a man of me." The demands of war, in other words, could unearth or refine "manly" characteristics that were not otherwise evident.

For both Union and Confederate soldiers, honor and masculinity were inevitably tied to a powerful sense of unity. Reinforcing the fear of dishonor—of facing public disgrace—was the fact that volunteer companies typically included men who'd enlisted from the same community, leading to mutually-reinforced peer pressure. No one wanted to be the subject of a letter calling out a "skulker," as one soldier wrote home: "I am sorry to say that Norman Hart is a D—n coward" who ran from battle. Undoubtedly, Norman Hart's family and neighbors were expected to see that letter, meaning that his shame wouldn't be confined to the battlefield. Conversely, pride in one's unit reinforced one's individual sense of pride and honor and the knitting together of "a true band of brothers." Group and individual, then, are mutually interdependent: the group exerts peer pressure which fortifies the individual against displays of cowardice, and the individual's honor or shame reflects on his unit, his state, or even the army as a whole. An Alabama corporal wrote, "A soldier is always nearly crazy to get away from the army on furloughs [...] but as a general thing they are more anxious to get back. There is a feeling of love [...] for those with whom one has shared common dangers, that is never felt for any one else." An individual man's honor, in other words, was most evident in relation to that of his "brothers."

McPherson adds that although modern historians tend to view concepts of duty, honor, and masculinity with cynicism and to dismiss them as mere romanticism, this isn't how soldiers thought at the time. Undoubtedly, romantic views of war did circulate: for example, a planter's son from South Carolina wrote, "I am blessing old [novelist] Sir Walter Scott daily [...] for teaching me, when young, how to rate [knightly] honour[.]" But these romanticized views often didn't survive the realities of the battlefield. A New Jersey soldier warned his mother that his younger brother shouldn't enlist, because "If he expects fun and excitement (which between us is at the bottom of all his patriotism) he will be most emphatically mistaken." In the rest of the book, McPherson considers how duty partnered with an enduring "patriotism" to sustain soldiers throughout the war.

NORTHERN VS. SOUTHERN IDEOLOGY

1776, the year of the United States' independence, was not a distant memory for Americans of the 1860s. It's hard to overstate the influence of this historical context on the Civil War, McPherson argues: "Northerners and Southerners alike believed themselves custodians of the legacy of 1776. The crisis of 1861 was the great test of their worthiness of that heritage." The "profound irony" was that Confederate and Union soldiers interpreted their American heritage in conflicting ways: "Confederates professed to fight for liberty and independence from a tyrannical government; Unionists said they fought to preserve the nation conceived in liberty from dismemberment and destruction." McPherson argues that both Union and Confederate soldiers employed the language of the American founding in expressing their motivations for fighting—Northerners, in fact, were initially motivated by the issue of union more than by slavery, whereas Southerners, ironically, were motivated by resistance of supposed "slavery" to Northern "subjugation."

While early Union volunteers did not tend to mention slavery as one of the major issues motivating their enlistment, many spoke in terms of preserving the Union for which their forebears died. This reverence for the Union, though abstract, appealed to both common and upper-class soldiers because of its rootedness in the American founding. An Illinois farm boy wrote, "Should We the youngest and brightest nation of all the earth bow to [traitors] and forsake the graves of our Fathers?" In other words, the memory of the founding was fresh enough to inspire pride and a sense of obligation to guard its legacy. A New Jersey captain wrote home, "I would rather live a soldier for life […] than that our Republic should be divided into little *nothings* by an inglorious and shameful peace." He means that if Southerners are permitted to maintain a way of life that is an offense to the American founding, the country as a whole will effectively be lost. If they lost the war, many Union soldiers "believed that they would no longer have a country worthy of the name."

Confederates *did* often name slavery as a motive—that is, resisting "enslavement" by the North. Confederates, like their Northern counterparts, invoked the Founding Fathers. The founders "severed the bonds of oppression once […] now [we] for the second time throw off the yoke," wrote a South Carolina soldier. Only now, according to the Confederate view, the "yoke" was the Union's attempt to destroy the Southern way of life. Confederate soldiers tended to use the words "slavery" and "subjugation" often, using them in the same sense that 1776 patriots described Britain's tyranny over them. A Missouri Confederate wrote, for example, that he saw himself "fighting gloriously for the undying principles of Constitutional liberty and self government"—including Southern states' ability to govern themselves by maintaining slavery. McPherson argues that American Revolution-era slaveholders sometimes expressed discomfort with the conflict between fighting for liberty while keeping others in bondage. Confederate soldiers, on the other hand, saw slaveholding ideology as a *key* to the "freedom" for which they fought. Because Confederates used the terminology of "slavery" to describe so-called Northern tyranny, they tended to speak euphemistically of fighting for "our own social institutions" or "the institutions of the South" (including slaveholding). This sense of Northern "tyranny" further strengthened Confederate motivations by allowing them to cast themselves as fighting for "home" against "invaders." A Virginian wrote, "the insolent invader [must be driven] from the soil polluted by their footsteps." The Confederate use of the language of the U.S.'s founding, in sum, was an especially powerful ideological motivation because of the way it allowed Southerners to see themselves as distinct and resistant to Northern "aggression" while maintaining slavery themselves.

McPherson believes that these motivations, rather than fading into disillusionment, tended to intensify and harden over the course of the war. Even as late as 1864, considered to be the most grueling and bloody year of the conflict, ideological expressions like these weren't unusual on either side. For instance, even as a Pennsylvania private recovered in the hospital, he wrote his wife that he'd fight the war all over again, for "I cannot believe Providence intends to destroy this Nation, this great asylum for the oppressed of all other nations and build a slave oligarchy on the ruins thereof." Later in the book, McPherson demonstrates how early pro-Union sentiments matured into the stronger abolitionism expressed here.

SLAVERY, EQUALITY, AND ABOLITION

At the beginning of the American Civil War, "few Union soldiers professed to fight for racial equality" or even for the cause of abolishing slavery. However, McPherson argues that Union attitudes—though hardly untouched by racism—changed significantly over the course of the Civil War. Over time, those who'd entered the war for the cause of preserving the Union became, at the very least, "convinced that this goal was unattainable without striking against slavery." From there, firsthand experiences helped bring about a more explicitly abolitionist point of view among many. Without oversimplifying Northern white attitudes toward slavery, McPherson argues that the course of the war itself, by exposing white Northerners to Southern institutions and acquainting them with black fellow soldiers, caused a gradual, limited embrace of the cause of black liberty.

As the war progressed, Northerners' firsthand exposure to slavery tended to reinforce existing abolitionist sympathies or even to spark newfound abolitionism. A Pennsylvania private observed, "I thought I hated slavery as much as possible before

I came here, but here, where I can see some of its workings, I am more than ever convinced of the cruelty and inhumanity of the system." Sometimes, simply being exposed to on-the-ground realities was enough to jar people's thinking. Newly-kindled abolitionism didn't always stem from a belief in human equality, however. When Union soldiers described Southern slavery as a "blight" that "withered all it touched," they were often commenting on the economic and cultural backwardness they believed that a slave-dependent system helped to foster—not necessarily on the cruelty and dehumanization of slavery. An Indiana colonel wrote, "I am no abolitionist [...] But the more I see of slavery [...] the more I am satisfied that it is a curse [...] Outside the towns in the South the people are a century behind the free states." Such observers believed that slavery "deadened all enterprise and prosperity." Even in such cases, witnessing lived realities was a factor in shifting views.

Racist attitudes were undoubtedly present among Union ranks—many pro-Unionists opposed early measures toward abolition and greater equality—yet first-hand experience gradually softened their opposition. By 1862, increasing numbers of Northerners believed that eliminating slavery was a key to preserving the Union, yet that didn't mean they felt sympathy for slave emancipation. There was even a marked backlash in the period preceding the Emancipation Proclamation, with such commentary as "If emancipation is to be the policy of this war [...] I do not care how quick the country goes to pot." After the Proclamation was issued in 1863, remarks became even more barbed: "I don't want to fire another shot for the negroes and I wish that all the abolitionists were in hell," a Northerner insisted. Some felt, in other words, that there had been a bait and switch—they'd enlisted for a cause that was now transforming, against their will, into another.

These racist sentiments weren't universal, however, and they began to fade into a minority during the last years of the war. One formerly anti-emancipation lieutenant tried to persuade his fiancée that the Southern aristocracy and its enabling system of slavery were corrupt: "God intends that it and slavery[,] its reliance and support[,] must go down together [...] We did not think so one year ago and you will think differently too a year hence." Statements like these illustrate that views changed even during the course of the war, largely because of what formerly hostile solders witnessed firsthand. Similarly, many initially resisted and disdained the formation of black Union regiments, yet exposure to the bravery and effectiveness of these units tended to change people's minds. A naval officer said, for example, "I never [would] have believed that a common plantation negro could be brought to [fight] a white man. I supposed that everything in the shape of spirit & self respect had been crushed out of them generations back, but am glad to find myself mistaken." Not only were soldiers exposed to the harmful system of slavery, but they got an opportunity to see that black soldiers could fight as well as white soldiers. After years of battle themselves, even skeptical soldiers found such evidence compelling.

It's difficult to trace the perspectives of black soldiers themselves—including freed slaves who fought for both sides—simply because far fewer letters and diaries survive from these soldiers. (Years of enslavement and oppression meant that illiteracy rates were much higher among black soldiers than among white soldiers.) However, evidence does suggest that white sentiment shifted significantly from the beginning of the Civil War to its end. Lincoln's overwhelming reelection in 1864, after a much more openly abolitionist campaign and earning 80 percent of the Union soldier vote, is ample evidence of this. As an artilleryman wrote in celebration of the reelection, "I can cheerfully bear all the discomforts of a soldier's life for the overthrow of that monster evil," slavery.

MORALE AND ENDURANCE

Once a soldier's romantic illusions are cleared away by the bloody experiences of the battlefield, how do his motives—such things as duty, honor, and patriotism—hold up, such that they continue to propel him into battle? In addressing this question, McPherson considers various resources that strengthened American Civil War soldiers' morale and helped them endure the ongoing hardship and strain of war. He makes a case, first of all, that fear never really left even the most seasoned soldiers—they just learned how to deal with it more effectively. Soldiers required both external and internal resources to help them deal with fear and remain committed to the principles that initially motivated them to fight. McPherson argues that, externally, trusted leadership was a major key to morale, and internally, soldiers' religiosity was critical to enduring in the face of suffering and death.

Fear was pervasive among Civil War soldiers, whether they admitted that it was or not. In soldiers' writings, they were frank about the toll of battle, both during and in the aftermath. One New York artillery officer reflected that the activity of battle was so all-absorbing that he wasn't conscious of any fear: "Could there be a stronger proof that courage is merely a nonrealization of the danger one is in owing to excitement, responsibility, or something of the sort?" In other words, fear isn't necessarily absent in battle, but the pressing tasks of survival can effectively mask fear in the midst of crisis. After the Battle of Gettysburg, another officer wrote that, following several days of adrenaline-fueled elation, "one realizes what has been going on [...] sees the wounded, hears their groans [...] Such scenes completely unman me." Even where fear can be masked or its effects delayed for a time, the reality of what has happened will catch up with a soldier eventually. Although historians of combat have sometimes suggested that soldiers become more reckless in battle as they became hardened by

ongoing violence, McPherson argues that this isn't necessarily the case. One example is a Confederate soldier who wrote after Gettysburg, "I believe that soldiers generally do not fear death less because of their repeated escape from its jaws. For, in every battle they see [...] so many frightful and novel kinds of mutilation [...] that their dread of incurring the like fearful perils unnerves them." Fear only intensifies, in other words, as soldiers witness more and more of war's impact and become increasingly conscious of their own vulnerability.

Externally speaking, trusted leadership was one key to combating fear by strengthening morale. On one hand, volunteer soldiers weren't renowned for their discipline and deference to authority. McPherson argues that "American white males were the most individualistic, democratic people on the face of the earth in 1861." They elected many of their military officers and they didn't "take kindly to authority, discipline, [and] obedience." A North Carolina lieutenant observed that, while France's Napoleon may have been right to say that a man must become a "machine" in order to be a good soldier, "a degree of manly, personal independence [...] adds greatly to the virtues & essentials of a Soldier." In other words, a distinctly American military character—one marked by both "independence" and discipline—was better for morale than overbearing leadership. Likewise, homegrown leadership had to respect American democratic norms in order to effectively strengthen morale. American soldiers had the most respect for a leader who would do whatever he asked his men to do. For example, a New York soldier writes that "our colonel [...] is a regular old N.Y. farmer [...] if you were here you would see him with 2 men on his horse & him [on foot] carrying a knapsack and a gun." Another lieutenant points out, "the men think themselves as good as their officers" and they won't put up with an officer's pretensions to the contrary. Men's morale was kept up by leaders who respected their independence, shared their loads, and led them into battle instead of just ordering them.

Internally, religion (overwhelmingly Christian, whether Protestant or Catholic) was a tremendous factor for maintaining troops' morale. What McPherson describes as "Christian fatalism," while seemingly pessimistic, was actually an emboldening force that helped men fight. As a soldier whose brother had just died wrote to his family, "He was due to die, and if he hadn't been killed in the battlefield he might have died in the hospital [...] I think our time is all set [...] and it makes no difference where we are." McPherson argues that such attitudes tended to strengthen soldiers' morale more than it hindered it, as soldiers believed that their ultimate fate rested in God's hands, so it was their job to fulfill their duties bravely in the meantime. Similarly, soldiers did not necessarily pray to be spared from death, seeing such a request as presumptuous: "I do not think that I have any right to pray for exemption from physical harm," one man wrote, but for "protection from moral wrong and that I may always be prepared to die, come what may." The emboldening sense of commitment to a larger, God-ordained cause—even to the extent of being ready to die for it—was common on both sides of the war, even though Union and Confederate soldiers construed that "cause" in very different terms.

Although military leadership and religious belief are very different phenomena, both these things provided soldiers with effective forms of structure. Military discipline under trusted leadership helped soldiers to perform their duties without giving way to fear on the battlefield. Religion exerted its own interior "discipline" by providing a structure whereupon most soldiers organized their understanding of the moral meaning of the war and their own place in the war effort, while also giving them the strength to keep fighting despite the likelihood of death.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FLAG

While flags straightforwardly symbolized an American Civil War soldier's fighting unit, state, or country, they "acquired a special mystique" for both Union and Confederate soldiers. Flags symbolized the abstract ideals which motivated a soldier to fight (things like union, freedom, states' rights, or home), but perhaps just as much, they symbolized the bond shared between a soldier and the other men who fought under that same flag. This shared bond was itself deeply motivating for soldiers, and thus the "flag" steeled men for combat and against cowardice. This potent symbolism also explains why soldiers volunteered for the post of color bearer (carrying the flags during battle, which made one a ready target).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *For Cause and Comrades* published in 1997.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"I am sick of war," wrote a Confederate officer to his wife in 1863, and of "the separation from the dearest objects of life,"—his family. But "were the contest again just commenced I would willingly undergo it again for the sake of our country's independence and [our children's] liberty." At about the same time a Pennsylvania officer wrote to *his* wife that he had to fight it out to the end because, "sick as I am of this war and bloodshed [and] as much oh how much I want to be home with my dear wife and children…every day I have a more religious feeling, that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind…I [cannot] bear to think of what my children would be if we were to permit this hell-begotten conspiracy to destroy this country." These convictions had caused the two men, and thousands of others, to volunteer and fight against each other in 1861. They remained more powerful than coercion and discipline as the glue that held the armies together in 1864.

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

This quote provides a good example of James McPherson's method throughout *For Cause and Comrades*: drawing representative quotes from Civil War soldiers' writings in order to get as close as possible to understanding their motivations for fighting. In this particular case, he introduces both a Confederate and a Union quote to illustrate the war-weariness of the respective men, who both nevertheless persevered in what they saw as a sacred duty in defense of the principle of liberty and the good of posterity. McPherson does this in order to demonstrate that, more so than in any other war, ideological conviction was the motivating force for the men who volunteered to fight and remained dedicated to the fight despite suffering—more than any external pressure and in spite of the disillusionment and unfading dread of battle. The pair of quotes also brings out the irony that "liberty" was cited as a motivating factor for both Union and Confederate soldier, though the concept was employed in very different ways.

Chapter 2 Quotes

Union volunteers invoked the legacy of the Founding Fathers. They had inherited a nation sanctified by the blood and sacrifice of that heroic generation of 1776. If disunion destroyed this nation, the generation of 186l would prove unworthy of the heritage of republican liberty. "Our fathers made this country we their children are to save it," wrote a young lawyer to his wife who had opposed his enlistment in the l2th Ohio, leaving her and two small children behind. If "our institutions prove a failure and our Country be numbered among the things that were but are not…of what value will be house, family, and friends?" Civil war "is a calamity to any country," wrote a recruit in the 10th Wisconsin, but "this second war I consider equally as holy as the first…by which we gained those liberties and privileges" now threatened by "this monstrous rebellion."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 2, McPherson shows some of the principles that helped motivate soldiers' decisions to enlist as volunteers at the beginning of the Civil War. For both Union and Confederate volunteers, the legacy of the Founding Fathers was a frequently cited motivation. But such motivation tended to look quite different, depending on which side was invoking it. Union soldiers looked back on their forefathers' fight for a free and united America; their response to Southern secessionism, therefore, was a test to determine whether today's Unionists could maintain the country that had been handed down to them. The Union was regarded as a sacred trust whose privileges must be maintained by the blood of today's patriots if necessary. Secessionism, by contrast, was a "monstrous" force that threatened to undo that precious legacy. Such reasoning wasn't considered to be excessively romantic by those who used it; the American founding was a relatively fresh memory and its endurance wasn't taken for granted.

This invocation of the Founding Fathers was as common among Confederate volunteers as among their Union counterparts—for an opposite purpose. Just as the American Patriots of 1776 had seceded from the tyrannical British empire, so the Southern Patriots of 186l seceded from the tyrannical Yankee empire. Our Fathers "severed the bonds of oppression once," wrote a twenty-year-old South Carolina recruit, "now [we] for the second time throw off the yoke and be freemen still." The American Revolution established "Liberty and freedom in this western world," wrote a Texas cavalryman in 1861, and we are "now enlisted in 'The Holy Cause of Liberty and Independence' again."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

McPherson uses this quote to demonstrate how Union and Confederate soldiers were both motivated by the legacy of America's Founding Fathers yet they interpreted that legacy in conflicting ways. Whereas Union soldiers saw themselves as successors to the patriots of 1776, entrusted with maintaining their legacy, Southern soldiers saw themselves in a similar role—they were fighting to maintain their liberty against the Union, whom they saw as equivalent to the British tyrants. In effect, then, they saw the Civil War as a second war for independence. The South Carolina and Texas soldiers' enthusiasm for "throwing off the yoke" and the "holy cause" captures the passion that was felt for this perspective. Thus, this quote shows how deeply the differences between Union and Confederate mindsets ran—even though, on the surface, the rhetoric was so similar. This illustrates how history is a matter of interpretation: events of the past can be understood and appropriated in varying ways depending on the needs of the present.

Chapter 3 Quotes

During the post-battle letdown, fears banished during the heat of combat often returned with redoubled intensity. "A battle seems more dangerous in thinking it over afterwards than it does right in the midst of it," wrote an Illinois officer to his wife after Perryville. "The mind can discover dangers while thinking back over it that were not apparent while the fight was on." […] A New York officer likewise reported after the Gettysburg campaign that "the glorious excitement" had borne him up for several days, but "after the fight is over, then one realizes what has been going on. Then he sees the wounded, hears their groans…Such scenes completely unman me. I can stand up and fight, but cannot endure the sight of suffering, particularly of our own men."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

In *For Cause and Comrades*, McPherson makes the point that while many Civil War soldiers were propelled into war by patriotic motives, summoning the will to actually face combat was much more challenging. He also shows that Victorian standards of masculinity discouraged soldiers from displaying the fear they surely felt in combat. But in this chapter, McPherson argues that fear was ever-present on the battlefield; the key for soldiers was learning how to manage it. These quotes from soldiers give insight into the psychology of survival. The Illinois soldier's words suggest that even if fear can be held at bay in the midst of battle, it comes back with redoubled force once the battle has been survived. The New York officer's comments show that a kind of battlefield euphoria could sustain soldiers up to a point; however, awareness of others' suffering could frighten ("unman") the same soldier who had just bravely fought. The soldiers' words show that there was much more to managing fear than just getting through a battle, setting up McPherson's study of the internal and external resources that soldiers needed in order to continue strengthening themselves for battle—and its fearful aftermath.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ The old adage, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink," has some relevance to Civil War soldiers. The institutional structure of the army could train and discipline them (after a fashion), could station cavalry or a provost guard in their rear, and could (sometimes) furnish courageous leaders. But these were not British redcoats or the professional soldiers of Frederick the Great. […] The cultural values of Victorian America held each individual rather than society mainly responsible for that individual's achievements or failures. What really counted were not social institutions, but one's own virtue, will, convictions of duty and honor, religious faith—in a word, one's *character*. […] Training, discipline, and leadership could teach them *how* to fight and might help them overcome fear and the instinct of self-preservation. But the deeper sources of their combat motivation had to come from inside themselves.

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Civil War soldiers were not renowned for being the world's most disciplined. McPherson claims that both the Union and Confederate armies were the most democratically-minded in the world in the 1860s. As such, soldiers did not take kindly to the idea that strict drilling and training—of the kind one would have found in British or German armies of previous centuries—were necessary. In this chapter, McPherson shows that certain external structures—like training camp, or cavalry stationed in order to shoot anyone who attempted to flee from battle—could help train undisciplined soldiers or force reluctant ones to do their duty. And respected leadership (especially officers who would lead their men into battle and share their burdens, rather than just ordering them or flaunting their superiority) was a significant motivating factor, too. Overall, however, these measures could only accomplish so much. McPherson argues that for individualist American soldiers, *internal* motivation was what ultimately counted. This was a departure from armies of the past and it was owed both to the Victorian cultural context (personal character was paramount) and to America's revolutionary history.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ At least one of the several hundred women who managed to enlist as soldiers in the Civil War expressed similar sentiments. Having passed as Lyons Wakeman to join the 153rd New York in 1862, Sarah Rosetta Wakeman wrote to her parents the following year when she expected to go into battle: "I don't dread it at all….If it is [God's] will for me to be killed here, it is my will to die." She survived the only battle in which she fought, Pleasant Hill in April 1864, but died two months later of chronic diarrhea.

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In McPherson's discussion of Civil War soldiers' resignation to God's will, he highlights a rare instance of a woman who managed to sneak into the ranks. Sarah Rosetta Wakeman is one of the very few such women whose letters survive. Sarah was born into a poor farming family from upstate New York. Lacking prospects either for marriage or for earning much of a living as a domestic servant, Sarah began disguising herself as a man in order to work on a coal barge. When she met recruiters from the New York infantry, she decided to enlist. Sarah served guard duty in Virginia and Washington, D.C., then survived a grueling march through the Louisiana bayou. She helped beat back the Confederates at the battle of Pleasant Hill in April, 1864. By May, she was gravely ill and she died in the hospital a month later, apparently without her sex ever being found out. Sarah Wakeman's story shows that many soldiers' adverse life circumstances might prompt them to enlist, but that these same soldiers could fight with just as much courage and principle—and the risks Sarah undertook by disguising herself suggest how strong her principles may have been. The nature of her death is also a good reminder of how many soldiers succumbed not to death on the battlefield, but to terrible diseases contracted in camp or on the march.

Some soldiers […] were wary of theological unsoundness if they implored God for protection. That was up to Him. The purpose of prayer was to cleanse the soul, not to shield the body. "I do not think that I have any right to pray for exemption from physical harm in the discharge of my duty as a soldier," wrote a Maryland Confederate, "but only [for] protection from moral wrong and that I may always be prepared to die, come what may." […] A soldier in the 5th Iowa informed his wife that several men in the regiment had formed a Prayer Group—a common occurrence. They prayed for grace and forgiveness of sins, he wrote five months before he was killed at the battle of Iuka, because death could come at any time "and therefore I realize the importance of being 'always ready.'"

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, McPherson considers the internal motivations that helped Civil War soldiers endure combat—especially religious beliefs. Here, he discusses the role of prayer in particular. Earlier, he touched on the idea of "Christian fatalism" which was widespread among soldiers—an attitude of resignation that God had appointed one's time and manner of death, so one must simply do one's duty in the meantime. While some soldiers appeared to believe that earnest prayer (both their own and their families') could affect their survival, others were more hesitant to pray specifically for survival. The attitude of these soldiers was that life and death were in God's hands, so it would be presumptuous to beg for one's life. Yet prayer wasn't useless in such cases—one should rather pray for the ability to do one's duty with the best possible Christian character and be prepared to die faithfully. Prayer groups were one way that soldiers supported and encouraged one another in such beliefs. Religious belief, then, had both an individual and a communal aspect. In addition, McPherson notes, Victorian culture in general was preoccupied with the circumstances of death and the importance of being "ready," which certainly shaped the prayers of soldiers.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Most of the men in a volunteer company had enlisted from the same community or county. Many of them had known each other from childhood. They retained close ties to that community through letters home, articles in local newspapers, and occasional visits by family members to the regiment's camp. Because of this close relationship between community and company, the pressure of the peer group against cowardice was reinforced by the community. […] The soldier who proved a sneak in battle could not hold up his head again in his company or at home. […] "I am sorry to say that Norman Hart is a D—n coward," wrote a private in the l0th Wisconsin after Stones River.

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Even though American society in the 1860s was famously individualistic, there was undoubtedly a strong component of social pressure as well. McPherson argues that this was most clearly seen in the experiences of community-based fighting units in the Civil War. Soldiers often enlisted together and proceeded to train, march, camp, and fight alongside one another for the duration of the war. While connection to one's community of origin certainly served as sustaining motivation for soldiers by tethering them to support from home, that connection also had a negative side: peer pressure. This is seen above in the identification of Norman Hart as a "coward," a message that his family and neighbors would certainly have been disappointed to hear. The knowledge that a man could be shamed in a fellow soldier's letter home would have exerted heavy pressure in a culture in which honor, courage, and "manhood" were so highly prized. At the same time, what scholars have called "primary group cohesion" (the tight-knit "band of brothers" formed in combat) encouraged mutual reliance among soldiers and a desire to fight well not only for the sake of personal honor, but for one's "brothers."

Perhaps the best description of the powerful mystique associated with the colors comes from a noncombatant. In December 1862 Walt Whitman visited his brother George, a lieutenant in the 51st New York, after he had been wounded at Fredericksburg. Finding his wartime vocation, Walt Whitman stayed in Washington as a volunteer nurse, learning as much about soldiers as anyone outside that fraternity could learn. In April 1864 he described to his mother a regimental flag he had received from a wounded soldier he tended. "It was taken by the secesh in a cavalry fight, and rescued by our men in a bloody little skirmish. It cost three men's lives, just to get one little flag, four by three. Our men rescued it, and tore it from the breast of a dead Rebel—all that just for the name of getting their little banner back again....There isn't a reg't...that wouldn't do the same."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the book, McPherson observes the reverence in which the flag (whether United States or Confederate) was held by Civil War soldiers. The symbolism of the flag revolved around the principles it stood for—union, the Constitution, the Founders, states' rights, or simply home. But the existence of these lofty values didn't mean that the physical object wasn't precious in soldiers' eyes as well. This was seen firsthand by poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) who was profoundly moved by the injuries he witnessed while visiting his brother, who was a Union soldier. The type of skirmish he mentions over the flag is not an isolated instance: soldiers were willing to die to bear their regimental, state, and national "colors" into battle, to defend them, and to regain them after they had been captured by the enemy. (In Whitman's quote, the term "secesh" is shorthand for "secessionist," a term used interchangeably with "rebel" by those who supported the Union.) The potency of the flag's symbolism echoes the power of the motives which propelled soldiers into battle in the first place.

Chapter 7 Quotes

Tennesseeans and Louisianians who saw large parts of their states including the principal cities fall to the "insolent invader" in the spring of 1862 felt a redoubled commitment to the Cause. A captain in the 16th Tennessee wrote after the surrender of Fort Donelson that his men were "now more fully determined than ever before to sacrifice their lives, if need be, for the invaded soil of their bleeding Country....The chivalrous Volunteer State will not be allowed to pass under Lincoln rule without...the fall of a far greater number of his hireling horde than have yet been slain at the hands of those who are striking for their liberties, homes, firesides, wives and children." Rather grandiloquent prose, but it was echoed in plainer terms by a private in the 9th Tennessee who was incensed to think of his mother "being left there and Exposed to there insults [...] I feel a stronger Determination never to [quit] the field untill they are driven from that beautiful land."

Related Characters: James McPherson, Abraham Lincoln

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Among the motives which kept Confederates fighting throughout the Civil War, defense of "home and hearth" was frequently cited. McPherson shows that such motivation was stronger among Confederates because most of the war was fought within Southern territory, meaning that Confederate soldiers did feel their homeland had been invaded—a sense that brought many visceral fears with it. Sometimes, even soldiers who were indifferent to the secessionist cause were moved to enlist and fight by the impulse to defend their own lands and state, if not the Confederacy more broadly. The Tennesseean's reference to Lincoln's "hireling horde" is a reference to the presence of bounties to motivate later enlistments in the North, and perhaps also to give a sense of the "foreignness" of the Union Army, in which immigrants and foreign-born citizens were more common than in the Confederate Army. But more simply, soldiers worried what would become of their homes and families under a government which they suspected would be unsympathetic to their way of life, unless they rose up in defense of what they loved.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ The patriotism of Civil War soldiers existed in a specific historical context. Americans of the Civil War generation revered their Revolutionary forebears. Every schoolboy and schoolgirl knew how they had fought against the odds to forge a new republic conceived in liberty. Northerners and Southerners alike believed themselves custodians of the legacy of 1776. The crisis of 1861 was the great test of their worthiness of that heritage. […] That is why Lincoln began his great evocation of Union war aims with the words: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth…a new government, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Likewise, [Jefferson] Davis urged his people to "renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty."

Related Characters: Jefferson Davis, Abraham Lincoln

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

The Revolutionary War was not a distant memory for Civil War soldiers. Rhetoric invoking the patriots of 1776 was therefore not regarded as merely sentimental, but as a source of self-understanding and urgent motivation for both Northerners and Southerners of the 1860s. Both Union and Confederate soldiers would have enlisted out of a sense of obligation to the revered founding generations who'd passed down a legacy of liberty. The difference was that each side saw the other as a betrayer of that legacy and themselves as its rightful guardians. President Lincoln intentionally highlighted the idea that "all men are created equal" (a reference to the Declaration of Independence) when he gave his brief Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863, on the site of the Union victory, where so many from both sides had lost their lives. This allowed him to associate the Union's increasingly pro-abolition stance with the legacy of "our fathers." Likewise, Jefferson Davis appeals to "our fathers" as those who were committed to the cause of states' constitutional rights. Both appeals would have been a source of sustaining motivation for soldiers and may have even encouraged men to sacrifice their lives.

❝ These soldiers were using the word *slavery* in the same way that Americans in 1776 had used it to describe their subordination to Britain. Unlike many slaveholders in the age of Thomas Jefferson, Confederate soldiers from slaveholding families expressed no feelings of embarrassment or inconsistency in fighting for their own liberty while holding other people in slavery. Indeed, white supremacy and the right of property in slaves were at the core of the ideology for which Confederate soldiers fought. "We are fighting for our liberty," wrote a young Kentucky Confederate, "against tyrants of the North […] who are determined to destroy slavery." A South Carolina planter in the Army of Northern Virginia declared a willingness to give his life "battling for liberty and independence" but was exasperated when his supposedly faithful body servant ran away to the Yankees. "It is very singular and I cant account for it."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

The Confederate use of the word "slavery" is an interesting example of the appropriation of history for the sake of morale. The word often appears in soldiers' letters as a way of appealing to the Revolutionary generation's resistance of Great Britain—in turn allowing the Confederacy to occupy the position of independence-fighters in their own day. They very seldom used the term to refer to the institution of slavery which was such a vital aspect of the Southern economy and culture. Yet they didn't hesitate to acknowledge slavery as something worth fighting for, even if they didn't use the words. McPherson pulls no punches in calling this attitude "white supremacy." He uses quotes from Confederate soldiers to highlight the paradox—the juxtaposition of "liberty" and defense of one's right to possess other human beings. The South Carolina soldier's bafflement over his slave's escape is a particularly jarring example of how slavery was a taken-for-granted aspect of Southern culture and, in McPherson's view, a blind spot for many who claimed to fight for so-called "liberty."

Confederates who professed to fight for the same goals as their forebears of 1776 would have been surprised by the intense conviction of Northern soldiers that *they* were upholding the legacy of the Revolution. A sergeant in the lst Minnesota proudly told his parents that he fought for "the same glorious ensign that floated over Ticonderoga, [and] was carried triumphantly through the Revolution." A schoolteacher with several children of his own, who had enlisted in the 20th Connecticut on his thirty-sixth birthday, celebrated his thirty-seventh by writing that he had never regretted his decision to fight for "those institutions which were achieved for us by our glorious revolution [...] in order that they may be perpetuated to those who may come after." An Illinois farm boy whose parents had opposed his enlistment in 1862 asked them tartly a year later: "Should We the youngest and brightest nation of all the earth bow to traters and forsake the graves of our Fathers?"

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 110

Explanation and Analysis

Northern attitudes about liberty were no less passionate than Southern ones during the Civil War. Just as Southern soldiers saw themselves as upholding the spirit of 1776 by fighting for liberty (even if that included the "liberty" to own slaves), so Northern solders saw themselves as fighting to maintain the Union for whose independence their ancestors had died. Some appealed to specific historic symbolism—for instance, Fort Ticonderoga was the site of the first American victory in the Revolutionary War. The Connecticut schoolteacher writes more abstractly of "institutions" worth preserving, implicitly referring at least to the Constitution. And even the less eloquent farm boy sees his young country as duty-bound to uphold what its "fathers" achieved. The language of liberty clearly had a broad appeal, capturing the imagination of Union soldiers in various deeply motivating ways. McPherson later points out that during the earlier stages of the war, relatively few Union soldiers understood themselves to be fighting specifically for the abolition of slavery, though this changed throughout the course of the war.

Chapter 9 Quotes

"Slavery and Aristocracy go hand in hand," [a Minnesota lieutenant] told his fiancée, who did not agree with his new opinions. "An aristocracy brought on this war—that Aristocracy must be broken up...it is rotten and corrupt. God intends that it and slavery[,] its reliance & support[,] must go down together....We did not think so one year ago & you will think differently too a year hence." [...] A Kentucky lieutenant who had once threatened to resign his commission if Lincoln moved against slavery had executed an about-face by the summer of 1863. "The 'inexorable logic of events' is rapidly making practical abolitionists of every soldier," he informed his sister. "I am afraid that [even] I am getting to be an Abolitionist. All right! better that than a Secessionist."

Related Characters: James McPherson, Abraham Lincoln

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

This quote illustrates how Union soldiers' views changed about slavery over the course of the Civil War. While some men were ardent abolitionists when they enlisted, this was a relatively rare position. Most saw the abolishing of slavery as, at best, a pragmatic matter—something that would weaken the Confederacy and thereby hasten the end of the war. But McPherson shows that the more soldiers came into direct contact with slavery and with black people in general, the more sympathetic they became to abolitionist views. Sometimes, as in the case of the Minnesota lieutenant, it was because they witnessed slavery firsthand and they believed it was dehumanizing for the individuals involved, as well as having a negative impact on the larger culture. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the institution of black Union regiments, views changed even more rapidly as white soldiers had the opportunity to fight alongside back soldiers. Very often, personal experience seemed to play a significant role in transforming Northern views on abolition, as the abstract became personal.

❝ At Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, and Fort Wagner black soldiers in 1863 proved their willingness and ability to fight. That began a process of converting many skeptics into true believers. A naval officer whose ship came into the Union base at Beaufort, North Carolina, for repairs was impressed by the black regiment there under the command of James Beecher, brother of Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. "There is a firmness & determination in their looks & in the way in which they handle a musket that I like," he wrote his wife. "It looks like fight & Port Hudson has proved that they will do so. I never [would] have believed that a common plantation negro could be brought to face a white man. I supposed that everything in the shape of spirit & self respect had been crushed out of them generations back, but am glad to find myself mistaken."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 127

Explanation and Analysis

This quote provides another good example of the way in which personal experience and observation played a role in shifting Northern opinions on slavery. Black regiments in the Civil War were notably present in the above-named battles in the Vicksburg campaign along the Mississippi and also in South Carolina. James Beecher was from the prominent New England Beecher family who were noted for their social activism—Henry Ward Beecher was a famous abolitionist preacher, and Harriet Beecher Stowe authored the tremendously popular *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—so it is not surprising that James Beecher, too, was prominent in pro-abolition causes. The North Carolina naval officer's remarks show how easily misconceptions could be swept away. Though slavery was undoubtedly a degrading institution, ex-slaves who joined the Union Army showed no hesitation to take up arms in defense of their own and others' freedom. Sadly, the perspectives of black soldiers themselves are more difficult to trace, since what letters and diaries existed have seldom survived.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ [Certain] letters had a baneful impact on morale. An unmarried officer in the l03rd Illinois described two married captains in the regiment who "each gets five letters a week [from his wife] and looks a little sicker after each letter." The colonel of the 15th Wisconsin, a renowned Norwegian-American regiment, lamented that several of his married soldiers received letters filled with "complaints, and whinings, asking him to 'come home' etc., [which] has more to do with creating discouragement and finally sickness and disease than the hardships he has to endure." In an effort to arrest this demoralizing process, the lieutenant colonel of the crack 5th Wisconsin of the Iron Brigade gave a speech at home during a furlough in March 1863: "If you wish success, write encouraging letters to your soldiers. Do not fill the ears of your soldiers with tales of troubles and privations at home, caused by their absence."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis

Receiving mail from home was often the highlight of a Civil War soldier's time in camp. Because it was so crucial for morale, the Union, especially, went to great lengths to ensure a speedy and reliable mail service. However, the relationship between soldiers and the home front could sometimes be complicated, as McPherson shows here. Married soldiers often had to wrestle with conflicting values—on one hand, the cultural expectation that they provide for their families, and on the other hand, both personal and social pressures to do their duty in the war. When family members at home complained of hardships caused by their soldier's absence, this delicate balance of values threatened to collapse. The struggles of wartime wives are not part of McPherson's study, so the book doesn't give much insight into the so-called "complaints, and whinings" their letters purportedly contained. Only the soldiers' reactions are visible, in the form of discouragement and exhortations to their wives to stop writing in this way. But this quote amply illustrates the uneasy relationship between domestic duty and wartime morale, especially the way that outside concerns could profoundly shape soldiers' attitudes.

[Additional] themes emerged in soldiers' letters to wives trying to justify their absence in the army. The first was an appeal to women's own patriotic duty, their heritage of "republican motherhood" from the Founding Mothers who had labored to give birth to the nation by sustaining the Founding Fathers. "Be a woman," wrote a lieutenant in the 28th Mississippi to his wife who had expressed her loneliness and anxiety. "Think of the noble women of ancient and modern times—Think of our Revolutionary mothers daily."

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

The ideal of "republican motherhood" traced back to the Revolutionary era. Although women didn't participate in politics directly at that time, women's political power was nevertheless recognized—especially in the role they played by encouraging the political participation of husbands and sons. The "republican mother" was also responsible for instilling morals and virtues in her sons so that they would be sound citizens in the public sphere. This ideal also fit well with Victorian-era views of women that were current during the Civil War—women could be encouraged to exert semi-political influence (by encouraging their husbands and sons on the front lines) while remaining primarily in the private and domestic sphere. Soldiers picked up on these themes in their letters home—hence the Mississippi lieutenant's admonition to his wife to "be a woman" in the mold of the "Founding Mothers" who sacrificed for the birth of the Union. Republican motherhood is another example of a way that Civil War soldiers on both sides drew upon the imagery and sentiments of the idealized Revolutionary generation.

Chapter 12 Quotes

When one of the Army of the Potomac's most celebrated soldiers, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, proposed to return to the army after partial recovery from a wound once thought to be fatal, his mother pleaded with him to reconsider: "Surely you have done & suffered & won laurels enough in this war." He replied in February 1865 that "I am not scared or hurt enough yet to be willing to face the rear, when other men are marching to the front." To return was the only course "which honor and manliness prompt." Surviving another life-threatening wound at White Oak Road on March 31, he fought through the campaign to Appomattox where Grant designated him to receive the formal surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Related Characters: James McPherson, Ulysses S. Grant, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

Related Themes:

Page Number: 169

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, McPherson considers soldiers' endurance to the end of the Civil War. Despite the fact that 1864 brought some of the war's deadliest fighting, many who had already been fighting for three years chose to reenlist. Overall, McPherson finds that a remarkable number of the sampled soldiers persisted in upholding the same values that had propelled them into war in the first place. A good example is the famous Union officer, Joshua Chamberlain, who suffered half a dozen wounds over the course of the war, at least two of which had been considered life-threatening. Even after all this, Chamberlain chose to return to battle, explicitly citing the "honor and manliness" which were unspoken motivations for so many Civil War soldiers. In light of his mother's plea, Chamberlain does not seem to have thought of his service as something that could be quantified—there was no such thing as "enough" when his men were fighting without him. Even less celebrated veterans would have voiced similar sentiments, suggesting that this sense of duty to one's fellow soldiers was widespread.

"There is nothing pleasant" about soldiering, wrote a corporal in the 105th Ohio, but "I can endure its privations…for there is a *big idea* which is at stake . . the principles of Liberty, Justice, and of the Righteousness which exalteth a Nation." A few months before he was killed at Fort Fisher, a sergeant in the 9th New York reproved his brother that "this is no time to carp at things which, compared with the success and reestablishment of the Republic, are insignificant." And in letters to his mother, an Irish-born sergeant in the 2nd New Jersey declared that neither the "horrors of the battlefield [nor] the blind acts of unqualified generals" had "chilled my patriotism in the least." "We are still engaged in the same holy cause," he wrote on the third anniversary of his enlistment, "we have yet the same Country to fight for."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

This quote supports McPherson's argument that even near the end of the Civil War, many soldiers continued to cite the same values that had inspired their enlistment and sustained their early participation. In particular, each of the Union soldiers quoted here cites something even bigger than a sense of personal duty—a commitment to "principles of Liberty," the "reestablishment of the Republic," and "patriotism" on behalf of a "holy cause." While not every soldier would cite similar ideals, such language suggests that "big ideas" really did supply sustaining motivation for a great many soldiers, especially those who stuck it out to the end. The Ohio corporal's line "righteousness which exalteth a nation" is from the Bible, Proverbs 14:34. In the King James version, the full verse reads, "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." The implication is that a nation which tolerates slavery and rebellion is subject to reproach, and that the Union is on the side of righteousness—a good reminder of the prominence of religious motivations for so many soldiers.

> The conviction of Northern soldiers that they fought to preserve the Union as a beacon of republican liberty throughout the world burned as brightly in the last year of the war as in the first. After marching up and down the Shenandoah Valley a couple of hundred miles in Sheridan's 1864 campaign, the last twenty-five miles barefooted, a private in the 54th Pennsylvania wrote to his wife from the hospital that he was ready to do it again if necessary for "I cannot believe Providence intends to destroy this Nation, this great asylum for the oppressed of all other nations and build a slave oligarchy on the ruins thereof."

Related Characters: James McPherson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

Other motivations aside, belief in the Northern cause of preserving the Union is one that remained strong from the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 until its conclusion in 1865. Though certain convictions—like abolitionism and equality—took shape over time, and other motivations (like shifting situations on the home front and the loss of comrades) ebbed and flowed, ideological commitments to liberty seem to have remained uppermost for a surprising number of the Union soldiers McPherson highlights. The view of the quoted Pennsylvania private demonstrates this—despite a grueling march and hospitalization, he shows his willingness to do it again, for the sake of an America he describes as a haven for the oppressed. In his view, such a country stands directly opposed to one that countenances the institution of slavery.

In that respect, this quote also shows how far apart Northern and Southern perceptions of liberty remained by the end of the war, since Confederates still fought doggedly for the preservation of Southern rights and institutions, too. In any case, the Pennsylvania soldier appears to have been fairly representative of Union views—Abraham Lincoln's 1864 reelection showed that most Union soldiers had gotten on board with an openly abolitionist view of liberty, and his victory helped propel the Union to victory less than a year later.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PREFACE

The uncensored letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers "provide fuller and more candid explanations for their decisions to enlist and fight" than exist for soldiers in any other war. Between the Union and the Confederate Armies, three million soldiers fought in the Civil War. It's impossible to get a fully representative sample of these soldiers, but James McPherson does the next best thing: selecting a "quasi-representative sample" of the surviving documents and reading them with an eye toward answering certain questions.

The American Civil War was fought between 1861 and 1865, between the predominantly Northern states which remained loyal to the Union and the Southern states which seceded to form the Confederacy. James McPherson, an American historian whose scholarly focus has been the Civil War era, introduces the present project: to understand what made soldiers on both sides enlist and fight.

McPherson's sample consists of 1,076 soldiers: 647 Union and 429 Confederate. The number of Confederate soldiers is an overrepresentation—Confederates made up 29 percent of the total number of soldiers in reality, while here, they make up 40 percent of the studied soldiers—but this allows McPherson to "broaden the base for generalizations" about these soldiers.

McPherson lays the groundwork for his project by explaining his selection of sources. Any researcher must be conscientious about the sources that will provide the basis for his conclusions. In this case, McPherson wants to broadly reflect the historical proportion of Union and Confederate soldiers but also to avoid being overly broad in his conclusions about the smaller Confederate sample.

When considering soldiers' ages, marital status, geographical distribution, and branch of service (infantry, cavalry, artillery, and navy), the studied samples are fairly representative. By definition, however, the 10-12 percent of soldiers who were illiterate are not represented. Black Union soldiers are also underrepresented, as are foreign-born soldiers, unskilled laborers, and nonslaveholding farmers (in the Confederate sample). The samples are also biased toward officers and those who volunteered near the start of the war.

By choosing to focus on soldiers' own writings, McPherson inevitably faces certain limitations, particularly when dealing with those populations whose literacy rates were lower. This leads to certain under- and overrepresentations. For instance, about one-third of Confederate soldiers belonged to slaveholding families, compared to two-thirds of McPherson's sample (of those whose slaveholding status can be determined).

McPherson explains that the sample's bias toward native-born, middle- and upper-class, early enlistees is unavoidable. This is because these soldiers were more likely to write letters and diaries, and their descendants more likely to preserve them, than "working-class, foreign-born, black, or slaveless soldiers." But this limitation actually yields certain advantages. McPherson is most interested in the motives of soldiers who did most of the fighting, and casualty figures suggest that the groups which are overrepresented in the sample are indeed those who did a disproportionate amount of fighting.

McPherson explains the trade-offs entailed by his selection of data. In short, while certain groups are favored, the available data is also skewed in favor of those soldiers who were most involved in combat, which provides more of a basis for understanding the motives of the heaviest fighters. The greater availability of data for such soldiers might be due to the fact that the families of soldiers who were killed in action were more likely to preserve their letters and diaries.

McPherson states that he tells the story of why these men fought through their own words as much as possible. Their words represent the "tip of the iceberg"—for every statement McPherson quotes, at least six more such statements appear in his notes. Although he identifies the occasional famous soldier by name, most are identified in the text by their rank, regiment, state, and branch of service (typically infantry, unless otherwise noted). He also refrains from correcting most of the soldiers' "delightfully original and creative" spelling.

While no single soldier's perspective should be taken as representative of the whole of the group they're a part of, the soldiers whom McPherson chooses to quote do *represent a significant number of like-minded counterparts who aren't quoted. Additionally, McPherson tries to stick close to the language of the soldiers themselves, likely to retain the authenticity of the soldiers' words and experiences.*

CHAPTER 1: THIS WAR IS A CRUSADE

McPherson got the idea for *For Cause and Comrades* in 1976, when he took several Princeton students on a tour of Gettysburg battlefield. The group walked across the ground over which Pickett's charge—including 13,000 Confederate soldiers—took place on the climactic day of the battle. The students marveled, asking what could have motivated those soldiers to make such a desperate, deadly charge. McPherson didn't know how to answer that question, but it eventually led to this book.

McPherson's book was prompted by the curiosity of students who wanted to understand the lived experience of Civil War soldiers. Pickett's charge, in particular, was a failed, last-ditch Confederate push that arguably turned the tide of the war in the Union's favor. Such events involved real people with real motivations, not just abstract figures.

McPherson also grappled with soldier motivations in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Very few Vietnam veterans seemed to possess the same outlook as their Civil War forebears—their focus was on individual survival, not a larger cause. A Vietnam general observed that today's American soldiers would never throw themselves into 18 hours of fierce fighting like the Union soldiers who threw themselves into one attack after another at Spotsylvania, for example.

McPherson's career as a historian was getting underway during the Vietnam War era in the 1960s and '70s, so it makes sense that he would think about soldier motivation against that backdrop, observing a sharp divergence between the passions of the Civil War and the low morale that characterized many Vietnam soldiers.

McPherson realized that the right question wasn't, "Why not?" but "Why did Civil War soldiers do it?" It wasn't, he believed, because Civil War soldiers cared any less for their lives than modern soldiers do, or that they lived in a more violent culture. And they certainly weren't forced to fight—most soldiers, both Union and Confederate, were poorly-paid civilian volunteers.

McPherson decided to look at the question of why some soldiers fight more fiercely in a positive way, by trying to understand exactly what motivated soldiers during the Civil War. The question is especially interesting given that, unlike the draft-reliant Vietnam War, most Civil War soldiers chose *to enlist, with little obvious prospect for reward.*

McPherson observes that one can find in Abraham Lincoln, Joshua Chamberlain, and the letters of a poor farmer's son very similar themes. Most did believe they were fighting for their country, for duty, and for honor. At the same time, it was common knowledge that about half the men in a given regiment did the bulk of the fighting; others (known as skulkers) found ways of avoiding the fray, whether by deserting, finding "bombproof" jobs behind the lines, or simply disappearing when fighting grew intense.

Remarkably, both famous orators (like President Lincoln and the highly articulate Union officer Chamberlain) and "ordinary" soldiers express similar motivations. However, not all soldiers were equally committed to the cause in their actions.

Many of the most disdainful remarks one finds about skulkers and stragglers come from upper- and middle-class soldiers. These were early volunteers who believed they'd enlisted out of motives such as duty, honor, and patriotism. These men observed that bullies, street fighters, and other stereotypical tough guys generally made the poorest soldiers, whereas those with a timid reputation often displayed the most courage in battle.

Unsurprisingly, there is a correlation between early enlistees and those who expressed the loftiest motivations for fighting. These soldiers saw the war as primarily a matter of ideals, not simply a desire to fight, which explains the lack of correlation between having a tough reputation and being a good soldier.

Men who were drafted into battle, served as replacements, or (in the Union) enlisted because of bounties after mid-1863 were looked down upon by those who'd volunteered in 1861 and 1862. Such men were derided as "without patriotism or honor," having "no interest in the cause." Yet many early enlistees, even those who grumbled in their letters home or who were injured multiple times during the war, persevered to the end. Why did these men "fight like bulldogs?"

Similarly, enlistees who claimed to be motivated by ideals didn't have much respect for those who didn't appear to share their outlook. And these same men generally seemed to follow up their expressed opinions with their behavior, enduring throughout the entire war—and prompting McPherson to examine what motivated them.

To answer this question, McPherson goes through the writings of those men who did most of the fighting. There is an abundance of such sources, including war memoirs published in the later 19th century, regimental histories, published letters, and published diaries. However, all such published works contain "constructed [...] narratives with a public audience in mind," and potentially faulty memories. While valuable, they are not adequate sources to answer the questions McPherson poses.

To understand motivations, McPherson tries to get as close as possible to the thoughts of soldiers themselves. There is no shortage of primary documents related to the Civil War, but generally those which were prepared for publication, or those written some years after the war, have the disadvantage of being excessively polished or containing faded recollections.

Thankfully, many unpublished letters and unrevised diaries also exist. Civil War armies were the most literate armies in history up to that time—at least 90 percent of white Union and 80 percent of Confederate soldiers could read and most of these men wrote home during the war. McPherson has read 25,000 letters and 249 diaries and he is convinced that they are the best available surviving evidence for the questions he poses. These letters, unlike those from later wars, are also uncensored.

Though of course personal letters, too, were written with an audience in mind, McPherson believes that they nevertheless tended to be more candid and immediate than writings intended for publication. The lack of censorship allows insight into things like troop morale, battle details, and politics that isn't found as easily in modern letters.

McPherson adapts the conceptual framework of French Revolution historian John A. Lynn to help him interpret his material, looking at three categories: initial motivation (why men enlisted), sustaining motivation (what kept them fighting), and combat motivation (what "nerved them to face extreme danger"). McPherson will argue for a closer relationship between these categories than scholars have typically observed.

McPherson won't examine these three categories sequentially but he will consider them while looking at different stages of the war and at certain themes. An example of "conventional" scholarship on wartime motivations is that scholars of World War II, for instance, have argued that patriotic motivations for enlistment often didn't last, and that combat motivation had more to do with group camaraderie than with ideology. McPherson will challenge some of these assumptions.

CHAPTER 2: WE WERE IN EARNEST

The Civil War has been called The Brothers' War because of the way that families were sometimes forced to choose sides. For example, when James Welsh, born in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, moved to Illinois and he became a Lincoln-voting Republican, he wrote home to his brother John criticizing "Jeff Davis and his crew of pirates" for their "treason." John wrote back saying he grieved his brother's support for "sending men here to butcher his own friends" and that John himself would never submit to "black Republican rule." The two brothers enlisted in their respective sides and never spoke again; John was killed at Gettysburg.

This opening example of strife between brothers illustrates the high passions and divisive nature of the Civil War. Loyalty to where one lived seemed to play a significant role in solidifying one's convictions. On one side, secessionists were seen as traitors; on the other side, Unionists were blamed for invading and making war on one's own flesh and blood. The term "black republican" was a slur Southerners used against the Republican Party because of the party's abolitionist sympathies.

During 1861, the first year of the Civil War, all those who enlisted, on both the Union and Confederate sides, chose to do so. The same was true for most in 1862. If it weren't for these volunteers, the war would never have happened. McPherson attributes these early enlistments to an initial "patriotic furor" that swept the country following Fort Sumter. When explaining his decision to enlist, an Illinois farmer wrote to his fiancée describing his "indignation" at the "armed *rebels* and *traitors* to their country and their country's **flag**."

After Lincoln's election in 1860, South Carolina was the first Southern state to secede from the Union. With this action, the new Confederate states also demanded the surrender of Union military properties to the Confederacy. The Lincoln administration refused to surrender Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, to the Confederates, leading to the Confederate decision to fire on the fort on April 12, 1861.

Even before Fort Sumter in April 1861, seven Southern states (in which cotton was a main crop) had seceded. Afterward, Lincoln's call for Union troops ignited secessionism in the Upper South. Young men wrote of the frenzied excitement and the belief that the war would be brief, because "the scum of the North *cannot* face the chivalric spirit of the South."

Even as Northern soldiers were inspired to enlist by what they saw as Southern treason, Confederate patriotism was stirred by the war mobilization in the North. Long-simmering regional differences began to come to a boil.

Initial patriotic fervor cooled down but it ebbed and flowed throughout the war, and enlistments with it. Most early recruits "professed patriotic motives" like those of the excited young Southern men. Northern enlistees often echoed Abraham Lincoln's description of secession as "the essence of anarchy," a defiance of the Constitution. A Philadelphia enlistee, for example, described the emerging conflict as "not the North against South," but "government against anarchy."

Early enlistees conceived of the war not so much as a geographical conflict, but as an ideological one. Northerners saw themselves as defending the Constitution against those whom they saw as defying the United States.

Such Union volunteers were "[invoking] the legacy of the Founding Fathers." They believed that if their generation couldn't hold the Union together, they would "prove unworthy of the heritage of republican liberty." Few such men mentioned slavery explicitly, but those who did had strong feelings about cleansing America of what they saw as a shameful institution.

For Northern enlistees, motivation to join came down to a sense of obligation to maintain the Union. It's important to note that enlistees seldom fought explicitly for slavery at this point—but those who did tended to have very strong abolitionist views.

Some Confederate volunteers mentioned the preservation of slavery among their motivations for enlisting. A Virginia schoolteacher, for example, deemed the "horrors of war" far preferable to seeing their white daughters marry black men. Whereas Americans of the Founding Fathers' generation sometimes acknowledged a paradox between the fight for liberty and the owning of slaves, Confederates often denied the paradox outright, even mocking the idea of fighting for so-called human rights.

Unlike for Northerners, slavery tended to be more at the forefront of Southern enlistees' minds. This is because they had more of a stake—culturally and economically if not personally—in its preservation since slavery was so entrenched in the Southern economy and way of life. Assumptions of slaves' inferiority is clear in comments like that of the Virginia schoolteacher. Fears about interracial marriage (and claims that Northerners intended to force such things on the South) weren't uncommon in Confederate writings.

Put more positively, most Confederate volunteers saw themselves as fighting for liberty, too, describing Lincoln as a "tyrant" and the institution of slavery as "a bond of union stronger" than the North could boast. They even described their fight as being against "Northern slavery" or "subjugation." They evoked the Founding Fathers just as often, appropriating the Fathers' rejection of British oppression as their own cause.

Confederate language about freedom and slavery came from a view which associated the Union with British "tyranny" in the Revolutionary era. Slavery was sometimes even invoked as a grounds for cultural unity that must be maintained. There was a readiness to acknowledge, even to celebrate, slavery that most Revolution-era slaveowners were more reticent to do.

Both Union and Confederate volunteers appealed to symbols like country, **flag**, and the Revolutionary legacy; yet Confederates could appeal more concretely to the defense of home against invasion. Even in states like Virginia, where Union sentiments had lingered, Northern invasion sparked anger against those who the Southerners believed were "invading" their sacred homeland.

Allegiances weren't clear-cut for every eventual soldier, but Northern acts of war, like "invading" Southern territory, brought tensions to a head. Robert E. Lee is a prominent example of a Virginian who held out against secession for some time, yet he cited defense of his home state as his eventual motivation to fight for the Confederacy.

Another major motivation was duty—a prevalent concept in Victorian America. Duty was understood to be "a binding moral obligation involving reciprocity," such as a duty to the **flag** under which one had known liberty and protection. Confederates more often spoke of "honor," or one's public reputation. Shirking duty would be seen as a violation of conscience, whereas suffering dishonor was viewed as a public disgrace. Sometimes duty and honor were mentioned in the same sentence, and there wasn't a neat correspondence between Northerners with duty and Southerners with honor—rather, there was a general trend. And while honor tended to be more of an upper-class concept in the South, appeals to duty were more widespread in the North, including among immigrants who felt an obligation to their new nation.

McPherson provides historical context to help explain some of the major motivations for enlistees, namely abstract concepts like duty and honor which were concretely felt by people at the time. Failing to fulfill one's duty, or dishonoring oneself, had personal and societal implications. And they appeared not just among people whose ancestral heritage traced back to the Revolution, but to those who'd chosen to make the United States home more recently.

Duty and honor were also linked to Victorian views of masculinity. War "separated men from boys." Both Union and Confederate soldiers were eager to "prove themselves men" by enlisting. Two views of masculinity competed during this era—the "drinking, gambling, whoring" figure without obligations and the "sober, responsible, dutiful" son or husband. War was sometimes seen as a mechanism for transforming the first kind of man into the second.

There wasn't a universal model of manhood during the Victorian era, but the cultural consensus was that a real man fulfilled his obligations, whereas a deficient man chose to answer only to himself. This explains why duty was viewed as the crucial separator between men and boys, as adults tend to take on responsibilities that children are incapable of.

Sometimes this desire to prove oneself a man was linked to romantic views of war and desires for adventure and glory—but such views didn't tend to last very long on the battlefield. A 20-year-old North Carolina soldier described training camp as "a glorious time," but he later wrote home that he would "give almost anything to have this abominable war ended." A New Jersey soldier described it as "preposterous" to think that "fun and excitement" could be found in the service. In any case—no matter what the precise motivations that led them to enlist—all soldiers soon found that they had to stand up to the realities of combat.

McPherson makes clear that the ideals of duty and honor can't be reduced to a romanticized view of war. While the latter certainly existed, part of becoming a "man" meant outgrowing such ideas about warfare and taking on the all too real burdens of the battlefield.

CHAPTER 3: ANXIOUS FOR THE FRAY

At the beginning of the Civil War, most soldiers, on both sides, seem to have been "spoiling for a fight," eager to "see the elephant"—a phrase from the period which denoted an exciting new experience. This eagerness derived partly from the desire to demonstrate one's manliness to others.

At first, enlistees genuinely wanted to experience the novelty of warfare and to learn if they were capable of behaving in "manly" fashion. Initial excitement, in other words, hadn't yet given way to the need for sustained motivation.

After one's first battle, however, men tended to be quickly disillusioned. For instance, an Ohio soldier wrote to his wife that although he began fighting with high spirits, after the battles was over he never wanted to participate in another. Similarly, a Virginia private wrote that he'd "seen enough of the glory of war"—he was tired of seeing men maimed or killed. Once a man had "seen the elephant"—regardless of whether he had met his personal standards for manliness—he generally wasn't eager to see it again.

Simply experiencing warfare radically changed one's attitudes about it. Even if a soldier enlisted with genuine intentions and acquitted oneself "honorably" on the battlefield, he encountered things he had never been forced to endure before. The question then became how to cope with what he'd experienced—and how to prepare himself to face it again.

Once soldiers' boyish eagerness was replaced with a more realistic view, the men nevertheless expressed willingness to fight for duty's sake. A soldier weary of war nevertheless did "not wish to be elsewhere [...] for it is for my Countries **Flag** I am fighting." This being the case, all soldiers still had to contend with fear. Openly admitting fear was seen as "unmanly," so some either denied that they felt it or they only referred to the gallows humor in which men indulged on the brink of battle.

In a sense, real shame for a soldier was not feeling fear, but admitting to fear. Even while feeling fear, devotedness to duty remained a sustaining motivation for many—even if the man had to deny his feelings or make jokes about them in order to save face. Soldiers on both sides frequently cited the "flag" as a symbol of the land and principles for which they fought, suggesting that patriotism was a significant ideological factor driving both sides.

Over time, though, men seemed to admit more readily to the fear they felt before battle—especially the unbearable tension right before a fight, which was sometimes relieved through cries like the infamous Confederate "Rebel Yell." Once in battle, many experienced an unexpected calmness. A Massachusetts captain explained that, in the thick of the action, he was entirely focused on commanding his men, and that the horror of the scene only hit him in the aftermath. Another acknowledged that "courage" seems to be a "nonrealization of the danger one is in" owing to adrenaline-fueled absorption in the task at hand. An Iowan remarked after a horrible battle that he felt disoriented and numb, as if he were two different people on and off the battlefield. Shock or collapse did occur, however, after battle or sometimes even in the midst (which helps explain why an advance could deteriorate quickly into a retreat or a total rout).

Though soldiers at this time wouldn't have had the medical knowledge to describe the effects of adrenaline or the "fight or flight" response, such experiences were commonly described. Even sick or injured soldiers occasionally found themselves propelled into battle by a sudden physical strength they couldn't explain. While in battle, a hyper-focused detachment held fear at arm's length for many—but this didn't always work, and giving way to fear could have a catastrophic domino effect for entire units.

After battle, the letdown often allowed fears to come rushing back. A New York officer who survived Gettysburg remarked that he'd been buoyed by a "glorious excitement" for a few days, but then the suffering of fallen comrades devastated him. Sometimes combat revisited soldiers vividly in their dreams.

Though the many of the soldiers McPherson quotes continued to function on the battlefield, some of the effects they describe would later be described as symptoms of shell shock (in World War I), battle fatigue (in World War II), and more recently as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Even after these men had "seen the elephant" and been disillusioned regarding the so-called glories of war, they became better acquainted with the perils of battle. Rather than decreasing anxiety, experience only tended to make survivors dread the likelihood of their own death in later conflict. Yet it's apparent that these same men managed to steel themselves to continue facing battle. What kinds of external and internal motivations, wonders McPherson, enabled the soldiers to do so?

McPherson cites modern studies of combat effectiveness which have found that soldiers' fighting ability tends to improve over the first few battles—but after a short period of continuous combat or a longer stretch of intermittent combat, their effectiveness begins to decline as their energy and eagerness wane.

CHAPTER 4: IF I FLINCHED I WAS RUINED

Traditionally, soldiers are motivated by means of training, discipline, and leadership. McPherson observes that "Civil War volunteer regiments were notoriously deficient in the first, weak in the second, and initially shaky in the third." The Union and Confederate armies were formed by means of "do-it-yourself mobilizations" in local communities. Most volunteers thought of themselves as civilians who were filling a temporary role. Most elected their officers and most entered combat mere weeks after organizing.

The Civil War was not fought by professional soldiers: the vast majority were inexperienced civilians propelled by the ideals of duty and masculinity McPherson describes elsewhere. On both sides, the war had a grassroots, democratic aspect from the beginning.

Early on, most officers knew very little about military drill or tactics and they had to master a military manual very quickly and lead their men in dull, dreaded close-order drill. Part of the purpose of such drills was to instill obedience. This wasn't an easy task in a citizen army, though, as McPherson observes that "American white males were the most individualistic, democratic people on the face of the earth in 1861." A North Carolina lieutenant, however, argued that manliness and independences, not servile obedience, were needed to be a good soldier.

McPherson argues that America produced a distinctive type of soldier. That is, most civilian Americans weren't inclined to engage in mindless drills or submit to hierarchical discipline—and the leaders who were expected to train them scarcely knew how to do so. In contrast to some European views of military discipline, many Americans believed that "independence" was an asset for a solider, not a liability.

McPherson points out that Civil War armies wouldn't have lasted so long if they had been "undisciplined mobs." Over time, most came to see the value of drill and discipline. Nevertheless, the threat of deadly force was sometimes employed to compel a scared soldier into the line of fire. Through the 18th century, this was been standard practice, but Americans began to reject the method during the Revolutionary War. It nevertheless occurred sometimes that cavalry would be stationed to threaten skulkers back into line. Sometimes, known cowards would be publicly shamed by being dishonorably drummed out of the army.

McPherson points out that it's easy to caricature Civil War armies—they did eventually shape themselves into effective fighting units. And sometimes, they fell back on practices (like the threat of deadly force) that had been rejected as barbaric or un-American. Given cultural values of duty and manliness, shaming was sometimes more effective than threatening.

Some soldiers are known to have gotten drunk before battle, especially officers who would have been able to access liquor more easily. On both sides, rumors abounded about the drunken antics of their enemies, yet McPherson argues that such exploits were few and far between during the Civil War.

Often, rumors about one's enemies were more powerful than reality. In all likelihood, soldiers developed notions of the other side in order to dehumanize them and thus allow the soldiers to intellectually separate themselves from their enemy. In reality, most ordinary soldiers were fortunate to have sufficient rations of food and clean water, much less access to alcohol.

Leadership was key to effective fighting. The most important characteristics of a good officer were his personal courage and his willingness to do whatever he asked his men to do. Relationships among officers and soldiers began during training, but these men were often from the same community, and officers—usually a bit older and more educated or with more social standing—took "an almost paternal interest" in the men. A Massachusetts captain reflected that his responsibilities included not only drill and discipline, but looking after his men's habits, small personal disputes, and overall wellbeing. Officers who were willing to share their men's burdens made the best impression. A young private describes a major who, when a man collapsed on the march, let the man ride his horse and carried his gun as well. On the other hand, officers who flaunted their rank tended to fare poorly with their democratically minded men.

In Civil War armies, officers had a fine line to walk. For one thing, they often had roots in the same community as their men, so concerns about peer pressure (and hometown reputation) would have been a concern. Officers also knew that despite the importance of discipline and obedience to orders, pulling rank on their men would ultimately undermine their own authority. The most successful were those who shared in their men's hardships.

Leadership found its ultimate test in the heat of combat. The only way for a man to pass this test was to demonstrate his readiness to do whatever he asked of his men. At the first battle of Bull Run, a Massachusetts lieutenant wrote, "I knew if I flinched I was ruined." An Ohio captain dismissed his men's urging to take cover and instead he "set the example by taking the most exposed place."

The Massachusetts and Ohio officers exemplify the wise leader's awareness that his actions are constantly watched by those under him. An officer's courage, and his willingness to enter the fray ahead of his men, had a significant effect on morale.

While army structure could gradually train and discipline soldiers and provide good leaders, ultimately volunteer civilian soldiers were only going to fight if they *wanted* to since American culture emphasized "individualism, self-reliance, and freedom from coercive authority." Ultimately, Victorian America primarily focused on individual responsibility and virtue, not on social institutions. While institutions could teach men how to fight and how to manage their fear, internal motivation was needed to motivate them to fight.

McPherson concludes that while training, leadership, and discipline certainly played a key role in the Civil War, they did not by themselves provide sufficient combat motivation. Again, this owed much to soldiers' cultural context. While external structures could help soldiers to an extent, their individualist context meant that internal sources of motivation were even more vital.

CHAPTER 5: RELIGION IS WHAT MAKES BRAVE SOLDIERS

Battle challenged soldiers' belief in their ability to control their fate. This led to frequent expressions of fatalism in their letters—if it was a man's time to die, then he *would* die, and there was no use in trying to escape it. While there's no evidence that Civil War soldiers resorted to superstitions to help them cope with lurking death, there is much evidence of both armies' strong religiosity. In fact, McPherson suggests that the Civil War armies were the most religious in American history.

Both Union and Confederate soldiers would have been influenced by the Second Great Awakening, a series of Protestant religious revivals that swept America during the first half of the 19th century. In keeping with America's individualistic character, the Awakening tended to emphasize each person's ability to have a relationship with God, rather than the importance of participation in church structures. Naturally, those impacted by the revivals brought its influences into the army with them.

Many "nominal Christians" had conversion experiences during the war. One Iowan corporal wrote, for example, that he had been spiritually transformed into a different man than he was before and that he feared he wasn't "too late" for God's help in pulling through the rest of the war. During the terrible battle at Cold Harbor, a man "resolved to forsake my evil ways and to serve god." For soldiers who were already devout, faith only intensified during the war. One soldier, who ended up being killed, wrote his sister that he never understood the comfort others found in religion until now, and he resolved to "be a better Christian" if he made it home safely.

McPherson is not concerned about the genuineness or mere expediency of men's religious convictions, but of how these convictions helped them cope with the fears of battle. Here, soldiers express themselves as not primarily concerned with God sparing their lives—rather, religion itself becomes more real to them (at least reportedly) than it had been before. This leads them to look at their experiences of war in a different light and presumably to fight differently.

McPherson detects a "Christian fatalism" in such letters that could have an edge of optimism or of pessimism. While both attitudes helped a soldier overcome his fears in battle, the pessimistic version was a resignation to one's fate—for example, a Pennsylvania soldier rationalized that God simply decided it was his brother's time to die . On the other hand, the optimists put a more hopeful shading on things: Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain felt that he wouldn't incur harm unless God willed it to happen. Another soldier overcame his obsession with death when he realized that he was still protected by God on the battlefield just as he was elsewhere in life.

By "fatalism," McPherson doesn't mean that religious soldiers displayed a downcast attitude. Such "fatalism" could actually motivate men to fight harder by deepening their faith in God's providence and protection, until the time—whether on the battlefield or off of it—they were apparently meant to die. Chamberlain, who was wounded six times but ultimately survived the war, is an example of such an attitude.

Some of this religious fatalism had a predestinarian bent. One South Carolina lieutenant wrote that God's authority is supreme and that it would be "unsoldierly" to beg for his life, so he simply committed his fate to God. Nevertheless, most American Protestants of this time put a greater emphasis on human free will. McPherson argues that this made them more likely to trust in the efficacy of prayer in impacting their fate—both their own prayer and others' on their behalf. Thus an Ohio colonel wrote that God offered protection in response to his family's prayers.

The theology of the second Great Awakening placed particular emphasis on an individual's initiative in religious conversion. So while some where reticent to specifically pray for survival, others were bolder in doing just that. McPherson observes that the religious emphasis on human initiative may have also had much to do with America's democratic atmosphere and emphasis on social mobility.

McPherson points out that this religious faith grew from a strong belief in the eternal life of the soul and of a literal heaven and hell. This belief helped many soldiers to put the fear of death in perspective. A Mississippi private wrote that "Christians make the best soldiers" because they don't fear death or the afterlife. Even a nonbelieving officer observed this and acknowledged, "A [Christian] can afford to be a philosopher […] but a poor devil who cant believe it hasn't that support."

Belief in eternal life—especially for those who were confident that heaven awaited them—could help embolden soldiers in battle, since they believed death wouldn't be the ultimate end for them, and they could also interpret their experiences ("be a philosopher") through a lens of religious meaning.

Death and dying were also a prominent subject of Victorian literature at this time, featuring "premonitions of death and tearful deathbed scenes." Occasionally soldiers described a strong feeling that death was imminent (which sometimes came true) but they consoled their families with the conviction that they would meet in a better world.

Victorian preoccupation with death is another way in which cultural elements shaped soldiers' experiences of war. If soldiers brought preconceptions about death into battle with them (such as what constituted a brave or faithful death), these shaped the way they handled the possibility of death for themselves.

Another religious issue for soldiers was the Christian prohibition of killing. A recruit noted that it was difficult to simultaneously fight and maintain his Christian beliefs. Others agonized over the paradox between killing and following Christ's teachings even as they went into battle. Nevertheless, men more or less followed through on their orders. A Minnesota soldier wrote that although he didn't feel good about killing others, he couldn't see another way of resolving the conflict. Others expressed reluctance to kill while simultaneously upholding their convictions about the war and their sense of duty.

McPherson cites a controversial study called Men Against Fire *by S. L. A. Marshall, which claims that fewer than one-fourth of World War II soldiers fired their weapons in battle, in large part because of "cultural inhibition against killing." While the accuracy of Marshall's claims have been disputed, McPherson agrees that identification with the human beings one was ordered to kill was a source of psychological stress and trauma for many soldiers, even in the Civil War when Northern and Southern ideologies were diametrically opposed.*

This sense of duty was embedded in a belief that the war was not only just, but "a holy cause against an evil enemy." Both sides believed that God was on their side. A Confederate soldier wrote that he could not believe that God would allow Southerners to be oppressed by "such a race of people as the Yankees," while a Union soldier wrote confidently that their cause would ultimately ensure their place in heaven. When it came to the heat of battle, many adopted a "kill or be killed" justification, while others tried to distinguish between killing in combat and outright murder (such as a sharpshooter taking out the enemy outside of battle).

Not only did North and South have conflicting views of the meaning of such things as liberty and slavery, they also had opposing assumptions about the "holiness" of their respective aims. Soldiers on both sides devoutly believed in God's support of their cause and rejection of their enemies. This helps explain the sustained fierceness of both sides' convictions as well as their hostility toward one another. Both sides, too, had to come up with ways to justify the act of killing to themselves in order to continue putting themselves in danger.

From 1863–1864, when it became clear that the Confederates might lose the war, a wave of religious revivals spread through the Army of Virginia, the Army of Tennessee, and other Confederate armies. Many professed faith and were baptized, and prayer groups became popular. McPherson believes that the boost in morale these revivals brought about helped the Confederates to continue fighting into 1865. While revivals weren't as widespread in the Union army, conversions during the grueling late years of the war weren't unheard of. McPherson concludes that religious faith increased a soldier's ability to endure the stresses of combat, even if it didn't necessarily motivate the soldiers by itself.

Even as soldiers' preexisting religious views helped inspire and sustain them in war, the war itself, unsurprisingly, shaped soldiers' religious experiences. This, in turn, had repercussions for the duration and intensity of the war itself. Even more than discipline and leadership provided external structure for soldiers, McPherson believes that religion provided a powerful internal structure for soldiers' beliefs about the war, their justifications for fighting, and their abilities to endure combat.

CHAPTER 6: A BAND OF BROTHERS

What *did* urge soldiers into combat? McPherson observes that soldiers wrote a great deal about qualities like "courage," "bravery," and "valor"—but they wrote even more about cowardice. Wanting to avoid being seen as a coward is what gave them courage to go into combat. Often, this sentiment was expressed by the phrase "death before dishonor."

The importance of duty, honor, and Victorian-era masculinity for soldiers has already been established, and related to this is the role of courage versus cowardice. Acting with courage was a way of maintaining one's honor; succumbing to cowardice was a betrayal of honor.

Many soldiers wrote that their pride in their manhood would be disgraced if they showed any cowardice, and they were confident that their wives and families, too, "would sooner hear of my death than my disgrace," as one soldier wrote. Often, on the eve of a first battle, they claimed that their biggest dread was discovering themselves to be cowards. Skulking, or feigning sickness or lameness (sometimes jokingly called "cannon fever") was common in the war and the object of others' contempt. This meant that even truly sick soldiers sometimes went into battle, for fear of "being called a sneak and a coward."

It is hard to overstate the importance of honor in the mindsets of Civil War soldiers. Soldiers wanted to prove to themselves that they weren't cowards, but it was also important to prove this to their fellow soldiers, their families, and their communities. For some, being revealed as a truly was a fate worse than death—or even merely being accused *of cowardice—truly was a fate worse than death. This belief provided strong combat motivation for many.*

Many men in a volunteer company came from the same community, or at least the same county. Through letters, newspapers, and even occasional family visits, connections to hometowns were maintained during the war. Thus one's community exerted peer pressure against cowardice. For instance, a Wisconsin private wrote home to report that "Norman Hart is a D—n coward," and others didn't hesitate to name "skedaddlers," with the expectation that these would face shame and ridicule. Sometimes, soldiers assigned to behind-the-lines duties would find ways to rejoin their frontline regiments to avoid accusations of cowardice.

Unlike in later war, (as in WWII when battle details were removed from soldier correspondence) censorship didn't stop communities from knowing exactly how their soldiers behaved in battle. "Skedaddlers" were those who found ways of disappearing just as a battle got underway. The shame associated with such behavior was extreme, such that soldiers would sooner face a life-threatening situation than be thought of as cowardly.

Combat motivation is a much-studied subject, and often studies have concluded that soldiers feel the strongest need to prove themselves within the first couple of battles. After this, fear of wounding or death tends to become stronger than a soldier's "fear of showing fear." Some studies have concluded the same thing about the Civil War—that the Victorian obsession with manhood and duty eventually gave way to fear as the war became longer and bloodier. Some evidence in letters seems to bear this out. Especially as Union short-timers' enlistments wound down, men sometimes showed a growing fear of dying with just days left to go in their service.

The psychology of sustaining motivation and combat motivation are complex, as fear often seems to grow stronger—not weaker, as one might expect—as war goes on. There was no such thing as a "short-timer" in the Confederate Army because once a soldier's enlistment ran out, he was required to enlist again or else be drafted. In the Union army, however, many enlisted for three years.

However, McPherson concludes, half of the early Union enlistees re-enlisted, and among most of these, men—as well as most of the Confederate soldiers—initial values of honor and courage held true. If anything, in fact, these values seemed to grow stronger even through 1864, regarded as the most terrible year of the war. That year, an Ohio veteran wrote that he'd "rather go into fifty battles and run the risk of getting killed than as to be [...] a coward in time of battle."

Though McPherson considers other prominent findings on combat motivation, his own evidence suggests that as real as fear undoubtedly was, initial motivation did *translate into sustaining motivation and combat motivation. Fear of being known as a coward still outmatched fear of wounding or death.*

An individual soldier's honor was bound up with that of his regiment, state, and nation. Such honor and pride were symbolized by regimental and national **flags**. Even soldiers whose personal courage was renowned would share in their company's, regiment's, or state's humiliations. A New York lieutenant, wring of his feeling of disgrace when his regiment broke and ran at Third Winchester, declared that he'd never felt worse and that he didn't care if he was shot. When something like this happened, a regiment would often feel spurred to redeem themselves in the next battle.

Soldiers did not just feel a brotherly bond with those from their own communities who had enlisted alongside them; such feelings extended to entire regiments and men from the same state. Just as an individual's cowardice could reflect badly on his fellow soldiers, a company's or regiment's failures would be seen as dishonoring an individual.

Such pride in one's unit propelled even three-year Union veterans to reenlist. Writing to his parents, a sergeant in the 12th Iowa rationalized his decision to reenlist on this basis, explaining that he couldn't force the very men he'd fought with to "bear my burden" while he was safe at home.

The "band of brothers" bond was hard to explain to outsiders. After enduring years of suffering and combat stresses together, leaving wasn't easy, even for a battle-weary veteran.

Regimental or national **flags**, or "the colors," were a symbol of men's shared loyalty to their unit, state, and nation and thus of their bond to one another. Being a color bearer was a risky but much-sought-after position because of this "special mystique." Capturing the enemy's colors was considered to be an especially honorable feat, while losing one's own colors was a source of great shame. Soldiers were willing to die to "rescue" the flag from enemies, and planting the flag on a captured enemy position was perhaps the pinnacle of a soldier's pride, as a New York officer summed up his feelings after one such event: "God, Country, Love, Home [...] [I felt] proud as a man can feel."

The "mystique" surrounding the flag reflected both the loyalty shared among soldiers and the principles for which they fought. Thus, losing one's flag was more than just an accident of battle, but something that gutted men's morale. The New York officer's reaction makes this clear—the planting of the flag symbolizes values of faith, patriotism, and home prevailing over formerly enemy ground.

This sort of identification with one's fighting unit or flag is similar to what's described as "primary group cohesion," a much-studied phenomenon since World War II. A soldier's "primary group" would consist of who he interacted with every day in camp, while marching, or during battle. Such a group was even smaller than one's company, such as the men with whom he camped and ate meals and the sergeant who commanded his squad, all of whom probably came from his hometown or close to it. Such a group became a mutually dependent and supportive "band of brothers."

A squad was a smaller unit within a company, just as a company was a smaller unit within a regiment. A soldier might form a powerful bond with a subgroup even smaller than these. One can imagine how demoralizing losses within one's "primary group" could be, and how loyalty to such a group might inspire someone to reenlist.

The survival of each member of the "band of brothers" depended on each other member doing his job; in turn, group survival depended on individual steadiness. It's this group that "enforces peer pressure against cowardice." Thus, succumbing to "cannon fever" or skulking during battle endangers one's "brothers'" lives and also invites their contempt, even to the point of being shut out of the group. This was a powerful incentive for most men to fight courageously.

The psychology of combat motivation, again, is complex and it involves more than the summoning of individual nerve. The morale and endurance—as well as the sense of honor and even manhood—of each individual depends on that of the group, and vice versa.

Brotherhood in battle could also cause bickering, rivalries, and factionalism to dissolve as men fought side by side and also shared common sorrows. Teetotaling, pious men befriended hard-drinking, profane comrades. Men also refused "softer" assignments or promotions if it meant transferring away from their friends.

Friendship was a powerful bond that could override everyday differences in war, in a way that might not happen so easily in everyday life.

However, McPherson points out, it was very difficult for group cohesion to last: disease, deaths, transfers, and promotions caused primary groups to whittle down to nearly nothing over the course of the war. When this happened, larger ideals provided sustaining motivation and also combat motivation, since often the best soldiers were those who were deeply committed to what they called "the Cause."

As important as such brotherhood and group cohesion undoubtedly was, the nature of war meant that it couldn't last. Underlying beliefs had to provide more lasting motivation to keep fighting and facing combat.

CHAPTER 7: ON THE ALTAR OF MY COUNTRY

Many studies of World War II conclude that patriotic or ideological motivations were scarce among soldiers. The scholarly consensus is that most American and British soldiers were fighting too hard to stay alive to give thought to ideas like "helping to save democracy." The same holds true in studies of Vietnam soldiers. While some scholars have even said that Civil War soldiers notably lacked any ideological convictions, McPherson contests this idea. The United States of the time, he explains, was "the world's most politicized and democratic country," and its male citizens typically enlisted for reasons that aligned with their voting patterns—"recruits did not stop being citizens and voters when they became soldiers."

McPherson defines ideology in terms of both an individual's and a social group's opinions, values, beliefs, and even prejudices—which can encompass everything from "simple patriotism" to "more complex and systematic ideas about the meaning and purpose of the war." In other words, ideology can mean everything from an uncomplicated love of country to more abstract ideas about the values of one's culture and nation.

Many soldiers had access to daily and metropolitan newspapers in camp and spent much of their free time discussing and debating what they read. Some units even set up debating societies in their winter quarters, discussing such topics as how rebel leaders and states should be treated after the war, or questions like "Do the signs of the times indicate the downfall of our Republic?"

Though not all soldiers were literate, reading and intellectual discussions occupied a surprisingly large share of soldiers' downtime, correspondingly shaping their attitudes about the war and their role in it.

At the outset of the war, the Confederacy controlled a territory larger than any European nation except for Russia. Though some Southerners still held onto an American nationalism, a sense of "Southern distinctiveness" was decades old by this time and it did not take much to fan this regionalism into a distinct Confederate nationalism. Many soldiers described this in their letters as a willingness to sacrifices their lives for their country.

Whereas Northern soldiers tended to speak of the Union as a whole, Confederate soldiers more often appealed to a sense of regional pride. Thus, Confederate nationalism didn't spring out of nowhere—it was built upon a long-existent sense of nationalism.

Though many soldiers felt conflicted about leaving family behind in order to fight, many saw their defense of the Confederacy as a defense of "home and hearth," too. This became even more true when Union "invasions" of the South began in 1862. Southerners characterized the enemy as an "insolent invader" who'd provoked their wrath, even if they didn't care much for the secession movement. Even Northern troops acknowledged that this motivation seemed to give Southern soldiers a fighting edge. This loyalty to one's home and state—best defended through the defense of the Confederacy as a whole—fostered a sense of nationalism among Southerners.

Not all Southerners were keen on the idea of seceding from the Union, especially in 1861. However, because most of the war was fought on Southern soil, it did not take much for Southerners to fiercely defend themselves when Union troops began pushing into their territory. While Northern soldiers were fighting for "home" in their own way, this reality was more visceral for most Confederates.

It seems easier to understand the sources of Confederate patriotism and nationalism, yet 360,000 Northern soldiers were willing to die for their cause, too. While in a sense Northern sentiment was more "abstract and intangible," it was very real, as soldiers believed that if they lost, "they would no longer have a country worthy of the name." Others bemoaned the possibility of their free nation being broken up by "treason."

McPherson notes that Victorian-era sentiments about a "glorious cause" and "dying on the altar of one's country" sound romantic and sentimental to modern readers, but he describes this as "a temporal/cultural barrier" a modern audience must overcome in order to understand their motives.

McPherson calculates that two-thirds of both his Union and Confederate samples tended to express some sort of patriotic motivation in their letters and diaries, and that such expressions were most common among officers, slaveholders, and professional and middle-class men. This bias is especially strong among the Confederate soldiers, with sons of plantation families and slaveholding families expressing patriotic motivations at almost twice the rate of non-slaveholding ones. In the Union, there tended to be "a greater democratization" of such sentiments. However, in *both* North and South, such sentiments were rarer among draftees, substitutes, or men who enlisted after conscription went into effect.

Greater patriotic motivation among upper-class, professional volunteers suggests that those who volunteered were more likely to be invested in the ideological underpinnings of the war, and that the more educated and economically privileged had more opportunity for such investment. The first conscription act went into effect in the Confederacy in April 1862. In the Union, a conscription act went into effect in March 1863.

There are also sometimes class tensions in soldiers' letters—for example, poorer Southern farmers tended to express bitterness about a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight" and they wished they were at home instead. Bitter and reluctant men—at least according to the letters of the more motivated volunteers—made up most of the deserters and skulkers. The soldiers who participated most eagerly in the thickest fighting also tended to be the most openly patriotic.

McPherson pushes against the modern scholarly bias which looks at patriotic motivations with a cynical eye. His point is that modern people don't have to identify with such patriotism in order to take soldiers at their word about why they fought.

CHAPTER 8: THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY

Civil War patriotism "existed in a specific historical context," McPherson explains. All Americans of that era idolized those who fought in the Revolutionary War and both Northerners and Southerners saw the events of 1861 as a test of their worthiness to uphold that legacy. Both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis appealed to this idea in their speeches.

When examining any historical phenomenon, it's important to understand its context rather than trying to understand it in isolation. In this instance, for Civil War soldiers, patriotism was unavoidably connected to their perception of America's founding and their sense of responsibility to uphold the legacy of the Revolutionary War.

McPherson calls it a "profound irony" that Confederate and Union soldiers interpreted their 1776 heritage in such divergent ways. Confederates saw themselves as fighting for "liberty and independence from a tyrannical government." Union soldiers saw themselves as fighting to preserve the nation "from dismemberment and destruction." These differences deepened as the war went on.

Confederate and Union soldiers' divergent interpretations of 1776 suggest that public understanding of history is always changing, depending on the perspective of the present. Both sides' belief in "liberty" was equally fervent, but its application to the present meant something very different.

An Alabama corporal who was captured at Gettysburg, for example, saw himself as fighting for "the same principles which fired the hearts of our ancestors in the revolutionary struggle." McPherson describes this as a "folk memory of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat" which helped sustain Confederate morale. It encouraged them to reflect that those forebears' struggle for liberty was harder, yet ultimately victorious. A Missouri Confederate, likewise, saw himself as "fighting gloriously for the undying principles of Constitutional liberty and self government."

Confederate appeals to the Revolutionary past were in no way ironic. However, McPherson describes these as being rooted in "folk memory," suggesting that such appeals had more to do with a sentimental reading of the past than one which was strictly accurate.

For the Confederates, the opposite of liberty was "slavery" or "subjugation." Soldiers often spoke of the dread of the Yankee "yoke of bondage" if the South lost the war. A Texas cavalryman even described the war as between "subjugation, slavery, confiscation" or being "victorious, glorious, and free." Their use of the word "slavery" echoed the usage of the 1776 patriots, who had described their relationship to Britain in that way.

The Confederate use of the term "slavery" is a good example of the importance of historical context. Today, the term refers only to the practice of Southern slavery, but at the time, many Confederates saw it as an accurate description of their relationship with the North, echoing 1776 usages of the word.

McPherson notes that although slaveholders of Jefferson's era sometimes acknowledged a paradox in their fight for liberty, Confederate slaveholders or those from slaveholding families did not acknowledge any such inconsistency. They even viewed slavery as being at the heart of their fight—for instance, a Kentucky Confederate wrote that the Southern troops were fighting for freedom against Northern "tyrants" who wanted to abolished slavery.

Slavery was so firmly established in the South that its role in the Southern way of life, even in its conception of liberty, was simply taken for granted—something that, McPherson suggests, wasn't the case only a couple of generations earlier. This is an example of the difference between an ideological use of the past and historical accuracy about the past.

Before the war, many Southerners avoided using the word "slavery," instead referring to "servants" and to "Southern institutions." Occasionally, this terminology survives in soldiers' letters. A North Carolina lieutenant, for example, wrote disparagingly of the "real Yankee style" of a Pennsylvania farming family who fed him a meal, because the wife and daughters (rather than slaves) did the work. This made the lieutenant even more convinced that "Southern institutions" were worth defending. Others wrote more plainly that without slave labor, the South would fall into ruin.

In general, Confederate soldiers weren't reticent about the role of slavery in their daily lives, even comparing Northern culture unfavorably to what they practiced at home. McPherson builds an argument that the war was inevitably about slavery—even if appeals were made to liberty or the Southern way of life, soldiers themselves admitted that such things weren't sustainable without *slavery.*

When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, some Confederates welcomed it for making plain the reasoning behind the war and the government's intentions. Some Northerners even feared that the issuing of the Proclamation would only inspire Southerners to fight even harder for slavery's sake. Indeed, in the months following the Proclamation, the North was so divided over it that Southern hopes for victory rallied, and some Confederates even wrote home to urge their families to invest in slaves.

The Emancipation Proclamation was first issued in September 1862, going into effect in January 1863. However, it didn't free all slaves—it only permanently freeing those enslaved people within Confederate states who could either make their way across Union lines or who lived within territories occupied by the Union. Even at this stage, the Proclamation was controversial on both sides.

Naturally, the soldiers who emphasized the centrality of slavery as a motivation for fighting tended to be from slaveholding families. However, non-slaveholding soldiers did, as McPherson puts it, emphasize the "property" of "their white skins, which put them on a plane of civil equality with slaveholders" and far above anyone who didn't possess said "property." Some said they were fighting to resist the notion of black people achieving equal status with white people or to ensure "a free white man's government." Overall, however, McPherson observes that only 20 percent of his sample of 429 Southern soldiers "explicitly voiced proslavery convictions." He argues that one reason for this is that slavery wasn't controversial—it was taken "for granted as one of the Southern 'rights' and institutions for which they fought" and so it wasn't even up for debate.

McPherson's view is that white supremacy was at the heart of the Confederate cause, even though a majority of Confederate soldiers weren't slaveholders themselves. He draws evidence from soldiers' letters to make a case that resistance of racial equality was a motivating factor for many. And even where this evidence isn't explicit, that doesn't mean that slavery and racist ideology weren't present—it just means that Southerners often didn't see a need to directly talk about it.

Northerners, meanwhile, certainly believed that they, too, were fighting to uphold the legacy of 1776. They expressed that they were fighting for "the same glorious ensign [**flag**] that floated over Ticonderoga" or for "those institutions which were achieved for us by our glorious revolution." An Ohioan called "our fathers in coldest winter" who suffered "that we might enjoy the blessings of a free government," and another echoed that the "patriots in [Valley Forge]" didn't complain when they had to march barefoot in a subzero winter.

Northern appeals to the legacy of 1776 were vividly felt in their own way. Ticonderoga was one of the first American successes in the Revolutionary War, and the sufferings of the Valley Forge patriots would have been especially moving to Civil War soldiers who didn't always have sufficient provisions. Such "folk memories" provided sustaining motivation even for Northern soldiers who weren't themselves facing invasion.

When Union soldiers spoke of such revolutionary "institutions," they referred to things like "the rights of property, liberty of action" and "that kind of government that shall assure life liberty & the pursuit of happiness." Some argued that Southern secessionism was an anarchic offense to law and order which would lead only to dissolution and chaos. The Founding Fathers, in the Northerners' view, fought for liberty under the rule of law, whereas the Confederates seceded after Lincoln was fairly elected by a majority.

It's true that Northern appeals to history were, in a certain sense, more abstract. But even when their ideological views were not so driven by a sense of defending home and culture, they spoke of Southern secession as an offense to dearly held principles—an undermining of what the Founding Fathers had achieved.

Northern soldiers also spoke of the United States as "the last best hope for the survival of republican government." European despots and aristocrats, they feared, would laugh if the American experiment failed. On the other hand, an Illinois private believed, American success might inspire "European struggles for liberty." While many American-born soldiers expressed such sentiments, foreign-born soldiers (though underrepresented in the sample) certainly did as well—an English-born corporal writes that "if Liberty should be crushed here, what hope would there be for the cause of Human Progress anywhere else?"

Some Northern soldiers also had loftier views of what the Union stood for. If it was dismembered, they thought, there would be worldwide repercussions; the cause of liberty could be discouraged in other parts of the world. In a certain sense, then, Confederate ideology could be seen as more backward-looking, while Union ideology was more forward-looking.

McPherson concludes that while the belief in liberty was clearly a sustaining motivation which kept men in the army, it's arguably also an aspect of combat motivation which nerved men to go into battle for the sake of a higher cause. As one soldier wrote, he believed sacrificing his own personal safety was worth protecting "the mighty interests at stake." Initially, these "mighty interests," for most Northerners, didn't have much to do with slavery one way or the other. But over the course of the war, that began to change.

For many soldiers, in other words, ideological motivations ranked even higher than duty or brotherhood in encouraging men to face battle. But ideology wasn't stagnant; the experience of the war itself transformed it.

CHAPTER 9: SLAVERY MUST BE CLEANED OUT

While anti-slavery sentiments weren't unheard of at the beginning of the war, very few Union soldiers would have said that they were fighting for racial equality, or even primarily for abolition of slavery. However, abolishing slavery for the sake of the union was a cause that took hold within the war's first year and a half. For instance, an Ohio corporal saw "slavery and the slave power" as the cause of the "dangerous disease" of secession.

While McPherson holds that slavery was definitely the major cause of the Civil War, that doesn't mean that most Northern soldiers thought this way initially—and even those who did tended to see slavery as more of a symptom than a cause. Few were openly committed to the abolition of slavery.

Soldiers who already held antislavery views often had these intensified upon visiting the South during the war. After talking with a slave woman, a Pennsylvania private wrote, "I am more than ever convinced of the cruelty and inhumanity of the system." However, when soldiers spoke of slavery as a "blight," they weren't necessarily speaking from humanitarian concerns. Plenty saw "free-labor ideology" as something which promoted societal backwardness in general, stifling enterprise, ingenuity, prosperity, and even literacy throughout the rural South.

Even when some were moved to compassion by their experiences in the South, many soldiers also saw slavery as part of a bigger economic and cultural picture. Contrary to popular narratives that portray Northerners as staunchly anti-slavery, many believed that "free-labor ideology" would have disastrous consequences for social and economic progress.

Runaway slaves often found shelter among the Union lines. Often, soldiers' attitudes about this "were more pragmatic than altruistic," as they saw fugitive labor as useful for freeing up more Union soldiers for the front lines. By the middle of 1862, though, "pragmatism and principle" began to form "a growing commitment to emancipation as both a means and goal of Union victory."

Part of the change in soldiers' views about emancipation had to do with their view of Southern secessionists as "traitors" who'd forfeited their "property," including slaves. This initially motivated some to shelter slaves more than simple compassion did.

In July, 1862, Congress passed a confiscation act, and Lincoln decided that he would pass his Emancipation Proclamation. At this time, plenty of Union soldiers opposed freeing the slaves. Racism was a factor, and the rumors of emancipation led to arguments and rumblings of dissatisfaction among soldiers, who complained, as one soldier did, that if Lincoln turned this into "an abolition war [...] I for one shall be sorry that I ever lent a hand to it." While some were grateful that the proclamation made the war a clear conflict "between slavery and freedom," others felt betrayed and expressed hostility and disgust toward African Americans and abolitionists.

The confiscation act stated that any Confederate within occupied areas who didn't surrender could have his slaves freed. This was a sort of testing of the waters for the Emancipation Proclamation, which immediately proved controversial. Some felt the Proclamation signaled a change in the aims of the war, which further underlines the point that not all Union soldiers enlisted out of abolitionist sentiments.

In fact, the Emancipation Proclamation caused a "morale crisis" in the Union armies in the winter of 1862–1863. However, much of this could be attributed to defeatism in light of recent Union leadership failures. Ultimately, around half of the Union armies *did* seem to favor the Proclamation. And anti-emancipation soldiers began to change their minds over the course of 1863, both because of Copperheadism and the growing conviction that emancipation really would weaken the enemy and strengthen the Union.

General McClellan had been removed from his command recently, and defeat at Fredericksburg and the Mud March (a failed offensive) all contributed to lowered morale. Copperheadism was the term applied to the "Peace Democrats" who denounced Lincoln's war as unconstitutional and wanted immediate peace with the Confederacy.

Another factor was that the Union began to recruit black regiments. At first, this met with much opposition, often on racist grounds. But here, too—even among soldiers who otherwise didn't favor abolition—a pragmatic shift began. After all, many reasoned that black soldiers could shoot rebels just as well. And the more black soldiers entered the action, the more their success changed minds. An Illinois private wrote admiringly of black soldiers' efforts at the battle of Nashville and reasoned that anyone fighting on behalf of the country should be free.

Some of the battles in which black regiments especially distinguished themselves included Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, and Fort Wagner, all in 1863. Regiments were racially segregated, but soldiers crossed paths often enough that some had their minds changed about the equality of black and white people.

Evidence of black soldiers' thoughts is difficult to come by. Some letters were published in Northern black newspapers, but few personal letters or diaries have survived and even fewer of these documents were written by freed slaves. Many freed slaves couldn't read or write. However, black soldiers certainly fought for their own and others' freedom, and increasingly for the cause of equality in general.

McPherson explains why the perspectives of black soldiers themselves aren't represented among his samples: due to the historical circumstances, especially the oppressive effects of slavery, there simply isn't enough documentary evidence upon which to generalize.

By 1864, resistance to black regiments was a minority position. When Lincoln ran for reelection on an abolitionism platform, he received 80 percent of the solider vote. By this time, too, fervor for emancipation was much increased. An Illinois lieutenant wrote that he was surprised at how abolition had gained traction over the course of the war—now, he reasoned, he was fighting for the noble cause of liberty for all.

McPherson concludes that white Union sentiments regarding black soldiers really did change significantly over the course of the war, due in large part to personal experience of meeting black soldiers and admiring their work firsthand.

CHAPTER 10: WE KNOW THAT WE ARE SUPPORTED AT HOME

While duty, honor, and patriotism provided sustaining motivation for Civil War soldiers, and the desire for courage and group cohesion supported combat motivation, morale was often sustained by supporters back home. Letters from home helped comfort homesick soldiers and strengthen them for the fight. A Wisconsin private noted that nearly everyone in the North sympathized with the Union cause, and this support encouraged even cowardly men to fight courageously on the battlefield.

McPherson points out that a lack of solid support on the home front is one thing that makes morale in other wars (such as the Vietnam War) so hard to sustain. The Civil War was a very different situation, perhaps because the home front and the battlefield were in relatively close proximity. McPherson also points out that improved mail systems (especially in the Union) were key to maintaining morale during the Civil War, emphasizing the importance of familial support for the soldiers.

Because the Civil War's fighting units were community-based, letters from home were especially critical, reassuring soldiers that their service was recognized and appreciated in their hometowns. On the other hand, letters from home pleading for husbands' return tended to dampen morale.

Connection to home could be a double-edged sword: while families tended to be supportive, crises at home could cause a soldier to feel divided between his duties to his family and to his country.


Married soldiers had to contend with "competing ideals of manhood and honor." On one hand, they'd pledged to protect and provide for their wives and families; on the other hand, they also had a duty to defend their country. Neglecting either of these ideals would be seen as dishonoring one's manhood. For most soldiers, however heartbreaking it might be, the duty to country usually won out. Often, they reconciled the decision to fight by understanding the duty to country as *also* a duty to defend their families' freedom. As a Virginia cavalryman wrote that a man who cares for his family is consequently motivated to fight against an "invader."

An estimated 700,000–800,000 married men volunteered to enlist in Civil War armies. While the experiences of wives and families go beyond the boundaries of McPherson's project, it's clear that soldiers had to wrestle with a sense of competing obligations in order to keep up morale and motivation for war.


Several other themes appears in soldiers' letters as they tried to justify their long absence from their home and families. One was the appeal to women's patriotism, as men urged their wives to recall the Revolution-era women who sacrificed for their country, many husbands exhorted. Another was the appeal to family honor, or the belief that it's better to die honorably for one's family than to bring disgrace on them through cowardice. If these were ineffective, the need to uphold one's own manhood was always an option, too.

McPherson points out that soldiers' assertions about family honor show the husbands' hopes and self-justifications, yet the wives' sides are largely lost to history. Wives were encouraged to model themselves on Revolutionary forebears much as men were, again emphasizing the importance of historical legacy on maintaining the morale of soldiers as well as their families.

The matter of honor and manhood tended to be of most concern to officers, rather than enlisted men. Additionally, many more officers than enlisted men were married in McPherson's sample. Those who enlisted for bounties or were draftees also expressed greater homesickness and they were more likely to desert than enlisted volunteers. Sometimes, especially in the South, a wife's plea of impending starvation was enough to get a man to desert. Ultimately, though, there's more evidence of wives' complaints because of the nature of the documents. Most were likely encouraging and supportive but historians don't have their letters to confirm this.

Those who didn't enlist as volunteers, but were drafted or fought for pay, likely held weaker ideological commitments to sustain them in the war, if they held them at all. Speculatively, too, enlisted men in general may have had fewer resources to fall back on to help care for their families at home than more well-off officers would have had—hence instances of desertion. McPherson observes that historians can only draw limited conclusions regarding women's feelings about the war, potentially skewing scholarly and public understanding of the dynamic between soldiers and their families.

Studies reveal that there is often an estrangement between soldiers and the home front during wartime. This is partly because of the difficulty of explaining war to those who have never experienced combat. During the Civil War, brotherhood between men who'd fought together grew so pronounced that it occasionally expressed itself in hostility toward those (particularly "cowardly" men) who remained at home. But, unlike in studies of some later wars (such as World War I), there's no evidence of a gulf between home front patriotism and frontline disillusionment during the Civil War. If anything, soldiers reserved their disdain for men who failed to live up to patriotic, "manly" values.

As in any war, there was a rift between those who'd experienced combat and those who hadn't, but overall there does not seem to have been a major divide between the ideological views of civilians and soldiers. The only ones who were ostracized were those who, by the values of the time, were expected to fight but refused.

Union soldiers' morale withered when, in the last two years of the war, drafted men were allowed to hire substitutes to fight for them. Men who did this were disdained, seen as shirking their duty. Even more hated were the Copperheads, or Peace Democrats. Their political fortunes at home caused even reluctant and demoralized soldiers to band together in solidarity. The Copperheads' antiwar campaign was strongest in the winter and spring of 1863. Soldiers generally responded bitterly to news and editorials concerning Copperhead successes, and there was little dissent toward the opinion that such men were traitors.

The best-known Copperhead politician was a candidate for Ohio governor named Clement L. Vallandigham, who was convicted of treason by a military court and exiled to the Confederacy by Lincoln. The grassroots movement of Copperheads, or Peace Democrats, is the one significant example of a disjunction between soldiers' views and those at home. Copperheads seized upon fatigue and disillusionment to try to bring the war to a quicker close.

In 1864, the presidential election became a referendum on the war. Peace Democrats had a brief uptick in popularity when Grant's and Sherman's campaigns suffered—but after their prospects improved, Lincoln won reelection, in part because 80 percent of soldiers supported him. Lincoln's reelection was, says McPherson, "a final, decisive turning point in the mutually reinforcing morale of soldiers and civilians." Northern determination solidified. However, although "positive cultural values" demonstrably played a big role in morale, "darker passions" were also present.

Political movements were not distant from the minds of most soldiers and they had a direct impact on morale, much as shifting fortunes in battle shaped perceptions and attitudes among civilians. Ultimately, though, Union views seem to have remained fairly steady, leading to an upswell of support for Lincoln in time to decisively turn the tides of the war.

CHAPTER 11: VENGEANCE WILL BE OUR MOTTO

Part of the Victorian code of honor was "revenge for insult and injury." Often, this meant hatred. Hatred and the desire for revenge appear to have grown stronger as the Civil War went on. Among Confederate soldiers, such sentiments were stronger. McPherson says this is partly because of the persistence of the "code duello" and partly because the South suffered such devastation over the course of the war.

The "code duello" simply refers to the code of one-on-one combat that persisted within Southern culture even after it was officially outlawed. It was part of a culture that valued personal honor highly and took insults to honor as grave offenses.

Though Southern perceptions of "Yankees" were bad even before the war got underway, the desire for vengeance became "almost an obsession" once fighting began in earnest. A Texas cavalry captain hoped for the death of "narrow-minded, bigoted [...] nasal-twanged Yankees," and a Georgia lieutenant told his wife to teach their children to bitterly despise and destroy Yankees.

The darker side of regional loyalties was a tendency to view enemies not just as combatants, but as objects of hatred—an animosity that transcended the battlefield. Though McPherson doesn't explore the history of such animosity, it had long roots which were only strengthened by the war.

The destruction of Southern property helped intensify the desire for revenge. A Georgia sergeant on his way to Gettysburg said that he loved to kill immoral "vandals." Though Confederate General Lee officially prohibited plundering on the way into Pennsylvania in 1863, this order was broadly disregarded. After the battle of Fredericksburg, a Confederate artillery officer described his enjoyment of the sight of dead and mutilated Yankees, saying it "[did] my soul good." Black Union soldiers and their white officers were especially despised by Confederates. Even black soldiers attempting to surrender were often killed.

Some of the most notorious massacres of black Union captives occurred at Fort Pillow, Tennessee; Poison Springs, Arkansas; Plymouth, North Carolina; and Petersburg, Virginia. In 1864 at Fort Pillow, surrendering African American troops were brutally shot down. The details sof this event, such as whether General Nathan Bedford Forrest ordered the "massacre," remain controversial.

Among Union soldiers, animosity toward "rebels" was strongest in border states and in East Tennessee (which was majority Unionist). It was fiercest among Confederate guerillas, as in West Virginia and in Missouri, who often held a "life or death" conviction of the need to killing secessionists. After Fort Pillow, some Union soldiers invading Georgia with Sherman's army wanted to avenge their fallen fellow soldiers and "cleanse the country."

West Virginia split off from Virginia and was formed as a free, non-slaveholding state in 1863. In Missouri, a "bushwhacking war" took place between pro-Confederate ("bushwhacker") and pro-Union ("Jayhawk") guerillas. These are just two examples of a historical picture that's more complex than simply North versus South.

McPherson describes the "rhetoric of revenge" as a "dark underside" to the patriotism that was necessary to maintain soldiers' morale. Morale also fluctuated with the armies' respective victories and defeats, with political news, and with controversies like the one over Emancipation. For example, Union morale flagged in the aftermath of the appointment of Joseph Hooker in January 1863, but after Union victory at Gettysburg that summer, morale was quite reversed. Conversely, losses at Gettysburg and Vicksburg brought Confederates almost to despair, and desertion grew more common.

One of the ugly truths of war is that positive morale isn't necessarily the result of positive sentiments—sometimes, troops are motivated by a sense of vengeance. Other times, morale naturally fluctuates with the events of the battlefield, confidence in leadership, and the overall outlook of the respective sides.

By the time the Confederates surrendered at Appomattox, soldiers' morale (especially in the Army of Northern Virginia) had withered. The South was economically battered and war-weary, whereas the North was coming off a string of victories and Lincoln's reelection triumph. The Confederacy collapsed sooner than expected in the summer of 1865, yet its resilience up until this point was remarkable considering the unrelenting fighting of the past year.

For McPherson, the remarkable thing about morale is not that it eventually prevailed (for the victorious North) or collapsed (for the Confederacy), but how long both sides managed to sustain the will to fight.

CHAPTER 12: THE SAME HOLY CAUSE

Phrases like "shell shock," "battle fatigue," and "combat stress" didn't exist in the Civil War. What soldiers understood best was "courage," and they understood the *loss* of courage in terms of the loss of a will to continue fighting. Breakdown of courage occurred because of the prolonged fighting but also because of long marches, inadequate sleep and rations, and exposure. In the last year of the war, 1864, "combat stress reaction" and psychological breakdown became more common.

Contemporary students of war understand its effects in medical terms, but these resources generally weren't available to Civil War soldiers. Whereas moderners are largely aware of post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans, at this time a psychological breakdown was understood in terms of a failure of courage, as McPherson's explanation of the historical context (cultural values of duty and manhood) has made clear.

In light of such extremes, McPherson asks, "how could soldiers sustain a high level of ideological commitment or belief in noble ideas" to keep them going? Clearly, some couldn't. But especially for those volunteers who enlisted in 1861 and 1862, duty, honor, and ideology were sustaining motivations all the way through the war, if rhetoric found in letters is to be believed. Both officers and enlisted men, married and unmarried, scorned suggestions of resignation or desertion even when they were exhausted and demoralized by reversals of fortune.

By and large, even the earliest volunteers wanted to continue fighting, even going out of their way to reenlist despite having been injured or experienced misfortune in battle, or worrying about things at home.

Confederate soldiers largely remained committed to upholding honor throughout 1864–1865, as well as their sense of resistance to self-perceived submission to the "Yankees." A Confederate officer even said that surrender would mean "a depth of degradation unmeasurably below that of the Helots of Greece." By the winter of 1864–1865, a Mississippi officer even wrote that a loss would be akin to slavery and that he would even be willing to "let the negro go" if it meant avoiding such a disgrace.

Confederate views remained largely unchanged over the course of the war; in fact, what they saw as Northern aggression seems mainly to have entrenched their outlook. "Helots" were low-status serfs in the ancient Greek state of Sparta. This historical comparison sums up Confederate views of their own likely status under the Union.

Increasingly, this was not an isolated idea. The Confederacy was beginning to debate whether to arm slaves to fight on behalf of the South. They were facing a manpower shortage. By February 1865, Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee supported a measure to enroll a small number of slaves, on the assumption that these individuals would be freed. The "Negro soldier bill" was passed in March with a close margin, and soldiers appear to have been close to equally divided on the issue. Many saw it as a matter of "dishonor and humiliation." Those who supported the measure, however, saw no other alternative: freeing slaves was viewed as better than defeat and the loss of liberty altogether. After all, if the Union defeated the Confederacy, slavery would be abolished anyway.

The controversial measure to free and arm a limited number of slaves shows how desperate the South had become by this point in the war—doing so undermined the foundational principles of the Confederacy, yet this was regarded as a better outcome than the looming collapse of their society.

Letters and diaries from the waning years of the war display much of the same patriotism and commitment that one sees in the early period. As an Indiana lieutenant wrote, "I love peace but I love my country more. I am now wedded to war" until the issue is decided. Indeed, even more than half of those Union soldiers whose enlistments expired in 1864 ultimately reenlisted. An Ohio veteran wrote that although the desire to remain with his friends was one motivating factor, "more weighty [is] love of country and its institutions." Undoubtedly, there remained skulkers, draftees, and those who couldn't bear the pressures of war any longer. But enough remained to ensure that the tide turned in favor of the Union by the end of 1864.

Despite war-weariness, homesickness, and the loss of friends, the ideological beliefs that motivated soldiers to enlist seem to have sustained those who remained until the end. The longer they committed to Union success, the more "wedded" they became to seeing the cause through, not less. This steadfast commitment, according to McPherson, was ultimately responsible for Northern victory.

Lincoln's 1864 reelection victory is a sign of how strong Union morale remained toward the end of the war—even though somewhere between 40 and 45 percent of soldiers had been Democrats, or came from Democratic families, in 1860. As a New York private explained, he intended to "give the [rebellion] another thump this fall by voting for Old Abe. I cannot afford to give three years of my life to maintaining this nation and then giving them Rebles all they want."

The New York private's comments illustrate this sense of increasing, not fading, commitment. The longer the most ideologically committed Union soldiers fought, the more they became convinced of the necessity of prevailing; the price for giving up was too high after investing so much.

On the third anniversary of his enlistment—and also his 31st birthday—an Ohio captain wrote to his 10-year-old son thanking him for the birthday letter he'd just received. "It tells me, " he told his son, "that while I am absent from home, fighting the battels of our country, trying to restore law and order [...] and endeavoring to secure for each and every American citizen of every race, the rights guaranteed to us in the Declaration of Independence [...] I have children growing up that will be worthy" of those rights. McPherson concludes that contemporary Americans, too, are "children of that heritage. Whether we are worthy of it will remain a matter of constant reexamination," for which we can only hope that wartime sacrifices will never be required again.

McPherson concludes his study with a stirringly representative quote from a Union soldier. The captain's words sum up his sustaining motivations and combat motivations—among others, the desire to preserve law and order, and to secure and maintain Americans' rights. This is a good summary of the spectrum of Union views—encompassing not simply distaste for secessionism, but a positive desire to defend the rights of all citizens. McPherson (who is transparently pro-Union throughout) closes with a word of challenge to his readers, suggesting that Americans will always be responsible for assessing their fidelity to the heritage preserved by the Union victory.

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