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'The Soldier's Faith': Turn-of-the-century Memory of the Civil War and the Emergence of Modern American Nationalism

Writing in 1910, in what would be one of his last published essays, philosopher and psychologist William James turned his considerable powers of observation to the heightened 'military feeling' in modern America. While 'pugnacity' and 'love of glory' had been 'bred' into 'our bone and marrow' through centuries of war, James believed that the American psyche held a special, 'deeply-grounded' affinity for battle through its generation-old memory of the Civil War. To be sure, the immense scale of violence and killing in that conflict made Americans wary of modern warfare – no one, James wrote, would 'be willing to start another Civil War' – but, at the same time, few would choose to part with its legacy.

> Ask all our millions, north and south, whether they would vote now . . . to have our war for the Union expunged from history, and the record of a peaceful transition to the present time substituted for that of its marches and battles, and probably hardly a handful of eccentrics would say yes. Those ancestors, those efforts, those memories and legends, are the most ideal part of what we now own together, a sacred spiritual possession worth more than all the blood poured out.

The following essay examines the relationship between the idea of the Civil War as a 'sacred spiritual possession' and the construction of patriotism and nationalism during the Spanish–American War of 1898 and the entrance of the United States into the first world war. We shall consider first the celebration of Memorial Day in the North and South – the annual commemoration of American soldiers killed in battle – and how veterans and government officials used the occasion to instil a new sense of duty to the state. Civil War battle memoirs and

Journal of Contemporary History (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi), Vol. 31 (1996), 49–73.

popular histories will then be reviewed. Although this literature ignored ideals of service, it still supported American militarism, as will be argued in the last section, by describing the experience of combat in emotionally compelling and gratifying terms. Indeed, popular American attitudes towards battle reveal a certain fascination with the gruesome and destructive nature of modern warfare. In the 'warlike type', as James concluded, 'the horror makes the thrill'.[1]

The impact of Memorial Day addresses on turn-of-the-twentieth century attitudes about military service is hard to measure with historical certainty. Even though we know Memorial Day gatherings were generally well attended, evidence also reveals, as a *Boston Journal* editorial recognized in 1883, 'a disposition in some quarters to take the day for holiday uses, and to devote it to sports and pastimes, incongruous with the serious associations of the anniversary'. On the other hand, anthropological and sociological study of the construction of memory stresses the cultural power of public commemoration. In this context, turn-of-the-century Memorial Day celebrations – formalized community happenings, often culminating in town parades and speeches at local Civil War cemeteries – produced potentially powerful and even spiritually elevated moments in which Americans drew distinct meaning from the past. *Ritual* is the key to finding the proper balance between these two perspectives: one could appreciate the social reverence for wartime sacrifice while still enjoying the day in ways that had little to do with explicit thoughts of duty. 'In the main the day is reverently kept', the *Boston Journal* said. 'The men who, every year with thinner ranks, march through our streets to pay tribute to their dead comrades touch the hearts of those who see them more than they are aware.'[2]

If Memorial Day taught Americans anything about military duty, then those lessons occurred through the ritualized invocation of the sacrifice of the dead. In *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), Garry Wills describes a nineteenth-century American 'culture of death' in which leaders during the Civil War insisted that 'the place of the dead must be made a school for the living'. This ethic can also be found in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century celebrations of Memorial Day. Fifty years after

Lincoln's renowned address of 1863, Union veteran J. Sloat Fassett stood on the same hallowed ground and spoke of 'the spirit of Gettysburg' which 'puts self last and duty first'; this, Fassett emphasized, 'is the lesson from these voiceless graves'. While hearing about the sacred quality of the Civil War dead, turn-of-the-century Americans were also told that the physical and psychological challenges of battle offered a source of personal regeneration for those living in modern society. 'In this snug, over-safe corner of the world we need [war]', Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr said before a Memorial Day gathering in Keene, New Hampshire, 'so we may realize that our comfortable routine is no external necessity of things.' In his 1886 speech entitled 'Dead, Yet Living', Holmes – Union veteran and future Justice of the United States Supreme Court – emphasized that the glory and excitement of fighting for a cause was worth the risk of death. His generation had been marked indelibly by the experience of fighting for a cause in which it believed. 'Through our great good fortune', Holmes proclaimed, 'our hearts were touched with fire.'[3]

Holmes's memory of the Civil War has become an obligatory reference point for those interested in the rise of the martial spirit in modern American thought and culture. Scholars have been drawn to Holmes not only for his pre-eminence as an American jurist, but also for his ability to represent his wartime experience in literary and even poetic terms. Holmes did put forward a heartfelt ideal of martial heroism. Wounded three times in battle (including being shot clean through his chest at Ball's Bluff), Holmes accepted man's role in war as a matter of faith – what he called in the title of his most famous speech 'The Soldier's Faith'. Addressing a large Memorial Day gathering at Harvard University in 1895, Holmes described the value of battle as something to be taken as a personal pledge among men:

> That the joy of life is living, is to put out all one's powers as far as they will go; that the measure of power is obstacles overcome; to ride boldly at what is in front of you, be it fence or enemy; to pray, not for comfort but for combat; to keep the soldier's faith against the doubts of civil life, more besetting and harder to overcome than all the misgivings of the battle-field, and to remember that duty is not to be proved in the evil day, but then to be obeyed unquestioningly; to love glory more than temptations of wallowing ease, but to know one's final judge and only rival is oneself.

Holmes's life-long affection for Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels is apparent in this ennobling description of combat and confrontation; in turn, Holmes's association of war with blood sport would be evident among many of the young educated men who volunteered to fight in the Spanish–American War of 1898.[4] But, for the purposes of this discussion, Holmes's concept of martial heroism is most valuable for its clear-headed view of what it really means to live life as war. Holmes – in some ways like his German contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche – saw through his own romanticism.[5] He understood that overcoming and killing underlie the overdrawn beliefs about the value of battle: 'Force, mitigated as far as good manners, is the *ultima ratio*.' Holmes reduced the ideal of heroism to its basic elements of violence and aggression. If 'life is war', Holmes believed, 'the part of man is to be strong.'[6]

Holmes's attraction to war incorporated a relativism quite uncommon in late nineteenth-century American thought. Before 1900, only William James could match Holmes's sensitivity to the implications of modern disbelief. Western civilization 'had pursued analysis', Holmes wrote, 'until at last this thrilling world of colors and sounds and passions has seemed fatally to resolve itself into one vast network of vibrations endlessly weaving an aimless web.' For Holmes, only the experience of direct confrontation in battle could restore a sense of drama and determinacy to man's life:

> I do not know what is true. I do not know the meaning of the universe. But in the midst of doubt, in the collapse of creeds, there is one thing I do not doubt, and that is that the faith is true and adorable which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan or campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics which he does not see the use.

In Holmes's 'Soldier's Faith', the meaning of a man's life is determined by his actions. 'Out of heroism grows faith in heroism', Holmes concluded. This type of bare-boned, existential heroism would become more common in the United States in twentieth-century masculine thinking, especially among post-first world war American novelists (as exemplified by Ernest Hemingway's personal code of masculinity). But few Americans writing about war at the turn of the century thought about heroism in this way. In fact, the press censured Holmes's

Memorial Day speech of 1895 for its irresponsibility and inattention to the cause and purpose of the Civil War.[7]

In contrast to Holmes's relativism, most late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Memorial Day addresses spoke in a heightened language of moral judgment. Speakers in the North typically joined hopes for national reunification with reminders of why the war had been fought. In 1883, for instance, one year before Holmes's first Memorial Day address, Mayor Albert Palmer of Boston insisted that 'the right and wrong in the great American conflict are forever directly distinguishable'. Standing before an audience that filled the city's Faneuil Hall, Palmer emphasized the need to remember the moral differences between the two sides: 'Woe to him who shall utter one syllable to confuse them together, or unsettle the judgement that was finally rendered by the God of Battles.' Even some Southern speakers conceded, at least indirectly, the moral point of the war. J.F. Hanson, a former Confederate from Macon, Georgia, acknowledged that

> during the eventful years that mark the period from Appomattox in 1865 to Andersonville in 1891, I have learned much that I did not previously know, have unlearned much that I had been wrongly taught, and have recalled many important historical facts that, in moments of passion or despair, were forgotten.

Hanson added that 'this sentiment widely prevails in the South, and is not inconsistent with the devotion of the Southern people to the memory of the dead. We have lived', he concluded, 'to see the storms of passions by which they were tossed subside.'[8]

When they addressed the issue of 'why men should fight', most Memorial Day speakers rejected the ideas of moral relativism and the love of battle for its own sake. John Sharp Williams seemed to have Holmes in mind during his 1904 speech at the Lyceum Theatre in Memphis: 'No matter how bright the uniform, how loud "the shouting of captains", how splendid the deeds of valor, how inspiring the clangor of fife and drums,' Williams declared, 'there is nothing more disgusting, nothing more detestable, and nothing more in the history of the world has been so dangerous and destructive as the puerile thirst for military fame and the schoolboy love for "glory" and a strenuous life.' The ideals behind fighting matter greatly,

Williams insisted only: when bravery 'is thrown upon the side of the right . . . is it worthy of your praise and your reverence'.[9]

The predominant theme in turn-of-the-century Memorial Day addresses was one of national conciliation. Even though speakers recalled the causes of the war, most emphasized, as Boston's mayor Palmer put it, 'sentiments common to the whole country'. For Palmer, the 'fundamental principles' of democracy and 'republican government' provided traditions of which both sections of the country could be proud. Generally, turn-of-the-century Memorial Day speakers lauded a range of values and ideals revolving around the American nation itself – its existence, its health, and, above all, its union. This protean concept of nationalism became a principal basis for military obligation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Memorial Day orators explained the death and destruction of the Civil War as the necessary result of political difference, in no way reflective of hatred or animosity between the men who fought and killed each other.[10]

In the turn-of-the-century Memorial Day addresses one finds what can be described as a new tradition of military service forming around memory of the Civil War. Speakers commonly invoked the story and drama of sectional conflict and reunification in support of contemporary patriotic causes. On 30 May 1898, one month into the Spanish–American War, Senator John M. Thurston of Nebraska addressed a gathering at Arlington National Cemetery:

> What an inspiring sight to see those who once fought against each other now rallying under one flag, exalting and rejoicing that the azure field of the union banner holds in equal honor every star of statehood, and singing together the rearranged music of the Union – 'Yankee Doodle' and 'Dixie' – the favorite airs.[11]

Widespread respect and appreciation for the courage and sacrifice of Union and Confederate soldiers contributed to American nationalism – a sentiment that included a sense of duty more tangible and powerful than if the Civil War had not been fought. Memory of the war became an historical overlay to turn-of-the-century conceptions of citizenship, magnifying the importance of protecting and serving that to which so many other Americans had given their lives.

As public memory of the war influenced turn-of-the-century conceptions of citizenship, it also raised popular interest in the figure of the Civil War soldier and the physical and emotional experience of man in modern battle. Most Memorial Day speakers concentrated on the mutual respect that grew between the men of the two armies. 'The soldiers of our late war were "American soldiers" in warfare', said T.F. Lang in Baltimore, 'each combated, respected and admired the prowess of his opponents.' Lang's idea of a special type of soldier arising from the Civil War would be developed in Memorial Day addresses throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thomas Chambers Richmond, for instance, speaking in Madison, Wisconsin in 1902, reminded his audience that 'the war was costly, but the results are worth the price'. The Civil War 'gave us the American soldier', Richmond stated, 'the highest type of fighting man the world has yet produced – hopeful in adversity, patient in privation, undaunted in temporary defeat, brave in the hour of battle and magnanimous in the hour of triumph'.[12] Most concerned about national conciliation, Memorial Day speakers used the Civil War soldier as a common source of pride and a unifying symbol.

But turn-of-the-century American culture also produced more detailed accounts of the Civil War battle experience. Beginning in the early 1880s – after fifteen years in which the country had tried, as Gerald Linderman puts it, to 'thrust into shadow all things military' – Americans embraced the Civil War soldier as an icon of martial heroism. Towns and cities throughout the country erected monuments to Union and Confederate soldiers, and written battle reminiscences became very popular, including Ulysses S. Grant's *Personal Memoirs* (1885–6). In fact, a distinct genre of American literature developed around the wartime experiences of veterans.[13]

The corpus of turn-of-the-century Civil War literature – the novels, plays, magazine and newspaper articles, and hundreds of regiment histories and memoirs written by generals and foot soldiers alike – should be thought of as a type of 'vernacular culture'. In contrast to the Memorial Day speeches of public officials, popular Civil War literature included little discussion of the social and political causes of the conflict or of the national good that resulted from it. Most of the writing dropped moral considerations altogether and, instead, tried to describe Civil

War battle in *real* terms. This realist approach is perhaps best seen in 'The Battles and Leaders of the Civil War' series, published in *Century* magazine between 1884 and 1886 (and reproduced in volume form in 1888). *Century* editor Robert Underwood Johnson decided to ignore the 'political questions' of the war for the sake of simply 'telling it like it was', and so asked a wide range of Union and Confederate veterans to describe their memories of major campaigns and other important experiences. The enormously popular series offered over a thousand pages of stories and pictures – a 'composite history', as Civil War historian Bruce Catton commented, such as 'no war had ever had before'.[14]

The great appeal of the 'Battles and Leaders' series at the turn of the century lay partly in its ability to approximate the spectacle of the war. This is what Catton emphasized as he remembered neighbours visiting his boyhood home to look at his family's copy of the *Century* volume. Catton thought the illustrations of the war might actually have been more interesting than the stories. 'For the first time', Catton later wrote, 'a nation that had fought a great war could visualize its experience. It could *see* what it had done.' Indeed, in view of the turn-of-the-century American eye for realism, one can imagine the attraction of these carefully sketched drawings – much like the attraction modern photography and film would have in representing twentieth-century wars. The *Century* illustrations recreated 'Union Lines in Front of Kennesaw Mountain', 'The Steamboat "Chattanooga"', 'Spottsylvania Courthouse and Tavern', and other exciting sites of the Civil War; the drawings could even produce narratives of danger and destruction, such as 'Sherman's Troops Destroying a Railroad', 'An Incident at Cold Harbor', and 'Going Into Action Under Fire'. The drawings simultaneously dramatized and fuelled the popular desire to experience the war.[15]

Catton's recollection of the attraction of the *Century* drawings provides an insight into the way popular literature shaped turn-of-the-century memory of the Civil War. Despite being intended to capture the real war, these illustrations could not represent the horrific results of battle. Drawings of dead soldiers appeared in the series, but, as Catton said, 'people who die in these pictures almost always do so without the hideous grotesqueries violent death strews across the field': 'they are, somehow, the

honored dead'. And without seeing the brutal realities of war, Catton continued, viewers were drawn to the adventure, high-risk, and 'desperate action' of war; something once 'recalled with dread and bitterness passed into romance'. The veterans became 'bemused' with their change in memory, Catton added, 'as witness the old gentlemen who came to our house to look at these pictures, translating the reality that they knew all too well into the fiction in which imagination led old men's memories down shady lanes'.[16] And for many young American men of the time, the romance of war became the reality.

The allure of battle, a central strand of meaning running through turn-of-the-century memory of the Civil War, found its fullest expression in the memoirs of the Union and Confederate soldiers themselves. Published mostly between the early 1880s and the early 1900s, these books documented the excitement of fighting. In *Detailed Minutiae of a Soldier Life* (1882), for instance, Confederate veteran Carlton McCarthy described the anticipation of confronting the enemy. A 'typical' soldier of the Army of Northern Virginia, McCarthy wrote, 'weary and worn, recognizing the signs of approaching battle, did quicken his lagging steps and cry out for joy at the prospect'. The sheer spectacle and drama of the killing also comes through in these memoirs. Samuel Byers, a former major in General William Tecumseh Sherman's staff, described his experience at Jackson, Mississippi, in 1863:

> On the edge of a low ridge we saw a solid wall of men in gray, their muskets at their shoulders blazing into our faces and their batteries of artillery roaring as if it were the end of the world. Bravely they stood there. They seemed little over a hundred yards away. There was charging further by our line. We halted, and for over an hour we loaded our guns and killed each other as fast as we could.

Although most of the memoirs offer detailed accounts of battle scenes, few went as far as privileging the actual experience of killing the enemy. This was especially true of the memoirs written before the Spanish–American War. In these late nineteenth-century memoirs, little romance surrounded the actual process of *committing* violence in battle. Representation of killing was vague, imprecise, and sometimes accompanied by feelings of sorrow and regret.[17]

But if actual pleasure in killing is rarely found in the Civil War memoirs, many veterans did write of the emotional

gratification of battle experience. Some former soldiers described the all-consuming quality of combat – 'the elimination of all personality amidst the quickened activity and excitement of the action', as one Federal officer put it. The Union veteran B.F. Scribner's account of his feelings during the Battle of Chickamauga stands out for its psychological descriptiveness. With the 'enemy pressing me on both fronts', Scribner wrote in *How Soldiers Were Made* (1882), 'all things appeared to be rushing by me in horizontal lines, all parallel to each other. The missiles of the enemy whistling and whirling by', he continued, 'seemed to draw the elements into the same lines of motion, sound, light and air uniting the rush!' Most veterans valued battle, though, for the simple opportunity to make more of themselves as men. The physical danger of war tested a man's mettle. Meeting its challenges with honour and courage would remain with him for ever as testament to his manhood. Scribner wrote in great detail about this appeal of battle. After recounting the Union victory at Chickamauga he proclaimed:

> There is nothing that produces upon a man so profound an impression as a great battle; nothing which so stirs and tests the soul within him; which so expands and strains the functions of sensation and so awakens all the possibilities of nature! There is nothing which so lifts him out of himself; so exalts him to the regions of the heroism and self-sacrifice; nothing which so surcharges him and permeates his receptive faculties, and so employs all the powers of his mind and body as a great battle![18]

Civil War veterans found a culmination of manhood in their memory of battle: a heroic identity that transcended ordinary ways of being a man.

This ethic of proving one's masculinity in battle lay at the centre of the rise of martial heroism at the turn of the century. And the Civil War soldier became the exemplar of masculine self-realization through the extreme conditions of battle. It should be emphasized, however, that this turn-of-the-century attraction of battle did not develop without knowledge of the physical destruction and emotional horrors of the Civil War. Even though the act of killing was not represented in great detail, veterans did not try to mask the brutal results of war. Novelists John W. DeForest, Albion Tourgee, and Ambrose Bierce wrote forcefully of the startling terror and tragedy of modern warfare. And the soldier memoirs included the sights of

carnage and destruction, of the dying and the dead, in their recollections of battle.

Many of the veterans offered truly horrific memories of the death and suffering of the Civil War. Echoing General Sherman's 'War is Hell' utterance of 1880, the memoirs provided detailed accounts of the 'terribly wounded', explosions causing 'entrails flying in all directions', the 'bushels of dead', 'rivers' of 'running blood', and countless other 'ghastly spectacles': 'Dante himself never conjured anything so horrible as the reality before us', Samuel Byers said in recollecting 'the hundreds of the half-decayed corpses' he saw after Grant's victory at Jackson. 'Some were grinning skeletons, some were headless, some armless, some had their clothes torn away, and some were mangled by dogs and wolves.' One of the most gruesome experiences recounted in the memoirs was the not-uncommon story of a soldier going to sleep on a battlefield among his comrades, only to wake up and discover that the men on either side of him had died overnight.[19] Civil War veterans had come into close contact with death and they did not hesitate to relate those experiences to turn-of-the-century readers.

That turn-of-the-century memory of the Civil War could accommodate the hell-like realities of battle to its underlying romanticization of war is one of the critical aspects of the modern American development of martial heroism. Civil War memoirs and fiction combined atrocity with tales of bravery and courage, placing readers in the swirl of battle, in which the sight of death and destruction became familiar and perhaps even attractive. Rather than overlooking the results of violence, some Americans were drawn to them; for many 'militarists', as William James said, 'the horror makes the fascination'. This turn-of-the-century interest in the Civil War's joining of death and the allure of battle helps to explain the extraordinary literary success of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Stephen Crane's best-selling novel about a Union soldier in the Battle of Chancellorsville. No other text in American literature described the experience of battle in such complete emotional terms – terms that included the intimate depiction of death and the psychological compulsion of war. What emerged, then, from the memoirs and *The Red Badge of Courage* was a highly individualistic view of war and a psychologically-based compulsion to see and become a part of its essential processes. 'Whoop-a-

dadee', said a man, in Crane's novel, 'here we are! Everybody fightin'. Blood an' destruction.' Vernacular formulations of heroism generally overlooked political principles of duty and service. In its discussion of war, popular literature recognized a greater obligation to the self than to the state.[20]

Yet to describe wartime experience in wholly individualistic terms is to ignore the important element of camaraderie among soldiers; it also ignores the great power the state has in inducing men to fight in its wars. The modern state – founded, in part, on its control of arms and force in law – also produces ideology aimed at convincing citizens of their duty to serve. As shown above, government officials and other public figures at the turn of the century drew from memory of the Civil War to establish a tradition of personal sacrifice for the good of the nation. This ethic survived well into the twentieth century. George Creel, head of the United States Bureau of Public Information during the first world war, stressed the ideal of public duty in his 1916 promotion of the Selective Service system. 'As an immediate goal', Creel wrote in *Everybody's Magazine*, 'the system means a national Army of 4,000,000 trained fully-equipped defenders; ultimately it will mean a nation of citizen soldiers, every man fit and ready to fight for his country instantly, precisely, and efficiently.'[21] There is little reason to believe that these types of appeals did not inform some American men's understanding of their military obligation to the country.

Intertwined with the state's descriptions of citizenship and duty was the extensive idealization of the personal benefits of military service. As part of President Woodrow Wilson's decision to implement a draft for the first world war, government and military officials portrayed the soldier as a model of masculinity; as one US army officer told American men in 1918, time in the service would 'fit you to return to your homes better men than when you left'. Creel's public information campaign of 1916 did the most to link masculine strength and character with the army: 'It makes better citizens, even while turning out fit defenders, invigorating and strengthening American manhood, and at the same time safeguarding American institutions.' Service would have an invigorating effect on American men,

Creel insisted: 'Chests will deepen and shoulders broaden and eyes brighten.'[22] Of course, this type of appeal to manhood could already be found in the popular Civil War literature of the turn of the century: wartime propaganda and masculine vernacular culture converged around the idea of military service as a fulfilling masculine experience. And with this point in mind, one begins to see why the rise of martial heroism in turn-of-the-century America defies easy historical distinctions between public and private or political and personal. The same thoughts about war were at the top and the bottom.

In fact, if we shift focus back to the social level of American men of the turn of the century, it becomes apparent that popular interest in war supported nationalist efforts of the time. Or, stated from the other perspective, the American state benefited from (and to some extent depended on) common conceptions of martial heroism. Historians have long argued that the United States intervened in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898 because of a 'mass psychology of aggression' present among the American people of the time. If so, a major element of that psychology was the masculine understanding of war as a chance for real experience. Here, Teddy Roosevelt's thoughts about his participation in the Spanish–American War are representative. 'This is going to be a short war', Roosevelt declared. 'I am going to get everything I can out of it.'[23] Fighting the Spanish, for many American men, was not an obligation but an opportunity. From this view, the state not only makes men go to war but also sponsors it for them.

Indeed, the Spanish–American War became a national expression of masculinity – a material example of martial heroism in action. Many of those who fought in the Spanish–American War talked about it in vivid terms of personal excitement and self-fulfilment. *Hero Tales of the American Soldier* (1899), *Exciting Experiences in our War with Spain and the Filipinos* (1899), and other titles of popular histories suggest what some American men got from the war; separate chapters in these books chronicled 'How it feels to be under fire' and other sensations of modern battle. A small percentage of American troops actually fought the Spanish, but turn-of-the-century enthusiasm for war drew overwhelming numbers of volunteers. In building a volunteer force of 200,000 men, the army refused over 50 per cent of the applicants.[24]

The war in Cuba and the Philippines is certainly the best historical example of the impact of martial heroism on modern American nationalism. As Richard Hofstadter explained, the cause of liberating oppressed peoples provided heroic grounds for experiencing battle: the Spanish–American War 'served as an outlet for expressing aggressive impulses while presenting itself, quite truthfully, as an idealistic and humanitarian crusade'. Beginning with the first world war, the United States government and military establishment had to construct more elaborate appeals to conceptions of masculine duty and service, including the institution of a draft. But throughout the twentieth century there have always been large numbers of American men who are quite willing to go to war. When making the decision in 1916 to establish a selective service, the federal government estimated that 685,000 men would volunteer to fight in the first world war.[25] In every American war effort there has been an important political equation between men wanting to experience the extreme danger and violence of battle and the ability of the state to make war.

An added component of the United States's ability to make war in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an unusually strong sense of patriotism among many Americans of the time. Enthusiasm for battle blended with a new-found love of country – a 'complex and intangible' sentiment, as one 1918 study of American militarism described it, but nonetheless the leading 'thing men fight for' in modern America. In his valuable book *The Roots of American Loyalty* (1946), Merle Curti writes that the turn-of-the-century not only saw a heightened patriotic sensibility but also developed a new conception of one's relationship to the United States. Curti describes this understanding as the 'organic theory of nationalism' – an acute form of nationalism in which 'every man and woman was thought of as an embodiment of the nation itself'.[26] According to this view, an American soldier would make no distinction between personal and political reasons to fight, both being subsumed by the concept of the nation.

But, as Curti points out, important qualifications need to be made about the influence of organic nationalism among the various social groups of turn-of-the-century America. The Americans who supported such a theory of nationalism were largely of Anglo-Saxon background, and for them, close identi-

fication with the country meant emphasizing its history, traditions, and origins: this strain of nationalism sought to counteract the social diversity and disorder of modern America by recalling the unity of the country's past.[27] It also sought to shore up a group whose members felt increasingly threatened by each new wave of immigration. One way to do this was to re-establish Anglo-Saxon strength and virility in war. Race intersected with gender in turn-of-the-century discussion of the benefits of war. In his 1898 article on 'The War with Spain and Beyond', for example, Walter Hines Page urged readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* to match 'the adventurous spirit of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers' through imperialism. We should not, Page emphasized, 'be content with peaceful industry'. With the Union preserved and the frontier subdued, the heroic tradition of Anglo-Saxon America could only be extended through new efforts of expansion abroad.[28]

The Anglo-Saxon bias of turn-of-the-century nationalism had little influence, however, in alienating other Americans from the country's efforts overseas. The ideology of nationalism, as articulated and promulgated by influential voices in the culture, seeks to bind people together in support of state power. And late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American nationalism accomplished this through various means. It brought the North and the South together through memory of the Civil War and the delineation of an Anglo-Saxon heritage. But it also crossed racial and ethnic lines by defining common interests among Americans. More than anything else, declaration of war against the Spanish in 1898 had a tremendously unifying effect on the country. The existence of a foreign enemy prompted Americans to think of their similarities more than their differences, and the prospect of actually fighting in a war also brought American men together.

Polish Americans, for instance, saw intervention in Cuba as a way to support and assimilate to the values of their new homeland. As Matthew Frye Jacobson has noted, the large numbers of Polish–American volunteers believed that military service provided an opportunity to become 'participants in American civic life'. But Jacobson is also careful to point out that these immigrants not only considered themselves 'Americans in the making' but also Polish subjects 'whose obligations to the Fatherland endured'. Again, the common denominator of these

two identities was a highly gendered sense of martial heroism. Jacobson writes:

> It was with certain masculinist bravado that volunteers under the banner 'The Poles are Ready' crowded into a Chicago recruiting station emboldened by the song, 'Fight, brothers though a hundred will fall I will feel no defeat, Glory will be your legacy, and so march to Cuba!'

Poles in Milwaukee formed ethnic units with similar enthusiasm. As the *Milwaukee Sentinel* exclaimed in 1898, 'The martial spirit is rampant among the Polish–American citizens of Milwaukee.'[29]

Martial heroism also played a major role in African–American conceptions of civic identity. In fact, attention to turn-of-the-century attitudes about war among black men – those who had the least reason to fight for 'their country' – adds insight into the inner workings of American nationalism and how it gained hegemony over individual men by invoking the dual standard of military prowess and civic duty. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century black intellectuals and other public figures consistently linked military service to American citizenship. The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and subsequent enlistment in the Union Army generated an extremely close association in black thought between fighting and freedom – a legacy, as Frederick Douglass described in 1883, of rising 'in one bound, from social degradation to the plain of common equality with all varieties of men'. George Washington Williams, Civil War veteran and author of *History of the Negro Troops in the War of Rebellion* (1888), also spoke about soldiering in heightened terms of liberation. In recalling his own feelings during the war, Williams described 'the glory of military exaltation' and 'the brilliant aggressiveness of a free soldier'. Black memory of the Civil War translated into widespread support of the Spanish–American War and the first world war. Even W.E.B. DuBois, who later expressed great doubts about black participation in foreign wars, supported the American cause in 1917: 'Our country is at war', DuBois wrote in *Crisis*. 'If this is *our* country, then this is *our* war. We must fight it with every ounce of blood and treasure.'[30]

In addition to memories of the Civil War, the close connection between African–American citizenship and military duty

may be explained through black service in the Spanish–American War. Black troops played a crucial part in American military success against the Spanish, and celebration of that role in the following years added greatly to the Civil War legacy of the heroic black soldier. Description of 'The Daring Deeds of the Negro Soldier' in Cuba took up the first three chapters of Booker T. Washington's book *The New Negro for a New Century* (1909). Washington spoke of the 'superb heroism' of the troops and their 'eagerness to enlist'. Washington also talked at length about the importance of blacks fighting alongside other American soldiers, especially white men from the South. 'There was no more significant feature in the Spanish–American War', Washington wrote, 'than General Joseph Wheeler [a former Confederate officer] leading black regulars against the Spaniards.' Edward A. Johnson's *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish–American War* (1899) and other popular histories focused on the black soldier's ability to prove himself equal to other American men through war.

A key point of reference in these histories was the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments' support of Roosevelt's Rough Riders on San Juan Hill. The popular histories made it the centre of their accounts of the war. And they also included long excerpts from Roosevelt's farewell speech to his men in which he recognized the bravery of the black troops. 'The Spaniards called them "Smoked Yankees" but we found them to be an excellent brand of Yankees', Roosevelt said. 'I am sure', he continued, 'that I speak the sentiments of officers and men in the assemblage when I say that between you and the cavalry regiments there exists a tie which we trust will never be broken.'[31]

A rudimentary element of respect for black soldiers *did* develop among other veterans of the Spanish–American War. John Pershing, a US Army lieutenant during the war, went as far as describing a new sense of national unity among the soldiers in Cuba:

> White regiments, black regiments, regulars and Rough Riders, representing the young manhood of the North and the South, fought shoulder to shoulder, unmindful of race or color, unmindful of whether commanded by an ex-Confederate or not, and mindful only of their common duty as Americans.

One needs to keep in mind the bias and segregation in the

military during this time, not to mention the high level of racial prejudice and violence in American society at large. But after the Spanish–American War, some white Americans started making personal concessions about the bravery of black men in war. 'I'm not a negro lover', one veteran wrote in the *Washington Post*. 'My father fought with Mosby's Rangers [a cavalry unit of the Confederate Army] and I was born in the South.' But, he continued, 'if it had not been for the Negro cavalry, the Rough Riders would have been exterminated'. The black troops demonstrated courage under fire, as another veteran from New Mexico commented: 'They certainly can fight like the devil and they don't care for bullets any more than they do for the leaves that shower down upon them.' The common experience of battle lent insight into the character of black American men. 'Now I know what they are made of', the New Mexico veteran added.[32] The black soldiers had lived up to the American ideal of martial heroism.

The heroism of the black soldiers in the Spanish–American War was also recognized by national political and military figures of the time. If black Americans ever had to prove themselves worthy of national citizenship, President William McKinley said in a speech in Springfield, Illinois, in late 1898, they did so when their 'brave men ascended the hill of San Juan, Cuba. . . . They vindicated their own title to liberty on that field', McKinley continued, 'and with other brave soldiers gave the priceless gift of liberty to another suffering race.' In a speech at the Peace Jubilee in Chicago in October 1898, immediately following the United States victory in Cuba, General Nelson A. Miles expressed the belief that black service in Cuba also demonstrated the unity of 'American patriotism'. The 'white race was accompanied by the gallantry of the black', Miles stated, 'as they swept over entrenched lines and later volunteered to succor the sick, nurse the dying and bury the dead in the hospitals and the Cuban camps'. Again, black soldiers had acted heroically. 'It's a glorious fact', Miles concluded, 'that sacrifice, bravery and fortitude' in the war were 'not confined to any race'.[33]

The rhetorical appreciation of black service in the Spanish–American War suggests that turn-of-the-century American nationalism based itself less on racial distinctions than on qualities of character – that is, qualities of a heroic character

which lived up to the high ideals of duty, sacrifice, and courage. Roosevelt simply called this complex of values 'Americanism', a trait he expressly said could be found or developed in different peoples. 'I want to be distinctly understood on one point', Roosevelt wrote in 1897, 'Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace.' This ideal of inclusivity would become a distinctive factor in military mobilization in twentieth-century America. The military–government establishment certainly depended on racialist distinctions when de-humanizing American enemies and subjects, but it also needed to cover up racial degradation and differences when demanding support from the young men of the United States.

Compared to early and mid-twentieth-century German nationalism, for instance, American nationalism defined itself much less on racial terms. In his book *Masses and Man* (1980), George L. Mosse writes:

> Whenever Adolf Hitler talked about the 'new German', he wasted little time on the inner self of the Aryan, but instead defined him immediately through an ideal of beauty – '*Rank und schlank*' (slim and tall) was his phrase. There was never any doubt about how the ideal German looked, and it was impossible to imagine a Nazi exposition without the presence of that stereotype.[34]

To make this comparison is not to suggest that the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century formulation of American nationalism around heroic character should somehow be considered benign. Along with the idea of fighting, say, for the flag, American womanhood, or the sake of human uplift, the abstraction of heroic character was just that: an abstraction that drew attention from the material conditions and human consequences of national expansion. William James made this argument in his opposition to the American occupation of the Philippines and the consequent 'attempt to turn a concrete political issue into an abstract emotional comparison between two types of personal character, one strong and manly, the other cowardly and weak'. James directed his attack on imperialism toward that 'arch abstractionist' of American masculine character, Teddy Roosevelt. Days after reading Roosevelt's famous 'Strenuous Life' speech of 1899, James wrote a letter to the editor of the *Boston Evening Transcript* in which he put forward one of the most stinging critiques of the Colonel's person:

> Although in middle life, and in a situation of responsibility concrete enough, he is still mentally in the Sturm and Drang period of early adolescence, [he] treats human affairs . . . from the sole point of the organic excitement and difficulty they may bring, gushes over war as the ideal condition of human society, for the manly strenuousness which it involves, and treats peace as a condition of blubberlike and swollen ignobility, fit only for huckstering weaklings, duelling in gray twilight and heedless of the higher life.[35]

James is quoted at length here because he recognized the correspondence in turn-of-the-century American thought between conceptions of character and nationalist spirit. Criticizing Roosevelt's 'strenuous life' meant coming to terms with an ideological basis of American imperialism.

American nationalist interests, in short, benefited from the racially inclusive ideal of martial heroism. Some men from all parts of turn-of-the-century society could identify with or, more accurately, feel challenged by appeals to their 'Americanism' – the colour of a man's blood, not of his skin, became the most specific physical requirement of a patriot: 'For it is to you I am speaking', General Enoch Crowder said in rallying support during the first world war, 'you, the strong, sturdy, red-blooded sons of adventure and freedom and justice.' What really mattered was having the right spirit. As President Roosevelt told a Memorial Day gathering at Antietam in 1903:

> In the long run in the Civil War the thing that the average American had was the fighting edge; he had within him the spirit which spurred him on through toil and danger, fatigue and hardship, to the goal of splendid ultimate hardship.

Turn-of-the-century nationalism cultivated an archetype of the American soldier, which took on aspects of heroism much as the athlete acquires an identity through the quality and style of play.[36]

Part of the identity of the turn-of-the-century American soldier was a certain mastery in the carrying out of war. Beginning with the Spanish–American War, the act of killing itself was to become much more common in the soldier's discussion of his experience of battle. By the second world war, American GIs talked about it freely, as in a poem published in the popular *Infantry Journal*:

> To kill is our business and that's what we do
> It's the main job of war for me and for you,

> And the more Japs we rub out, the sooner we're through
> To return where they want for a soldier.

But the turn of the century brought probably the greatest change in the masculine acceptance of killing the enemy – a transition from the Civil War standard of holding up under fire to a modern enthusiasm for or, at least, easy acceptance of the violence and aggression involved in combat. Roosevelt expressed pleasure in 'coming face to face with the Spaniard' and fighting 'the issue out with bullet, butt, and bayonet in a deadly personal encounter'. (He later bragged about his battle prowess in a letter home to his sister: 'Did I tell you, I killed a Spaniard with my own hand?'.) Like Roosevelt, other soldiers in Cuba described the excitement of encountering the enemy and trying to overcome him in a modern language of athleticism – 'the thrill of grappling with him and hating him', as the poet Ernest Crosby described it. By all accounts, the American charge up San Juan hill was filled with the enthusiasm of sport.[37]

Even though excitement over the violence of war rose throughout the twentieth century, the principle of committing oneself to a cause remained closely tied to the identity of the modern American soldier. It was as if memory of the Civil War had cast a permanent aura of heroism over American thought about war. 'No nation is really great', Roosevelt said in a speech in 1913, 'unless the sons are willing to die at need for great ideals.' Crowder made a similar point in talking about the duty to fight in the first world war: 'It is the call of national conscience that ever compels and impels a real American to do service in support of a principle, in aid to his fellow man wherever he is oppressed or persecuted.'[38] Often the details of the cause would grow abstract and become a pretence for fighting a war: an excuse in terms of both American foreign policy and personal desire to experience the challenges of battle.

Notes

1. William James, 'The Moral Equivalent of War', *McClure's Magazine*, August 1910, reprinted in *The Writings of William James*, ed. John J. McDermott (New York 1967), 660–71.

2. *Boston Journal* editorial cited in *Boston Evening Post*, 30 May 1883, 3. For discussion of the lack of seriousness during turn-of-the-century Memorial Days, see Nina Silber, 'The Romance of Reunion: Northern Images of the South, 1865–1900', (PhD dissertation, University of California–Berkeley 1987), 342–3. For valuable discussions of historical memory, see Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7–25; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York 1989).

3. Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York 1992), 65; Sloat Fassett, *Memorial Address on the Battlefield at Gettysburg*, 21–2; Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, *Dead, Yet Living* (Boston 1886).

4. The most fascinating example of the interrelationship between American attitudes towards war and sport is college football – the late-nineteenth-century development of which needs to be understood in the context of memory of the Civil War: memory of physical sacrifice, simplified battle tactics, as well as various material and cultural manifestations of the war all informed contemporary understanding of the game and a man's relationship to it. Consider Camp Randall in Madison, Wisconsin. It first served as a place for mustering recruits in the early years of the war; and, then, shortly after Appomatox, it became the site of a cemetery and a war memorial for Civil War veterans; and, finally, in 1921 the University of Wisconsin built Camp Randall Stadium where its football games are still played. Memory of the Civil War infused meaning into the early-twentieth-century playing of football at the university. Even Wisconsin's well-known fight song – 'On Wisconsin, on Wisconsin, plunge right through that line' – draws a parallel between battle and the playing of football.

In fact, turn-of-the-century football fight songs illustrate clearly the overlap in meaning between the war and the sport. Some fight songs of Eastern college teams made direct references to the war, as they were often sung to the tunes of well-known Civil War songs. At the Harvard–Yale game of 1894, for instance, Harvard supporters sang this song to 'John Brown's Body':

> Old John Harvard is a smiling on you now
> Show Yale your mettle boys, and through the centre plow
> If the Eli cannot play, just show the Eli how
> For this is Harvard's Day.

Yale fans replied to the tune of 'Marching Thro' Georgia':

> Harvard men from Boston always come with hearts that quail
> When they see the blue upon the sons of Eli Yale
> When they strike our line their tricks will be of no avail
> Down with the Crimson forever.

New York Times, 25 November 1894, 5.

5. The similarities between Nietzsche ('When there is peace, the warlike man attacks himself') and Holmes are striking: birth dates – Holmes 1841, Nietzsche 1844; domineering intellectual fathers; classical education; supplemented formal education with Goethe, Kant, and Emerson; rejection at an early age of the existence of God; the experience of war at the centre of their self-understanding; significant portion of their work tried to prove the illusory quality of morality; thought supported twentieth-century nationalism.

6. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, 'Soldier's Faith' in Mark De Wolfe Howe (ed.), *The Occasional Speeches of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962), 81; other Holmes quotes cited in Marcia Jean Speziale, 'Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr, William James, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Strenuous Life', *Connecticut Law Review*, 13 (Summer 1981), 678, 669.

7. Holmes, 'Soldier's Faith' in *Occasional Speeches*, 76, 72. See *The Nation*, 61 (19 December 1895), 440–1 and *New York Evening Post*, 17 December 1895 for criticism of 'Soldier's Faith' speech; both are cited in Royster, *Destructive War*, 281.

8. Albert Palmer, *Oration Delivered Before the Suffolk County Association of the Grand Army of the Republic* (Boston 1883), 13; J.F. Hanson, *A Memorial Address Delivered at Andersonville, Georgia* (Macon, GA 1891), 3–4.

9. John Sharp Williams, *Address to Company 'A', Confederate Veterans* (Memphis 1904), 6.

10. Palmer, *Oration*, 27–8. My understanding of the historical process of reunification between the North and South has benefited greatly from Nina Silber, 'Romance of Reunion'. See also Paul Buck, *Road to Reunion, 1865–1900* (Boston 1937).

11. John M. Thurston, *Oration at the Arlington National Cemetery*, 5.

12. T. F. Lang, *Decortion Day at London Park Cemetery* (Baltimore 1880), 8; Thomas Chambers Richmond, *Memorial Address*, 20.

13. Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York 1987), 271.

14. John Bodnar uses the term 'vernacular culture' as a central concept of his valuable study of American nationalism, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 1992), 14–15 and passim; Johnson cited in Silber, 'Romance of Reunion', 337; Bruce Catton, 'Foreword' in *The American Heritage Century Collection of Civil War Art* (New York 1974), 10.

15. Catton, *Century Collection*, 6–11.

16. Ibid., 10. John Glenn Gray's valuable book, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York 1976), includes a detailed description of the allure and spectacle of battle.

17. Carlton McCarthy, *Detailed Minutiae of Soldier Life in the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861–1865* (Richmond,VA 1882), 95; S.H.M. Byers, *With Fire and Sword* (New York 1911), 77.

18. Federal officer cited in Royster, *The Destructive War*, 276; B.F. Scribner, *How Soldiers Were Made* (Chicago 1887), 147, 165.

19. Byers, *With Fire and Sword*, 83.

20. Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895; reprint ed., New York 1990), 20.

21. George Creel, 'Four Million Citizen Defenders: What Universal Training means in Dollars, Duty, and Defense', *Everybody's Magazine*, 36 (January–June 1917), 547.

22. Creel, 'Four Million Defenders', 551. For discussion of promotion of first world war selective service, see David R. Segal, *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizenship and Military Manpower Policy* (Lawrence, KS 1989).

23. Richard Hofstadter, 'Cuba, the Phillipines, and Manifest Destiny' in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York 1966), 159.

Roosevelt cited in Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish–American War* (Ann Arbor 1974), 52.

24. Marshall Everett (ed.), *Exciting Experiences in Our Wars with Spain and the Filipinos* (Chicago 1899); *Hero Tales of the American Soldier and Sailor as Told by the Heros Themselves and Their Comrades* (Philadelphia 1899); statistics on volunteers cited in Linderman, *Mirror of War*, 63–4.

25. Hofstadter, *Paranoid Style*, 161; estimated number of volunteers cited in Enoch Herbert Crowder, *The Spirit of Selective Service* (New York 1920), 102.

26. H.H. Powers, *The Things Men Fight For* (New York 1918), 24; Merle Curti, *The Roots of American Loyalty* (New York 1946), 177.

27. Curti, *Roots of American Loyalty*, 161.

28. Walter Hines Page, 'The War with Spain, and After', *Atlantic Monthly*, 81 (June 1898), 725–7.

29. Matthew Frye Jacobson, '"War, What Sort of Mistress Are You?" Militarism, Masculinity, and the Polish–American Response to American Intervention in 1898', paper presented at the Organization of American Historians conference, Chicago, April 1992.

30. Frederick Douglass cited in Royster, *Destructive War*, 271; George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Troops in the War of Rebellion* (New York 1888), 23; W.E.B. DuBois cited in Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York 1968), 69. For full treatment of DuBois's support of the first world war, see Mark Ellis, '"Closing Ranks" and "Seeking Honors": W.E.B. DuBois in World War I', *Journal of American History*, 79 (June 1992), 96–124.

31. Booker T. Washington, *A New Negro for a New Century* (Chicago 1909), 12, 28, 41; Edward A. Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers in the Spanish–American War* (Raleigh 1899), 39; *Under Fire with the Tenth U.S. Cavalry* (London 1899).

32. Pershing cited in Frank Freidel, *The Splendid Little War* (Boston 1958), 173; first comment by veteran cited in *Under Fire*, 160; second comment cited in Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers*, 68.

33. McKinley cited in *Under Fire*, 177; Miles cited in Johnson, *History of Negro Soldiers*, 47.

34. Theodore Roosevelt, *American Ideals: And Other Essays, Social and Political* (New York 1897), 30; George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man* (New York 1980), 185.

35. James, 'Governor Roosevelt's Oration' in Frederick Burkhardt (ed.), *The Work of William James: Essays, Comments and Reviews* (Cambridge, MA 1987), 162–4.

36. Crowder, *Spirit of Selective Service*, 296; Roosevelt, *Address at Antietam*, 14.

37. Poem cited in Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York 1989); Roosevelt and Crosby cited in Linderman, *Mirror of War*, 95, 106.

38. Theodore Roosevelt, *National Preparedness* (Kansas City 1916), 10; Crowder, *Spirit of Selective Service*, 296.

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