Being the elephant:
The American Civil War reenacted

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June 1, 1997

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,
Vermont College of Norwich University

PREFACE

Being the elephant: The American Civil War reenacted

This document represents an overview of the phenomenon of Civil War reenactment, based on two years of participant-observation fieldwork among reenactors in the New England region and elsewhere. I site my research within three different contexts by surveying the scholarly literature in the field of cultural performance studies, by tracing the history of performative representations of the Civil War, and by discussing my methodology, before turning to the primary question motivating this study, "Who reenacts the Civil War, and why?"

The second half of the document examines Civil War reenactment in relation to issues of identity in its adherents' everyday lives, particularly as these reflect perceptions of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and generational identification. In seeking to understand how reenactment functions as an aesthetic, I also suggest how that aesthetic may facilitate expression of and experimentation with real-life roles and aspirations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although the fascination (some have suggested "obsession") that prompted this project was wholly my own, I could not have completed my study without the help of many other people. First and foremost I wish to acknowledge the good humor, open mind, and seemingly inexhaustible patience of Fred Holmgren, who has often had cause to wonder where this was all going to end. I am also more grateful than I can say for the support and advice of my advisors, Chris Michael, who has a great talent for putting crises in perspective, and David Guss, whose knowledge, interest, and perception have been a tremendous gift to me and have significantly shaped my own critical thinking and this paper.

Finally, I want to thank the Civil War reenactor community in New England and elsewhere, who were more than gracious in accepting a stranger into their ranks for two seasons. It is my hope that this document offers, in return for their hospitality, some new ideas on the eternal reenactor question "Why do we do what we do?"

More important, I hope that along with scholarly analysis, I have managed to convey some of the spirit and originality of this extraordinary group of people. In particular, I owe thanks to my "home" unit, the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, and to the 9th Massachusetts Light Battery and the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, with whom I also traveled over the course of my research. Many, many individual reenactors offered me their insights, knowledge, and friendship, which I continue to value highly; because there were so many, I will not list their names here, but will just say that if you're reading this, I hope you recognize yourself and know who I mean.

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Introduction

Holiday Inn, Gettysburg

In November of 1991 I travelled to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania for reasons completely unconnected with the American Civil War. A Canadian and fairly recent resident of the U.S., I knew little about the war. Patriotism is a somewhat troubled subject for Canadians, defined largely by negations. What Canadians most emphatically are *not* is Americans, and so if I was ever exposed to any knowledge about the Civil War, I patriotically declined to absorb it. Thus I arrived in Gettysburg knowing nothing but its name.

It is impossible to ignore the Civil War in Gettysburg. The place is tiny--population only seven thousand--and the battlefield is immense, surrounding and embracing the town on all sides. When I arrived at the Holiday Inn, after a day of driving, I wanted to stretch my legs before the daylight faded. I stepped outside intending only to take a short walk, not to embark on a quest.

I found myself in a field that was still green in mid-November, looking at the statue of a soldier on horseback silhouetted against an orange sky. Cannons and stone markers dotted the ground all around me as I crossed the grass, their outlines crisp but their lettering indistinct in the waning light. Even had I wanted to, it would have been difficult to read the inscriptions on the rows of monuments that faced me when I crossed a busy street and walked into the cemetery on the other side.

What I *could* see was that I was not the only wanderer in this unexpected landscape. The farther I walked, the more I began to realize that the place was full of small groups of

people, two or three together, picking their own ways among the silent stones. What caught my attention was that their silhouettes strangely matched those of the statues I was seeing. These people were uniformed like the monumental figures on the pedestals all around us. Hats, boots, swords--the outlines were the same. There were a few other tourists like myself on the battlefield, but these costumed people seemed not to be taking in the sights so much as they were paying some kind of homage.

My introduction to the Civil War, then, coincided with my introduction to Civil War reenactors. I learned later that it has become a tradition for reenactors to congregate at this most sacred of American battlefields around Veterans Day, participating in ceremonies, paying tribute to the Civil War dead, visiting what is for many a highly important shrine. I discovered when I returned to the Holiday Inn that a "Blue and Gray Ball" would be held there the next evening. The halls of the hotel were crowded for the entire weekend with uniformed men and hoop-skirted women; on Sunday morning I was awakened by a fife and drum corps breaking into music directly under the window of my second-floor room.

I did not know these things on that first walk onto the Gettysburg battlefield. I only knew that I was seeing a kind of behavior I could not fathom, but which fascinated me utterly. Perhaps because I first encountered it in the fading light of an evening in late autumn, I felt that I was observing something ancient, something significant and startling, far more akin to pagan ritual, to ancestor-worship, than to anything I had expected to find in a community boasting such modern amenities as a Holiday Inn. What were these people doing, and why? It seemed important to me to find the answer to this question, if I could.

I made my first attempt later that same weekend, after I had happened to follow a pair of uniformed "soldiers" along a Gettysburg street. The metal heel plates on their boots gave their walk a distinctive ring; the aura of beer surrounding them perhaps accounted for their rolling gait, more reminiscent of sailors than infantrymen. I caught up with them as they waited for a traffic light to change.

"Excuse me," I said, ever the polite Canadian. "I was wondering if you could tell me why you do this."

They stared at me, as I was staring at them. "We love history," one of them said. The light changed, and we all began to walk again.

I did not pursue the exchange. It was obvious that the answer was one they had given many times before, and were perhaps tired of repeating. It was equally obvious that the phrase "we love history" failed to explain what I was truly curious about, and that perhaps no simple answer would be sufficient to satisfy my curiosity.

I put the puzzle into the back of my mind, where it remained, quiet but insistent, until the following year, when I returned to college as an adult undergraduate. Given an open

choice for my first semester's independent study, I returned to the subject of Civil War reenactors, including them as part of an examination of what seemed to me to be "secular religions" in American culture. During the semester I sought out reenactors in New England who gave me the opportunity to observe, converse, and eventually--on one memorable weekend almost a year after my first encounter in Gettysburg--to participate in a recreated Civil War encampment. I began to grasp some of the complex reasons why people reenact, reasons which clearly had as much to do with community and personal identity as they did with history.

My questions, however, were still proliferating. Was there any set of characteristics that united all Civil War reenactors? How could they reconcile the brutality of the war they were portraying with the obvious--even childlike--delight they took in their encampments? How much of reenactment was an escape *toward* something--an imagined vision of the Civil War--and how much an escape *from* the realities of contemporary life? Did reenactment actually accomplish anything in its participants' "real" lives, or was it purely escapist? What about the anachronisms that permeated the activity? How could reenactors be so fixated on minute historial details of clothing and drill and so apparently blind to the ironies of, for example, recreating the nineteenth century by means of a hobby that could not exist without the internal combustion engine? How was it possible to forge a strong connection to the past while staying in the comfort of the Gettysburg Holiday Inn?

These were the questions I brought into my graduate study when I decided to focus my fascination with Civil War reenactment in a more extended and disciplined way. After five years of looking at reenactors from afar, I wanted to try to understand their activity from an insider's perspective.

Civil War soldiers who had been in battle for the first time referred to the experience as "seeing the elephant."[1] It seemed to me that Civil War reenactors, unable to see the actual elephant for themselves, seek to do something that might be described as "<u>being</u> the elephant"--to step physically, intellectually, and above all emotionally into others' historical experiences. Many observers of reenactment are struck, as I was, by the impossibility of actually achieving this goal, and indeed many reenactors are quite pragmatic about the inherent limitations of their attempts at transformation. But the desire to make the attempt--to try to be the elephant--is

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[1]Reenactor sources suggest that the phrase originated with the experience of attending the kinds of circuses and zoos that once made regular stops across rural America. The elephants often featured in these shows would have been overwhelmingly large and exotic in their audiences' eyes; hence the expression "I've seen the elephant" would have been the equivalent of "Well, now I've seen everything!"

what seems to animate Civil War reenactment in its current form.

Analogously, then, I decided to undertake this study by attempting to be a reenactor. I knew that like the people I hoped to come to understand better, I was endeavoring to bridge a gap that was ultimately unbridgable. Nineteenth-century clothes would not make me into a true reenactor, any more than they made reenactors into actual Civil War soldiers. But the clothes and the participation in reenactors' activities would bring me much closer to the experience I wanted to comprehend. I had to try to "be the elephant" myself if I were to learn why this particular group of people is so animated by this particular desire at this time in history, and how they express and relate that desire to one another and to the culture around them.

This paper documents my study, beginning with a survey of the theoretical background I applied to my two seasons of participant-observation among reenactors. Chapter I discusses the field of "cultural performance" which has recently emerged within anthropology, and which approaches performative expressions of identity (such as Civil War reenactment) as dynamic articulations of the tensions operating in the populations which produce them. Central to this approach is the work of Victor Turner, particularly his model of "social drama," which provides a framework for relating "real life" to ritual and other performative behavior.

Chapter II examines the history of Civil War reenactment, a phenomenon which began while the war was still being fought and which has continued in some form almost continuously since then. Following Turner's "social drama" model, particular attention will be given to the question of how the various performative commemorations of the Civil War have related not only to the original event, but to subsequent changes in social conditions. The genesis of Civil War reenactment in its modern form will be discussed, although a detailed consideration of its own relationship to its cultural setting will be reserved for a later chapter.

My methodology and ethnographic experiences are detailed in Chapter III, "What I did in the war." Using my own two years of fieldwork as a case in point, I examine some of the characteristic ways in which reenactors choose units, construct performative identities, and organize their activities both within and outside weekend encampments.
As already noted, the methodology of participant-observation offers both opportunities and limitations for the researcher. Chapter III speculates on some of the implications for my findings of this particular mode of inquiry, as well as viewing some aspects of the dialogic relationship between researcher and informants which developed during this study.

Chapter IV, "The company street: Demography and community in Civil War reenactment," is an analysis of who inhabits the reenactor community, and how their "real" lives and experiences relate to the world they create at their weekend encampments. I begin by suggesting that views of reenactment as simply game-playing, simply historical presentation, or simply any one thing, will inevitably fall short, and that this activity can only be understood

by seeing how its various satisfactions operate together for its participants. I then explore the most common recurring demographic features of the reenactor community, and attempt to discern commonalities in the ways reenactors perceive their own individual and collective identities. A longing for immutable versions of identity, and a shared resistance to contemporary challenges to such immutability, appear quite clearly in reenactors' comments and in their performed versions of the past, vividly coloring their presentation of Civil War reality.

The next chapter considers the mechanisms of that presentation itself in more detail. A picture of Civil War reenactment as a primarily masculine and conservative activity emerges from Chapter IV; Chapter V looks at evidence of how those characteristics mold the aesthetic that is created by reenactors, an aesthetic in which playful and defensive qualities are intermingled and reflect a particular kind of male experience and outlook. The chapter concludes by examining the value central to reenactment, historical "authenticity." Although on the surface this seems to be a pursuit of exact and tangible reproduction of the past, many reenactors in fact seem to understand the concept much more relatively and performatively, which perhaps allows them both to express and to modify their perceptions of gender roles, nationality, and other facets of identity.

The paper concludes by following an instance of a vexed contemporary issue finding its way into a community largely devoted to withdrawing from such issues. The debate among reenactors over whether women should be allowed to enter the ranks disguised as soldiers provides a mirror for similar contests of power and gender identity in the everyday world. Analyzing what both opponents and supporters of women in the ranks have said and done over the past decade, I suggest that the issue supports my sense that performative skill and activity may offer a way for those holding widely divergent social views to coexist within the same community.

It has been a long journey from my evening walk out of the Holiday Inn in Gettysburg in 1991. In many ways this document represents a conclusion to that stroll I took to stretch my legs. It is my hope that it will also offer the reader some form of answer to the question--"What are these people doing, and why?"--that has motivated me for much of the time since then.

Chapter I

Theory and observation

The specific theoretical framework that allowed me to begin to understand the many paradoxes inherent in Civil War reenactment was provided by the field of "cultural performance," which has emerged at the conjunction of anthropology, performance theory, and other disciplines concerned with performative expressions of collective human identity. These studies have tended to blur or eradicate formerly-distinct lines between genres of performance (for example, between "sacred" and "secular" genres, or between religious ritual and aesthetic theater), focusing instead on the relationships among genres and the interchange between cultural performances and the social settings in which they arise.

The methodology of participant-observation, along with the academic literature in the field of cultural performance, which forms the basis for this chapter, provided me with two interlocking theoretical viewpoints from which to observe Civil War reenactment. The first, a primarily "emic" (a "native" or internal) perspective, examined the complexities of performance itself, and helped me to delineate reenactment's boundaries and articulate its contradictions in ways that illuminated its structures and conventions. The second, a more "etic" (external, or outsider's) view, allowed me to site reenactment in its unique social context, and to approach the questions of identity and motivation that prompted this study. By studying the relationship between the two--the constructed weekend world of encampments and the "real life" backgrounds and circumstances of those who had created that world--I was able to begin to theorize about the genesis of this type of cultural performance at this historical juncture.

In this chapter I will survey the major components of the cultural performance field, and extend my discussion of the theory to include brief analyses of how I applied it to my own field experiences.

Turner and "social drama"

The study of cultural performance has appeared within the field of anthropology over the last quarter century. Earlier views of ritual and festival behavior tended to emphasize the role of that behavior in reinforcing existing social structures, and to see its forms and functions as fixed and univocal. More recently, there has been a trend toward approaching all public displays of collective identity--cultural performances--as potential sites of negotiation, cultural cross-fertilization, and contestation, which can reveal in uniquely tangible ways the tensions and currents operating in the societies surrounding them.

The term "cultural performance" itself was first used by Milton Singer in 1972 to describe the kinds of activities that seemed to him to encapsulate the extraordinarily complex cultural landscape of India. Similarly, Clifford Geertz's famous description of a Balinese cockfight (1973) treats a performative phenomenon as a text that can be read interpretively to reveal central facts about social relationships in Bali. Literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin explored festival behavior in ways which demonstrate its oppositional possibilities and emphasize its "dialogic" qualities; his Rabelais and his world (1968) and other works have influenced many scholars. As part of a larger intellectual shift toward seeing elements of a field relationally rather than statically, these thinkers and others recognized something that earlier theoretical models had been too rigid to express: that there is a great deal of material exchanged between cultural performances and everyday life, each of which affects the other in ways more significant than had previously been imagined.

The most central thinker in the emerging sub-field of cultural performance studies was Victor Turner. Although trained as a structural-functionalist, Turner found that this approach to social behavior could not adequately describe what he was observing in the field, particularly in the realm of ritual. In his earlier writing, based on his fieldwork in African tribal societies (Schism and continuity in an African society [1957], The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual [1967), and The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure [1969]), Turner focused not merely on what he termed the "structural" aspects of ritual--those which tended to maintain the status quo--but also on its "anti-structural" qualities, through which tension and conflict tended to be negotiated.

By 1974, in Dramas, fields, and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society, Turner was articulating a cohesive theory of what he had come to call "social drama." This idea evolved from his conviction that "studies of social structures *as such* are irrelevant" (1974: 24), since human social structures do not exist independently of the dynamic interactions constantly reshaping them. Turner was also convinced of the power of fundamental cultural imagery--the kinds of inclusive, multivalent metaphors he termed "root paradigms"--to shape human behavior and experience. He saw a close and symbiotic relationship among the social life and

events of any given culture, that culture's ritual expressions, and its symbolic or metaphorical materials, whether those were framed as history, myth, or in some other form. "I...began to perceive a form in the process of social time," he wrote. "This form was essentially *dramatic*" (1974: 32).

In the early part of the century, Arnold van Gennep had already postulated a dramatistic structure for "rite of passage" rituals. He viewed these as having a tripartite structure, beginning with a separation from everyday reality, then a phase of "liminality" (literally, "on the threshold," between two places), followed by a return to the everyday, albeit in a somewhat altered state. Turner built on that theoretical structure, extending it in two new directions.

First, he saw that historical events themselves could take this separation-and-return shape, particularly when there was a break in everyday social patterns. When there is some fracture in the social pattern, usually reflecting already-existing tensions,

> Conflict seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence. People have to take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints, often against their own personal preferences. Choice is overborne by duty. (1974: 35)

Turner called these "aharmonic" processual units "social dramas." He believed they were produced essentially by the "models and metaphors carried in the actors' heads" (1974: 36), although he also felt that the events of social dramas have the ability to make changes in those models and metaphors. Social drama, he said, was "an agonistic model drawn after a recurrent agonistic situation" (1982: 72). Although the specific cultural materials shaping social dramas changed from society to society, he saw the form itself as universal, so that "social dramas...can be isolated for study in societies at all levels of scale and complexity" (1974: 33).

Turner identified four phases in the social drama: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration. In the "breach" phase, the social norms of a group are challenged in such a way that the group must react in order to assert or retain its integrity, identity or influence. Unless the breach is quickly healed, a "crisis" phase is entered in response to the breach.

It was in the addition of the stage of "redressive action" that Turner departed in a second respect from van Gennep's original three-part model of separation/ liminality/return. "Redress," in Turner's thinking, comprises all the actions taken by humans in attempting to resolve a situation that has entered a "crisis" phase. Turner suggested that these actions

> ...may range from personal advice to informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual. (1974: 39)

Performative behavior stemming from social dramas, then--and in Turner's thinking, that

included virtually all performative behavior[1]--is undertaken as part of an effort to resolve, understand, or manipulate significant events in the life of a society.

The stage of "redressive action" is critical in Turner's theory because it demonstrated what he saw as our uniquely human ability to remove ourselves from the everyday "indicative" mood ("things are this way") and to enter what he often referred to as the "subjunctive" mood of liminality and performance ("if things were like this..."). By the time he had fully articulated the "social drama" structure in his later work (particularly 1982's From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play), Turner had come to see this redressive phase as both responsive to social realities and generative of them, engaged in a two-way process of transformation that owed its power to the state of playfulness and/or reflexivity that became possible through the experience of performing, of acting out interpretations and possibilities. He stated:

> The social drama, then, I regard as the experiential matrix from which the many genres of cultural performance, beginning with redressive ritual and juridical procedures, and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated. Breach, crisis, and reintegrative or divisive outcomes provide the content of such later genres, redressive procedures their form. (1982: 78)

"[B]oth the legal and ritual procedures generate narratives from the brute facts," he believed (1982: 76), and this generation leads to the formation of new cultural tropes which in turn may influence the content and outcomes of future social dramas. "Life, after all, is as much an imitation of art as the reverse," in Turner's view (1982: 72).

The final phase of social dramas is "reintegration," to which Turner later added the option of "social recognition of irreparable breach" (1982: 71). Although this implies some form of conclusion, if not necessarily of resolution, to the crisis, the open-endedness of his eventual understanding of human behavior--the influence of redressive forms as stated above--creates a much more fluid picture of the inter-relationship of social and performative processes. There are seldom any neat endings to social dramas or any tidy boundaries to cultural performances, because they inform and affect one another too continuously and on too many levels.

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[1]Turner coined the phrase "liminoid" to describe ritual-like behavior in post-tribal societies. Although liminoid activities tend to lack the centrality and obligatory character of ritual observance in less complex cultures, they may still perform many of the same functions in the realm of redressive action.

Performance *per se*

Before his death in 1983, Turner had moved the theoretical models of human ritual expression from static to processual forms, envisioning a complex dialectical relationship between performative and everyday behavior. His thinking about these questions was part of a trend among many social scientists toward a more overt consideration of how performance functions in human relationships and expression. In this section I will trace some of the thinking that has contributed to the study of performance *per se* in the field of cultural performance, focusing in particular on the work of performance theorist Richard Schechner.

One of the first social scientists to address this subject of performance directly was Gregory Bateson. In an essay on play in his important 1972 work Steps to an ecology of mind, he suggested the existence of the "play frame" which separates the subjunctive realm of play from the indicative mode of everyday life, allowing it to become a kind of commentary upon both. The work of Kenneth Burke (for example, Language as symbolic action [1966]) takes a "dramatistic" view of human behavior and "emphasizes the human use of symbolic materials in communication and the human intent to influence others through symbolic action" (Beeman 373). Sociologist Erving Goffman has elaborated on the work of both Burke and Bateson, painstakingly examining the performative aspects of human interaction. Extending the idea of "frames," Goffman examined the ways in which human beings separate activities into different psychological contexts which determine their meaning, stating that "the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture" (1974: 27).

Although Goffman has considered the organization of overtly theatrical as well as non-theatrical frames, he does not discriminate absolutely between the two types of behavior, an approach which makes his work extremely useful for those considering the relationship between the two. In the study of an activity where, as in Civil War reenactment, there are few clear lines between actors and audience, performance and rehearsal, stage and backstage, Goffman's concepts and language provide an important tool for both observation and articulation. However, the question of the precise extent to which performative behavior can be qualitatively differentiated from everyday behavior is one which has consistently occupied scholars studying cultural performance, and some (for example, MacAloon 1984) have wished for more specificity than either Goffman and Burke offer in the precise delineation of performative genres and behaviors.

Providing a different approach to the subject, folklorists and sociolinguists have examined performance as an element of oral communication. Dell Hymes (particularly in Foundations in sociolinguistics and in his essay "Breakthrough into performance," both published in 1975)) placed the study of both folkloric materials and language use in a performative perspective. Richard Bauman (Verbal art as performance [1977] and other

works) has built on this foundation, using performance events "as a means of identifying the fusion of text and context" (Beeman 371). In the work of Roger Abrahams it is possible to trace the developing consciousness of that fusion in the cultural performance field. In a 1967 essay, for example, he argues for the qualitative separation of "ritual" and "festival" behavior in complex societies such as the U.S., viewing the former as sacred and consequential, the latter as a momentary and inconsequential oppositional expression. By 1977 he had moved "Toward an enactment-centered theory of folklore," in which he viewed cultural performances (which he termed "enactments") as central to and influential in social process, stating:

> All enactments are drawn, in some degree, from everyday life and yet set apart from it, inducing a kind of self-consciousness of activity, a reflexivity leading the members of the culture themselves to conceive of such intensive events as what Geertz calls "a paradigmatic human event." (1977: 94)

The converging paradigms of the various fields concerned with human performative behavior have found perhaps their most eloquent integrator in Richard Schechner, a performance theorist and theatrical professional who initially approached the conjunction of performance and everyday life from the perspective of aesthetic drama. Already experimenting with the boundaries between performers, audiences, and types of reality, often by incorporating material from non-Western theatrical traditions, Schechner was uniquely equipped to synthesize the work of performance theorists with the ideas of ethnographers like Victor Turner, with whom he collaborated extensively. Schechner's Between theater and anthropology (1985) overtly examines this conjunction, but the same subject matter forms the basis of much of his other writing, as it did of much of Turner's later work.

Like Goffman, Schechner does not draw distinct lines between genres of performance, believing that "the difference between ritual and theater cannot be stated in essentialist terms" (Beeman 378). Schechner (1976) proposes a "braided" relationship between the entertaining and the efficacious functions of performative behavior. Depending on prevailing social conditions, he suggests, either entertainment or efficacy may be dominant in theatrical forms; occasionally, these functions overlap, creating periods when there is less differentiation between popular entertainment and religious ritual. This model eliminates the need for distinct lines between performative genres, and demonstrates, as does Turner's work, the close and reciprocal connection between everyday and performed reality.

Schechner also widens the scope of performative behavior to include all activities that are part of the performance process. He has shown how each of these phases contributes to the construction of the eventual performance; during rehearsals, for example,

> ...performers play with the interface between the private and the public, pushing and pulling the porous boundaries. A big part of the fun of rehearsal is in trying out what may never be shown, a way of enacting the forbidden. (1988, 208-9)

To the understanding of precisely how performative behavior relates to everyday reality, Schechner has contributed the model of "restored behavior," which demonstrates that the necessity of staging a future performance requires performers of all types to draw on material from their individual and collective pasts, thus uniting memory and desire through the medium of the performative moment.[2] Of particular application to my research into Civil War reenactment is Schechner's observation that any attempt to replicate past experience is bound to fail, since the very act of returning to the experience inevitably brings new material and perspective to the original event. The web of history and imagination expressed through reenactment is captured perfectly for me in Schechner's statement that

> Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to rebecome what they once were--or even, and most often, to rebecome what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become. (1985: 38)

"Restored behavior" provides an extremely useful model for examining the particular cultural and personal materials from which reenactors construct their versions of Civil War reality.

Both Turner and Schechner have also considered the relationship of human ritual and theater to biological functions that seem to prompt comparable behavior in other animal species. Ethologists have explored the ways in which animals use "ritualization" in order to clarify or negotiate contested situations, particularly those which arise around issues of hierarchy, territory, or sexuality (which often overlap). Konrad Lorenz has stated that "The functional analogies of phylogenetic and cultural ritualization are...so profound and reach into such amazing details that a conception embracing both is fully justified" (48). Schechner, in particular, has pursued this idea, investigating the ways in which human performance may be a somewhat more complex means of coping with the issues of contestation or sexuality which he sees lurking under our performative forms. At the end of his life Turner was seeking neurological evidence of how the process of playful or ritualized adaptation might physically shape the human brain, giving us our predisposition for experimentation, actualization, and fun. The nature of play itself, so crucial to human processes of learning and adaptation, was central to Turner's studies of liminality, and yet inherently mysterious at the same time:

> As I see it play does not fit in anywhere particular; it is a transient and is recalcitrant to localization, to placement, to fixation--a joker in the neuro-anthropological act... Playfulness is a volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence, which cultural institutions seek to bottle or contain in the vials of games of competition, chance, and strength... Play can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing... You may have guessed that play is, for me, a liminal or liminoid mode, essentially interstitial, betwixt-and-between all standard taxonomic nodes, essentially "elusive." (1983: 233-34)

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[2]An analogous psychological model can be found in Singer and Salovey's concept of "self-defining memories," in which individuals' hopes for the future are found to significantly influence their choice of materials drawn from memory.

This view of the unpredictability and creativity of human play and performance permeates the work of both Turner and Schechner, lending their theoretical models a tremendous flexibility that in many ways mirrors the creative, adaptive processes they are examining.

Studies of collective memory

If we follow Schechner's model of "restored behavior," it is clear that those who create cultural performances are drawing on many levels of individual and collective memory. Some examination of the processes of human memory, then, seemed appropriate to this study. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was particularly influential in this field, having shown (as "restored behavior" does in a more narrowly performative sense) that human beings tend to choose material and memories from the available historical record based on present circumstances; that is, "the past is not preserved, but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (1952: 40).[3]

Paul Connerton is less concerned with what societies remember than how they remember it. He has traced the processes by which collective memories become "sedimented in the body" (72), providing a series of physical reference points by which we can remember signficant facts about authority and structure. His approach emphasizes the role of ritual and memory in reinforcing existing social structures, excluding any consideration of the "anti-structural" possibilities of social memory as elaborated by Turner and others. However, his discussion does offer a different perspective in its focus on memory as a learned physical process. In considering the large number of Civil War reenactors who are military veterans, it is tempting to speculate that the familiar physical sensations of military movements and drill may underlie much of these reenactors' connection to and understanding of the war.

Jim Cullen, George Lipsitz, and others have examined the role played by popular culture in perpetuating and challenging collective memory. Although unrelated in subject matter, Janice Radway's work combines the techniques of ethnography and literary criticism to provide a compelling case study of how popular culture both shapes and reacts to the society that creates it. Her account of the activities of female romance-novel readers was strikingly similar to my observations of the uses to which predominantly-male Civil War reenactors put the narrative that is at the core of their activities. In each case (the happily-ever-after story of the romance novel and the heroic military narrative of the Civil War) the story itself seemed to be

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[3]Some (for example, Schwartz 1982, Fentress and Wickham 1992) have argued that Halbwachs was too sweeping in his declaration that the selection of memories is entirely contigent, and that some personal and social events will be remembered because they are intrinsically more important than others. In general, however, social scientists now follow Halbwachs's view that collective memory is a constructed reality, not an absolute one.

used to express and negotiate tensions that may have arisen from its very dominance in its adherents' lives.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have described what they call "invented traditions," which illuminate the practice of constructing the past. They point to the many social discontinuities of the Industrial Revolution as a source of increased public desire for a sense of connection to a more stable past. Interestingly, this is the same historical period within which the American Civil War was fought and most broadly commemorated. It seems possible to trace many of the dissatisfactions examined in Hobsbawm and Ranger operating in the activities of those who initially memorialized the war (and who, in doing so, influenced subsequent commemorative undertakings).

David Lowenthal has exhaustively examined many facets of the public use of memory throughout Western culture. John Bodnar, David Glassberg, Edward Linenthal, Michael Kammen, and others have traced commemorative processes in America in ways that illustrate the malleability of the historical record. Thomas Pressly provided a comprehensive survey of how Americans viewed their Civil War in the ninety years after it ended; in the years since Pressly's volume appeared, David Blight, Jim Cullen, Eric Foner, John Rosenberg, Stuart McConnell and many others have examined the shifting role that the Civil War has played in American social consciousness.

The material discussed above provided me with two theoretical tools to apply to my study of Civil War reenactment. First, I found that by categorizing reenactment under the broad heading of "performance," I was able to begin to understand both its internal conventions and my own experiences within it. In a more specific sense, Turner's theory of "social drama" offered a particular model of social process against which I could test my observations. The two perspectives are difficult to pull apart, given the centrality of performance in Turner's thinking and the importance of his work for the cultural performance field. In a general sense, however, it is possible to say that the study of performance theory informed my "emic," or insider, view of reenactment, while the idea of social drama offered a more "etic" perspective, allowing me to address the questions which linked reenactment to the cultural setting surrounding it. The final section of this chapter will discuss my application of these two aspects of cultural performance theory to my field research.

Reenactment as performance

Schechner (1993) has noted that in postmodern culture, "The four great spheres of performance--entertainment, healing, education, and ritualizing--are in play with each other... What used to be a tightly boundaried, limited field has expanded exponentially" (20).

Civil War reenactment offers a particularly rich field for the observation of that interplay. One of the initial frustrations for the observer (including myself) is the difficulty of deciding precisely what reenactment is, since the activity seems to encompass aspects of so many different types of behavior: teaching, learning, commemoration, community-building, and a great deal of just plain fooling around. Viewed performatively, however, reenactment can be seen as an instance where Schechner's performative spheres have intersected. Forms and functions overlap continually, but the activity which unites them at a basic level is performance.

I began this study wondering, with others, about the many paradoxes presented by Civil War reenactment. How was it possible--and why was it desirable--to recreate a particularly brutal war and have such a good time doing it? For me, the resolution of this paradox is found in a performative approach to reenactment. Reenactors do not *recreate* war; they *create* something new, a response to a war that has remained centrally significant in American history for a large number of the country's citizens. Once the activity is placed in a performative frame, it becomes possible to view its contradictions as those to be found in any performance, which simultaneously is and is not real. (Schechner [1985: 123] has referred to the "not-not not" character of performance, in which actors are not really themselves, and yet not *not* themselves at the same time.) Moreover, a performative approach makes it possible to view the spirit of play, such a prominent feature of reenactor behavior and discourse, not in terms of disrespect or incongruity, but as the underlying force which animates the entire enterprise. As noted above, although Turner could not completely account in empirical or theoretical terms for the human impulse toward play, he became convinced that it was essential to the processes of adaptation and creativity, whether those were expressed in serious or whimsical, ritual or theatrical, sacred or secular terms. An understanding of reenactment as performance, then, makes it possible to understand how jokes and homage can not only co-exist, but invigorate one another as well.

Shortly after I had begun to view reenactment in this way, I participated in a church pageant in southeastern Massachusetts. Because the event gave me an opportunity to place reenactors' behavior (and my own) within a performative frame, as well as providing an instance where several levels of performance happened to overlap, I will discuss it briefly here.

During the pageant, the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, a group I had only recently become acquainted with, was to participate in a scene depicting a young member of the congregation enlisting in the Union army during the Civil War. Church members had already performed--somewhat stiltedly--scenes from the church's history during the colonial, Revolutionary, and Federal periods, while the reenactors watched and murmured occasional comments from the vestibule. A group of children paraded the aisles carrying signs promoting

the temperance movement, provoking some of the reenactors to talk of staging a counter-demonstration in support of the demon rum.

When it came time for our vignette, the accompanist played "Battle Hymn of the Republic" softly on the piano, only to be taken over and drowned out by the shrill reverberation of fife and drum and the ringing of a dozen sets of metal heel plates against the hard wooden interior of the church as the 25th Mass. marched up the center aisle. Although there had been no formal rehearsal for the scene, it was the kind of presentation that reenactors are familiar with from encampments and civic ceremonies. We all played our roles without having to consult one another or the script. The young recruit was inspected by the 25th's surgeon, officially mustered in by its captain, and marched off with the men as the drummer and I played "Garryowen."

In the parking lot, when the formation had dissolved, one member of the 25th said, "You know, we were the best thing in there." He was right, in that the reenactors' performance had had far more polish and confidence than the halting presentations by the obviously less-eager, less-experienced church actors. The 25th's moment on stage had been prepared for in dozens of drills, scripted and improvised scenarios, and, in some cases, "real life" military experience. They had already invested a great deal of time in the kind of selection and rehearsal that creates an assured performance. A performative framework allowed me to understand the basis of the 25th's skill, and to see it in relation to the other levels of competence and historical recreation operating within the church pageant.

Furthermore, it placed me within the same frame, not only as an observer but as an actor. Once I had come to understand the essentially theatrical nature of reenactment, I was able to draw on my own previous experience as a performer in order to comprehend the source of my instances of natural rapport with reenactors, my periodic lapses in competence, and the unspoken understandings that emerge within performing groups. In a sense, I was demonstrating the workings of "restored behavior" as I used my personal performative background to understand reenactors as performers and myself as a performer/researcher among them.

It was that kind of unspoken communication that allowed the 25th Mass. and I, strangers to one another, to create an effective scene on stage with no discussion and no apparent rehearsal. It is the same kind of playful, performative skill that animates Turner's view of human social and ritual process, and that equips human beings to make meaning of their world and themselves.

The Civil War and social drama

Although some scholars[4] have questioned whether the progression of breach-crisis-redress-reintegration/schism is applicable to all pivotal social events in all cultures, there is no doubt that the American Civil War, at least, does provide an unusually distinct example of Turner's model in both its original shape and its prolific generation of responses. This section will briefly examine the Civil War and one of those responses--reenactment--in light of Turner's theory of social drama.

The "breach" phase leading up to the Civil War can actually be viewed as a long series of successive breaches, each of them leading to an imperfectly-resolved crisis. Although there are many ways of interpreting the underlying tensions which contributed to escalating sectional conflict in the U.S. in the nineteenth century, it is clear that the conflicts which most urgently demanded redressive action virtually always centered on issues involving slavery. The circumstances leading to such decisions as the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), and the Dred Scott case (1857) each involved a breach, a crisis, some redressive action (taken in the legal sphere), and a temporary reintegration of the slave and free states. None of these attempts at reintegration remained stable, however, because the tensions which had prompted them remained fundamentally unresolved. These recurring circumstances illustrated Turner's belief that "when claims are advanced under different social principles, which are inconsistent with one another even to the point of mutual contradiction, there can be no rational settlement" (1982: 75). Increasingly in the mid-nineteenth century, as the available structural forms of redress failed to heal the widening breach, Americans chose more violent means of confrontation and resolution. The fighting in "Bleeding Kansas" (1854) and John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry were harbingers of much greater bloodshed to come.

Lincoln's 1861 decision to maintain a Union military presence in Charleston Bay was the last attempt at redressive action before the conflict entered its crisis phase. The four years of turmoil which followed the firing on Fort Sumter answered two important questions about America's national identity--its indivisibility and its legal guarantee of freedom for all citizens. But these questions were extremely complex in both conception and resolution, and that complexity was greatly exacerbated by the suffering experienced by Americans during the war. Despite the apparent reintegration evident in the 1865 Confederate surrender and the years of Reconstruction which followed the war, many of the issues raised by the conflict, its genesis, and its aftermath remained. Some of these--entwined with more recent social tensions--

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[4]Colin Turnbull, for example (in Shechner and Appel 1990) wonders whether the "social drama" progression is anything more than the movement of action and reaction that characterizes all human behavior.

continue to demand redressive action even a hundred and thirty years later. As Jim Cullen notes, "Officially, the Civil War ended in 1865, but culturally, it was just beginning" (16).

Redressive action taken in the wake of the Civil War is still a marked presence in the cultural landscape of the U.S. Attempts to codify the principle of racial equality in legal terms have consistently challenged Americans to rethink many of the same issues that underlay the war. Popular entertainment has found fertile territory in the Civil War, with some of its best-known products--for example, D.W. Griffith's Birth of a nation and Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the wind--becoming significant enough cultural phenomena to generate responses of their own. Commemoration of the war, in monumental, rhetorical, and performative forms, has often provided an opportunity for public commentary on American identity; the ongoing contemporary debate over the display of the Confederate battle flag, viewed by some with pride, by others as a sign of race hatred, is only one example of the tremendous symbolic power still inherent in Civil War iconography and narrative. Each of these responses, and countless others--including, of course, reenactment--constitutes a reaching toward plural reflexivity, an attempt to absorb, understand, or manipulate the still-unresolved questions surrounding this central event in American history.

Chapter II

Civil War reenactment from 1865 to the present

"The Civil War is 'felt' history." A reenactor quoted this phrase of Robert Penn Warren's to me at an encampment in Virginia, in answer to my question about the enduring presence of the Civil War in the national memory. Warren's complete statement was:

> The Civil War is our only "felt" history--history lived in the national imagination. This is not to say that the War is always, and by all men, felt in the same way. Quite the contrary. But this fact is an index to the very complexity, depth, and fundamental significance of the event. It is an overwhelming and vital image of human, and national, experience. (4)

The continued fascination of the Civil War extends far beyond the physical boundaries of the United States, and testifies to the story's ability to articulate important questions about not only American identity but about conflicts and ideals common to most human interactions.

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the American Civil War was, in Victor Turner's terms, a "social drama," the kind of inherently dramatic, socially significant event that both requires and produces ongoing public responses. Those responses have appeared in many arenas--in law and in literature, in statues and on stage. Since the form with which this paper is primarily concerned--reenactment--is performative in nature, and since a consideration of that performative quality is central to the theoretical approach I will apply in ongoing chapters, it seems useful here to examine how others have "performed" the Civil War--in other words, to trace the genealogy of contemporary reenactment.

This chapter, then, will survey the range of ways in which the war has been performatively represented over the past one hundred and thirty-plus years. I will confine my focus to what John Bodnar has called "vernacular" expressions, to distinguish them from primarily commercial or formal aesthetic endeavors (such as theatrical plays or commercial films) and what Bodnar terms "official" culture, promoted by those within dominant structures of authority (such as, for example, Civil War presentations by National Park Service personnel). Schechner and others have suggested that these genre lines are to some extent artificial; all of these forms do inform and affect

one another to a considerable degree, and vernacular, official, and commercial interests have not infrequently overlapped. However, in order to isolate a particular segment of the vast array of cultural material spawned by the Civil War, I will confine my attention here to performative expressions in the vernacular realm: that is, those prompted by subjective, non-commercial motives, not directed by any civic or other authority.

The snowball wars

The first Civil War reenactors were the soldiers themselves. Indeed, there is ample evidence that even during the war, the participants were mingling war and play in a way very suggestive of the childhood games that had doubtless preceded it and the reenactments that would soon follow.

Many regimental histories describe large-scale sham battles held in winter camp in order to ready the troops for upcoming campaigning. In front of hundreds of spectators from the Georgia countryside, for instance, the soldiers of the the Confederate "Orphan Brigade" from Kentucky fired blank rounds or cloth and paper wads at one another, and practiced forming the "hollow square" by which infantry guards itself against cavalry. In less formal circumstances, the Kentucky troops followed the example of many of their fellows on both sides of the conflict by making use of fresh snowfall to stage "snowball wars." An account of one battle held on March 22, 1864 describes how

> ...the men of the 4th Kentucky snowballed each other, and then hurled their mushy missiles at the Tennessee brigades in their division. Before long the remaining Kentucky regiments went to the 4th's rescue. Soon the two brigades stood lined up against each other, their field officers mounted and directing their fire as though in real battle. Of course, the officers became the chief targets of the snowballs, and even the mascot dog Frank of the 2d Kentucky joined in the fray, engaging a Tennessee mongrel who left him *hors de combat* with a bite in the foot. (Davis 214)

Eventually making peace, the Kentuckians and Tennesseans joined forces and engaged a Florida brigade, whom they routed with ease, capturing the Florida battle flag. After a pause for lunch, the Floridians filled their haversacks with ten snowballs per man and renewed the attack. They captured the Kentuckians' colors, but the Kentucky men took the Florida general prisoner before peace was finally made and the various items that had been looted from temporarily abandoned camps were restored to their owners. Despite being hit in the eye with a snowball, one Kentucky soldier wrote in his diary, "We have seen more fun today than at any time during the war" (Davis 215).[1] Even in the midst of four years of

[1]Although the formalized "war games" were undoubtedly quite serious rehearsals for actual warfare, the snowball wars are startlingly reminiscent of the improvised skirmishes and "tacticals" of contemporary reenacting, where the explicit object is to have fun. The difference

carnage, then, there was clearly an impulse to play with the constituent materials of the story still taking shape.

Commemoration by veterans

After the war, veterans from both sides of the conflict formed a sizable demographic category whose presence and views were important features of the American cultural and political landscape for many years. Even in 1890, one out of every ten eligible American voters was a Civil War veteran (McConnell 16). In the north the Grand Army of the Republic, formed in Illinois in 1866, remained socially and politically prominent well into the twentieth century. Stuart McConnell (1992) has encapsulated the range of GAR activities:

> More pervasive than any of the cultural productions [in society at large] was the day-to-day participation by hundreds of thousands of veterans and civilians in an ongoing conversation about the implications of the war for postwar society. Sometimes their discourse was political, as in arguments over the appropriate level of pension expenditures. Sometimes it took the form of symbolic acts: the military parade, the Memorial Day service, the monument dedication, the nostalgic Civil War "campfire" entertainment. And sometimes, especially in the 1890's, it was more diatribe than discourse, as the veterans tried to prescribe an older vision of the nation for an impatient and burgeoning industrial state. Through all these devices, the men who had fought the war on the Union side first explained to themselves what it meant to be veterans, then tried to tell civilians what it meant to belong to the nation the war had preserved. (16)

Like all forms of "redressive action," GAR activities relating to the war were as much a reaction to present as to past conditions. McConnell has shown how the public, educative, and overtly ideological activities of the GAR overlapped in many places with its members' intense personal desires to preserve (or perhaps invent) a simpler, nobler version of America than the acquisitive Gilded Age society in which they found themselves after the war. Like most performative events in the redressive sphere, these events not only

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between the two types of simulation is intriguing. At a reenactment I attended as a spectator, I was accompanied by a fellow Vermont College student and her two siblings, one of whom worked in military intelligence. Since his job was primarily to critique the performance of trainee units during simulations, I asked him whether the mood at these exercises ever turned playful or subjunctive, as it does in reenactments and as it clearly did during the Civil War snowball battles. He told me that both the object and the execution of the exercises were entirely serious, confirming my sense that there is an essential difference between such apparently similar activities as sham battles held for training purposes and those engaged in spontaneously. Goffman's concept of "keys," which will be discussed later in this paper, is helpful here in understanding how psychological context can determine meaning in human behavior. Beyond that, however, lies the even more intriguing question (which is somewhat beyond my ability to analyze in any detail) of the extent to which all war games, whether in the realm of formal exercises of of "playing soldier," are themselves both a rehearsal for and a response to war.

responded simultaneously to past and present conditions, but also showed a very different face in public than in private. The GAR presented many public statements about the meaning of the war, but it also provided members with close-knit fraternal societies which served wholly internal needs for community, support, and affirmation of important common values. In public, GAR members (much like contemporary reenactors) were active in parades, monument-building and battlefield preservation, and educational activities designed to foster a "proper" sense of patriotism among American youth (Kammen 104, 115, 120). The GAR's internal commemoration of the war, however, tended to focus on some type of idealized version of soldier life, whether it was the faux-military atmosphere of the post room or the large-scale, romanticized encampments set up for national and other gatherings. These private events privileged the affective, the personal, and the nostalgic, much as do their late twentieth-century counterparts.

The social forces which prompted the creation of an idealized world by veterans from both the north and the south were also strikingly analogous in many ways to those of contemporary reenactors' lives. McConnell, Logue, and others have demonstrated how shifting economic and demographic patterns, along with challenges to traditional gender roles, contributed to the sense among veterans in the late nineteenth century that many essential social rules were being threatened and overturned, a sentiment which, as we will see in Chapter IV, is frequently voiced among the reenactors in my study population. As McConnell states,

> ...in a world increasingly dominated by large corporations, railroads, centralized government, national communications networks, and mass political parties, the idea of the autonomous, "manly" individual, dependent on no one, no longer made sense. As previously insulated communities came to rely more heavily on each other, individuals began to realize that they were at the mercy of forces and events outside their control or even their understanding. (139)

Although these developments were centered in the North, Logue writes, "the South felt their effects... The Civil War now seemed like a time of selflessness and heroism compared to the grasping meanness of the century's closing decades" (119). In large part, it was this uneasy realization, so analogous to the stresses of globalized culture and economy in the late twentieth century, which prompted the Civil War veterans' escape into settings evoking youth, noble values, and the kind of clarity only hindsight can produce.

GAR encampments were popular until the 1890s, when most veterans were becoming too old for the rigors of life under canvas. National events frequently attracted well over 10,000 participants and featured drills, dress parades, camp cooking, singing around the fire, and idealized versions of other military activities (McConnell 177). On a smaller scale, individual posts often held "campfires" for their own members or

neighboring posts, at which army meals, speeches, music, drills, and the sharing of war stories were common elements of the program. McConnell speculates of these private gatherings that

> It may be that the stories related at closed campfires, for all the levity chronicled in the post minutes, actually included tales of suffering and confusion that veterans could only tell each other. Since those narratives...passed unrecorded, there is no way of knowing; they are lost to us, as they were to nonveteran contemporaries. (179)

The nature of private GAR activity tended to change when it was presented to a wider audience. Some "campfires" were opened to veterans' families or to the general public; these events tended to be more like structured pageants or other typical Victorian entertainments, which greatly diluted and sentimentalized the true experience of war. McConnell reports on an 1886 "ladies night" at Post 35 in Chelsea, Massachusetts, which included ten tableaux all focusing on non-martial aspects of the war: "Foraging," "The Soldier Boy's Promotion," "Gypsy Camp," and so on (180). "Camp nostalgia," he concludes, "was yet another way in which the realities of the war were tamed to suit Victorian preferences for order and sentiment" (181).

In the north, veterans were quick to organize nationally; this process was delayed for southern veterans by the greater psychic wounds they faced as vanquished rather than victorious fighters. By the time a national Confederate veterans' association was formed in 1889,[2] southerners had recovered from the most vivid of the war's traumas and were ready to begin rehabilitating the Confederacy's image and their own role in history. Like the GAR, the UCV held an annual reunion, which became one of the most important cultural events in the region. "The spectacle served as a mirror, reflecting the many facets of the veterans' ideals and aspirations," William White has written (35). Although UCV meetings were not such faithful reproductions of actual army encampments as the GAR camps, the nostalgic appeal of reminiscing with old friends around a campfire or barbecue pit was just as irresistible to rebel veterans as to Yankees.

By the 1870s, despite lingering sectional resentments, what Edward Linenthal (1991) has called "the ideology of reconciliation" was beginning to characterize the relationship between veterans' groups--and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the general population--in the north and those in the south. The restoration of white political rule to the south during the 1870s contributed to this reconciliation, as the troubled issue of race was to a large extent sidestepped by white Americans in both north and south. As well, there

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[2]The United Confederate Veterans (UCV) eventually attracted about 80,000 members, or between a quarter and a third of all Confederate veterans. This proportion was roughly the same as that for the GAR in the north.

was evidence of an emerging nostalgia in the increasingly industrialized north for images of the pre-war "Old South," along with a sense among veterans on both sides that their mutual trial by battle not only bound them to one another in significant ways, but elevated their status as leaders and citizens above that of non-veterans (Linenthal 1991: 94).

This sense of commonality led inevitably toward bipartisan commemoration of the Civil War. "Blue and gray reunions" were an increasingly common feature of veterans' gatherings. Beginning in the early 1880s, some Confederate groups began to hold reunions at Gettysburg (Linenthal 1991: 93), alongside the Federal units who had been doing the same thing since the 1870s. The most spectacular of these celebrations was the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the battle of Gettysburg in 1913. 55,000 veterans attended the four-day event, which included a reenactment of Pickett's Charge culminating in a handshake between survivors of the actual charge.[3]

The "Last Reunion of the Blue and the Gray" gathered almost two thousand aged veterans for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Gettysburg in 1938. With the prospect of a second world war looming, the ceremonies were used simultaneously to promote the ideal of peace and to demonstrate America's readiness for battle. On July 3, President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated an impressive peace monument; on the following day there was an equally impressive display of modern armaments and drill. The "Good War" in which these weapons and tactics would be used would shape Americans' perception of their own collective identity in the mid-twentieth century almost as powerfully as the Civil War had in the mid-nineteenth, constituting a new social drama that would both draw on tales of Civil War valor and determine how the earlier war would be presented and performed in the future.

The Civil War in American pageantry

Between the GAR's nostalgic campfires in the 1880s and 90s and the final major veterans' anniversary of Gettysburg in 1938, the United States experienced many of the enormous social changes that the veterans had been sensing and resisting: increasing industrialization and urbanization, new public roles for women and ethnic minorities, new modes of transportation and communication, and tremendous concomitant shifts in manners, mores, and the experience of daily life. A fascinating indicator of how these changes manifested themselves in the realm of cultural performance can be seen in the

[3]This "handshake at the wall" became a regular feature of Gettysburg reunions, to the extent that the ceremonial handshake, along with the charge itself, is sometimes recreated by modern reenactors (Linenthal 1991: 95-6).

development and decline of the pageant movement in America.

Pageants were an enormously popular form of entertainment in the first two decades of the twentieth century. They flourished in communities of all sizes, including large cities, where large-scale presentations could involve thousands of performers and tens of thousands of spectators. Typically, a pageant consisted of consecutive scenes, sketches, or tableaux, often allegorical or pedagogical in nature. Pageants utilized outdoor settings and generally privileged the visual over the oral. Themes were usually inspirational or patriotic in intent. Although professional pageant organizers emerged as the movement gained momentum, the participants were virtually always amateurs, drawn from the same population group that also comprised the primary audience. Pageants, to borrow Clifford Geertz's phrase, were a story that people told themselves about themselves.

Pageantry combined two distinct elements: the patriotic, conservative preservation-mindedness of the elite classes Glassberg calls "the guardians of tradition" (31), and the more reform-minded, democratizing, arts-oriented pioneers of progressive education, social work, and the "playground movement,"[4] who sought to extend rather than conserve definitions of what it meant to be an American. Both groups believed that public presentation of American history and values facilitated the "melting pot" process, although their emphases were often quite different. For the guardians of tradition, the aim of the melting pot was to assimilate newcomers without unduly disturbing the original mix. For the reformers, entry into the cultural landscape was an avenue toward greater economic and social opportunity, one that might be followed without entirely abandoning the traditions of one's original culture. The tension between the two approaches is of course still evident in contemporary America in the ongoing, unresolved debate over "diversity."

In the history of the pageant movement it is possible to follow quite clearly how cultural performances can become sites for public negotiation over such issues of identity. One of the more fascinating aspects of pageantry is that its more reformist elements recognized that such public performances could provide opportunities for consensus as well as for contestation:

> Recreation workers...believed that encouraging adults to express the childlike spirit of play on holidays could help heal potentially dangerous social antagonisms arising out of differences of ethnicity and class. Children instinctively played together, unconscious of social distinctions; their parents, abandoning

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[4]This was a loose coalition of progressive educators and social reformers who believed that wholesome, somewhat structured play was healthful and educational for all children, with particular benefits for children of the poor or of recent immigrants. The movement drew on a matrix of values--for example, access to health and education services for all, and the importance of women's roles in "civilized" public life--that also appeared in the women's suffrage, public health, and temperance movements of the same era.

themselves to the play spirit, might do so as well. (Glassberg 61)

Although some pageants were completely allegorical or abstract in nature, most tended to incorporate some reference to history, often local history. For the purposes of this survey, I will focus on how the Civil War was presented within the context of pageantry. As with GAR representations of the Civil War, the pageant movement often illustrated the poignant, the personal, and the non-violent aspects of the war. For instance, the Civil War segment of a 1911 pageant staged in Thetford, Vermont featured scenes of soldiers departing for war to the strains of "Battle Hymn of the Republic," followed by depictions of the townspeople gathering to hear the news from the front, the reading of a dispatch listing the names of the town's casualties after Gettysburg, and a message announcing the end of the war. The soldiers were portrayed by local GAR members, who "returned" to the town at the end of the performance, some of them pretending to be wounded. Like most pageants, the Thetford event presented Americans with images of a bloodless and heroic kind of war. Interestingly, battles from earlier conflicts (particularly the Revolution) were often depicted in pageants; it was only the Civil War, perhaps still too close in time, too traumatic, or too freighted with unresolved questions, that tended to be framed in more sentimental and personal terms.

The Thetford performance also emphasized a smooth (if largely illusory) continuity between one era and the next. At least in its early phase, pageantry attempted to reconcile the growing sense of discontinuity felt by many Americans with their hopeful belief that social and technological change was inevitably for the better. Thus the achievements of ethnic groups, when they were included in pageants, tended to be celebrated not for themselves but for their contributions to society. When a group of black Civil War veterans in Springfield, Massachusetts reenacted the assault on Fort Wagner during the city's 1908 Fourth of July parade, the local newspaper lauded it as a display of harmony in the blending of "races and race-ideals" (Glassberg 63).

The experience and aftermath of World War I significantly challenged this sense of optimism. Pageants had tended to portray continuity and progress at a community level, hinting at larger episodes of history through intimate local tableaux. With America's entry into the war, pageantry began to focus on the idea of national rather than community cohesion. Before the war, dissent could be accommodated through the inclusion of variant voices as part of the march of progress. After 1915, there was much less tolerance for dissent in any form.[5] A typical 1918 Illinois pageant included a section on "Children of the

[5]In a recent piece, David Glassberg and J. Michael Moore examine evidence that between the two world wars, there was an unexpected range of public opinions on American foreign and military policy, and how that tolerance for dissent hardened, during World War II and

Civil War," with a scene showing a southern child being forced to kiss the Union flag and renounce the Confederacy (Glassberg 221).

Concurrent with pressure from some areas of society for greater solidarity, oppositional voices were beginning to make themselves more clearly heard. In the 1920s, for instance, "Lost Cause" imagery became much more prevalent in pageants in the south, emphasizing sectional rather than national consciousness (251ff), perhaps in reaction against the overall tendency to demonstrate a united America.

The increasing complexity of global politics, the trauma of a foreign war with an unclear cause, and the continued rapid pace of change in all sectors of American life led, as they have in our own era, to uncertainty about how to present that ideally unified nation in public performance. These uncertainties contributed to the increasing emphasis on American unity in historical pageants, but they also led to many of the factors which ultimately undermined pageantry's popularity. The pageant, with its stately progression of scenes and optimistic integration of disparate elements, was no longer an apt medium for American cultural expression; moving pictures were more vivid exemplars of the newer, speedier, reproducible America. By World War II, pageants had virtually faded from the scene. It was no longer possible to imagine or depict the simple, linear movement toward a better world that had provided pageantry's underlying structure.

Although there are important differences between them,[6] early pageantry and contemporary reenactment offer many intriguing points of relationship. Pageantry's emphasis on play and performance as potential levellers of social antagonisms has an analog in reenactment's playful aspects, and in the spirit that keeps reenactors insisting "It's just a hobby" and "We're here to have fun." Both forms privilege direct connections with the past through locality or lineage (many pageants included Civil War veterans portraying their younger selves, or cast direct descendants of local notables in the roles of their ancestors). In both pageantry and reenacting, as with most instances of "vernacular" commemoration, the tendency is to make larger events explicable by framing them in personal terms, ideally giving participants and spectators a way to experience a sense of

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the subsequent Cold War, into increasingly polarized positions on American military policy. ("Patriotism in Orange: The memory of World War I in a Massachusetts town" in John Bodnar, ed., Bonds of affection: Americans define their patriotism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996)

[6]Pageants depicted a range of eras and styles, where reenacting focuses intently on a single period. As well, pageantry arose largely from women's increased consciousness and expression of their social roles, where reenactment is primarily a masculine pursuit. It is, however, fascinating to speculate that it is precisely the increasingly public role of women which has helped to prompt male reenactors' attempt to return to an idealized time of simpler, male-dominated gender relationships. This idea will be pursued in Chapter VI.

involvement in the significant stories of the culture.

Pageantry, like reenacting, had to contend with the tension between education and entertainment. Just as reenactors sometimes worry that the public is too easily seduced by the noise and excitement of mock battles, prominent pageant-maker Percy MacKaye recognized that depictions of war had a carnivalesque attraction that drew spectators' attention away from the more pedagogic aspects of a piece. Military scenes recreated not only "collective service, but color and rhythm" (Glassberg 208), he wrote; these scenes, so much more impressive and stirring than most people's ordinary lives, inevitably dominated the audience's imaginations just as reenacted battles today capture the public's attention in a way that carefully-prepared and presented "living history" presentations do not seem to do. MacKaye argued for the creation of more rousing symbols of peace to counter the dramatic seductiveness of war; some modern reenactors lament the situation but admit that that same seductiveness acts on many among their ranks as well, making it difficult if not impossible to counter.

If motion picture technology played a role in the decline and fall of pageantry, it has played a strikingly symmetrical role in filling the ranks of Civil War reenactors. Many "veteran" reenactors have noted how recruitment surges after successful mass-media presentations of the war, and many newer recruits told me how "Glory," "Gettysburg," or Ken Burn's television history were initially responsible for their seeking out a performative site on which they could pursue their interest in the Civil War more subjectively. It is possible to see in this progression the complex motion of cultural process, in which individual strands are woven through the whole from differing directions and in different patterns. Apprehension over the pace of technological advance was partially responsible for the pageant movement's depictions of manageable change and simpler times; those depictions were eventually abandoned, largely because other, more technologically-sophisticated forms of entertainment had emerged. Yet to a subsequent generation, for whom movies and television are no longer new or unsettling, the experience of seeing the Civil War in film can prompt a desire for a more tangible experience than film can provide. Another layer is added when one considers that with the now-standard practice among filmmakers of using reenactors as "extras" in Civil War movies, reenactors to some extent influence the films that they and their fellow "buffs" will view. If, as Turner has theorized, "all the genres [of cultural performance] have to circle...around the earth of the social drama, and some, like satellites, may exert tidal effects on its inner structure" (1982: 79), those same genres clearly influence one another as well.

During my fieldwork I encountered two instances of contemporary historical pageants. I have briefly described the first, an anniversary celebration at a Massachusetts

church, in Chapter I. The second pageant, billed by the reenactors who created it as a "candlelight tour," consisted of more than a dozen staged scenarios scattered throughout the grounds of a historical village in New York state. Like the church pageant, the scenes emphasized the personal and the poignant over the grandiose (the church pageant treated the Boston Tea Party by showing ladies of the congregation discussing it at an actual tea party, while the candlelight tour emphasized the aftermath of battles and struggles rather than the actual events).

However, both events included representations of dissent and uncertainty almost as a matter of course, perhaps reflecting an era when it is much more difficult to feel absolute certainty about social and political circumstances. As previously noted, children in the church's pageant paraded the aisles with temperance signs in one scene, and Vietnam war protests were faithfully recreated; at the historical village, grass-roots doubts about and opposition to the Civil War were shown in several scenarios, leaving the somewhat confused spectators with more of an anti-war message than they had obviously expected to see. The pageant form itself is now to some extent a historical re-creation; however, even when that form is revived in a largely nostalgic setting, it seems clear from the foregoing examples that pageantry, like other forms of cultural performance, cannot help but respond to contemporary circumstances.

The black powder connection

In his book on the living history movement, Jay Anderson (1984) traces the roots of the phenomenon to the first use of costumed folk performers at the Skansen Museum in Sweden in 1898 (19). As has been seen from the foregoing section, the urge to reenact significant episodes from history clearly pre-dates the Skansen experiment, and in fact has its roots deep in the human past, from whatever moment someone first tried to explain, relive, or rehearse an experience performatively. Anderson does, however, pinpoint with more accuracy one of the important origins of the contemporary form of Civil War reenactment: the black-powder rifle movement which became organized in the 1930s.

During this time, events from the Civil War continued to be recreated, although as we have seen the actual veterans of the war were too old by this time to be more than ceremonial participants.[7] Linenthal points out that "[d]uring the 1950s elements of a

[7]In 1935 a reenactment of the battle of Chancellorsville was staged on the Fredericksburg, Virginia battlefield, using cadets from the Virginia Military Institute and members of the U.S. Marines and cavalry as soldiers. In 1937, continuing the 75th anniversary cycle of

distinct Civil War subculture took shape in America" (97). This development was prefigured by the formation of the first Civil War roundtable, or discussion group, in Chicago in 1940. And Kammen (1992) has pointed to the evolution of a "heritage phenomenon" (535) in the years following World War II, as Americans increasingly turned to the past for education, justification, and amusement.[8]

My own reenactor unit, the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, was formed[9] during this period, for the commemoration of the 350th anniversary of Northampton, Massachusetts in 1954. The unit's founder and colonel, a World War II veteran who wished to combine his interest in Civil War history with his desire to be a part of the anniversary celebrations, rented Civil War surplus uniforms from a costume supply company and borrowed "period" rifles from the Springfield Armory, which had supplied many of the weapons for the Union during the war and which was still a functioning federal armory at that time.

The "Civil War subculture" to which Linenthal refers was made up of members of Civil War "roundtables" (or discussion groups), collectors, board-game afficianados, and general "buffs,"[10] or anyone with an intense and independent interest in the war. Another, somewhat earlier element of this subculture was drawn to the story of the war primarily through an interest in weaponry. The National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association, dedicated to making and firing black-powder weapons, was organized in Ohio in 1931, and eventually broke into three distinct sub-groups. The core group remained true to its original mandate and continues to be an active organization today. A second faction eventually formed the nucleus of the "buckskinner" movement, a group of living historians fascinated by the lore and history of the nineteenth century hunters, trackers, and guides known as "mountain men."

A third wing of the NMLRA began to pursue a specific interest in the Civil War.

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commemoration, there was a two-week observance of the battle of Antietam at Hagerstown, Maryland (Kammen 457), followed the next year by The Last Reunion of the Blue and the Gray at Gettysburg (Linenthal 96).

[8]Radway has suggested that the American middle class tends to place a high value on the acquisiton of knowledge, leading to a preference for leisure activities which can be sanctioned as educational.

[9]More accurately, it was reactivated; although not all reenactor units follow this official route, many have requested and been granted permission to use the unit designations of what were, of course, "real" military organizations. The 10th Mass. was chartered by the Massachusetts Adjutant General as "heritage unit" of the 104th Infantry, 26th Yankee Divison.

[10]The term "buff" originated with fire-watching enthusiasts in New York, and refers to the buff-colored uniform worn by volunteer firemen. I find the association intriguing, in view of the fact that volunteer firefighting was one of the activities most frequently listed by my respondents among their non-reenactment interests.

Like the buckskinners, these hobbyists wished to add greater experiential depth to their recreational use of historical weapons. In 1950 a splinter group from the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association formed the North-South Skirmish Association (N-SSA), which also remains an active group. To a large extent the N-SSA provided the foundation on which contemporary reenacting has been constructed.

Because of this close relationship and the many surface similarities between skirmishers and reenactors, a closer look at the activities of the North-South Skirmish Association is warranted here. The N-SSA is a national group whose individual members are organized into "teams," each of which takes the designation and uniform of a Civil War unit and participates in regional and national matches. The use of the word "team" is significant. Skirmishers regard their hobby primarily as a sport, not as a performance, reenactment, or historical presentation (although the public is welcome at N-SSA events). Their gatherings are centered around competitive shooting, using Civil War era muzzle-loaders, pistols, and artillery pieces. Although the organization is largely made up of men, women (usually wives) also attend and often take part in competitions for Civil War era clothing; in 1991 the organization also voted to allow women to compete on the shooting range.

Superficially, reenactors and skirmishers seem quite similar. Both groups are motivated by a love of Civil War history; both are predominantly white, male, and conservative. Both value the opportunity to "get away from the grind of today's workaday world," as an N-SSA member told me. "The escape is the greatest part of it. It's the most wonderfully relaxing thing I can do." A powerful experience of camaraderie, along with the sense of preserving and presenting history, are also common to both activities.

However, the precise nature of that presentation shows the essential differences between the two. At the heart of skirmishing is competition, a particularly literal type of performance. Schechner (1988) calls this kind of performance an "actual," since the primary emphasis is on the actual accomplishment of some deed--for example, the breaking of a row of clay pigeons in the shortest possible time. Even for the "civilians" of the N-SSA, competition, not performance, is the primary goal. Rather than seeking to surround themselves as completely as possible by the recreated past, skirmishers focus on quantitatively measured achievements taking place in the present. Strictly speaking, skirmishers <u>are</u> reenactors (despite their disclaimers to the contrary), but they do not share the more highly-developed performative sense common among the reenactor population which was my own focus, nor is immersion in a wholly separate and subjunctive world their main objective. This more literal bent is perhaps mirrored in their organizational structure, which features a unified and tightly-run hierarchy in place of the often-anarchistic

conglomeration of independent troupes which constitutes the reenactment community.[11]

The Civil War centennial

The N-SSA was established in the decade before the centennial of the Civil War, and as Anderson points out, it quickly became clear that "North-South Skirmish Assocation members constituted the only organized body capable of accurately simulating Civil War military life in camp and on the battlefield" (139). What had begun as a private hobby combining recreational shooting with historical research became something quite different when its members were "called upon to perform for the nation." This was the true genesis of Civil War reenacting in its current form.

It is crucial to note the very brief gap between the loss of the last Civil War veterans and the appearance of the first modern reenactors. There were still a few thousand veterans living in the 1940s, although their ranks were thinning quickly.[12] The black-powder enthusiasts and Civil War buffs of the 1950s, then, belonged to a generation that had grown up with the ancient warriors as a physical presence on the commemorative landscape. A sense of that tangible connection--and an awareness of its impending loss--seemed to motivate many who sought to step into the shoes of the vanishing heroes.

Linenthal addresses this desire for continuity in his study of Americans' relationship to their sacred battlegrounds:

> From the earliest reunions at Gettysburg through the 1938 Reunion--the Last Reunion of the Blue and the Gray--visitors could convince themselves that they were witnessing the essence of the battle. Not only were they on the field at the exact time of day that the battle had been fought, but they were also in the presence of those who had been the combatants. The palpable nostalgia present in the early reunions grew more desperate as the veterans became fewer in number and these last links to the battle passed away. It was as if the death of these veterans signaled the death of a heroic past--a past that many believed the nation dare not forget. Consequently, certain modes of veneration that initially were commemorative in nature became primary strategies for reviving the past. Battle reenactment was one such strategy. (101)

Moreover, it was a strategy employed not by the official "guardians of tradition"--museums, historical commissions, the National Park Service--but by amateur historians expressing a personal dedication to America's heroic past. Although the federal Civil War Centennial Commission, created in 1957, urged a commemorative style stressing solemnity and unity, its first executive director, Karl Betts, acknowledged in 1961 the popularity of

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[11]In 1989 (Cullen 186) *Travel Holiday* magazine estimated the number of Civil War reenactors in the U.S. at about 22,000, while the N-SSA's membership is currently 3,700.
[12]The last known Federal soldier died in 1957, the last surviving Confederate in 1959. A particularly ancient former slave who had worked for those on both sides of the conflict lived until 1971 (Logue 142).

the alternative amateur form:

> We have done a great deal to discourage re-enactments on many, many occasions. But the local people want to do it, and there is very little you can do to prevent that. The urge to stage battles [has] reached such proportions that, in the South, for example, they are commemorating their defeats as well as their victories. (Anderson 141)

At first the centennial commission and the National Park Service sought to accommodate the popular demand for "sham battles." A large-scale reenactment of the first battle of Manassas was staged on July 22, 1961, in front of a crowd of 35,000. About 3,000 reenactors, half from the N-SSA and half from the National Guard, "fought" in the Virginia heat. "It was a hundred and seven degrees," a veteran reenactor told me, "and I came down with heat stroke, which got me a free trip to the Fort Myers dispensary."

The event was a popular success, but the organizers were disturbed by what they felt to be inadequate safety standards, which had led to several injuries. Historian Allan Nevins, who replaced Karl Betts as head of the centennial commission in 1962, described reenactments in general as "trashily theatrical" (Bodnar 214). For the remainder of the centennial the commission reluctantly tolerated battle reenactments when they occurred, although the National Park Service closed its battlefields to the activity after the Manassas event, a policy that remains in force.[13]

Most of the significant events of the Civil War were reenacted during its centennial, beginning with the Harper's Ferry Raid in 1959, and Lincoln's first inaugural and the bombardment of Fort Sumter in March 1961. In 1962 the clash between the ironclads Merrimac and Monitor was reenacted twenty-two times near Norfolk, Virginia. The first battle of Winchester was portrayed with reactivated units of the Stonewall Brigade. These units and others retraced Stonewall Jackson's routes through Virginia in the spring of 1962, and in June of that year cavalrymen from the North-South Skirmish Assocation recreated J.E.B. Stewart's fabled "ride around McClellan" in northern Virginia. July 1963 saw the hundredth anniversary commemoration at Gettysburg, at which 40,000 spectators watched as five hundred Confederate reenactors, drawn mostly from the ranks of the North-South Skirmish Association, crossed the field where Pickett's Charge had taken place accompanied by a recorded soundtrack of music and battle noises. Joining with Union reenactors for a "Reunion at the High Water Mark," they marched to the place where the two sides had met in July 1863, saluted the monument there, and sang the national

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[13]Reenactors may take part in some kinds of activities on NPS sites, but "Battle reenactments and/or demonstrations of battle tactics that involve firing at opposing lines, the taking of casualties, or any other form of simulated warfare are absolutely prohibited in all areas administered by the National Park Service" (from regulation "NPS-6," quoted in Hadden, 137).

anthem (Linenthal 99). On this most sacred of battlefields, the guardians of tradition managed to present a unified agenda, something they would not be able to do as successfully twenty-five years later.

In November 1963 the presentation of the Gettysburg Address was recreated. John Kennedy, a great devotee of "sham battles," had been invited to attend, but chose to go to Dallas instead, thus providing the nation with another martyred president.[14] Reenactments continued into 1965, with Lincoln's second inaugural in March (Henry Fonda portrayed Lincoln, as he had in the 1939 film "Young Mr. Lincoln") and finally the tiny, post-climactic battle of Palmito Hill, Texas, in May. The centennial was over.

Occasional tension between the "official" and "vernacular" celebration was not the only problem that arose during the period. Other oppositional voices occasionally made themselves heard over the gunshots, as at Gettysburg when several speakers mentioned that in many ways the nation had not yet redeemed the sacrifices and promises made during the Civil War (Linenthal 99). And although the official ceremonies marking the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation avoided the increasingly volatile issue of civil rights, an alternate ceremony staged by African-Americans in Springfield, Illinois was much more openly critical of the status quo (Bodnar 210).

In the south, the Civil War centennial generated immense interest, with commemoration there tending to have a regional character that communicated, sometimes ambiguously, the continuation of a strong sectional consciousness very different from that of the rest of the nation. Although opposition to official versions of history was not as vocal during the Civil War centennial as it became during the American Bicentennial ten years later, the surface of American patriotism was not as seamless as the centennial commission had hoped to show. It was clear that public commemoration of these events continued to expose serious and unresolved questions.

In the aftermath of the Civil War centennial, many historians and others perceived reenactment as merely an excuse to go camping, get drunk, and shoot off black powder. Aware of the validity of some of these criticisms, some within the reenactment community began to raise their voices about safety and about the impression they were making on the public. Many centennial-era reenactors did not continue after 1965, but many did, leaving a scattered and unregulated collection of units to decide how to present itself to the general public.

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[14]R. Lee Hadden, noting this fact in his how-to handbook on reenacting, hints that had Kennedy pursued his taste for reenactment rather than his need to mend political fences in Texas, he would have escaped assassination. The comment strikes me as the kind of "close encounter with history" that reenactors eagerly seek out.

The Bicentennial and beyond

The celebration of the American bicentennial afforded an opportunity for experienced reenactors to hone their skills and interpretations. The Brigade of the American Revolution, formed by reenactors in the 1960s, led the way in promoting greater historical accuracy in weapons, accoutrements, tactics, and overall presentation (Anderson 146). There was and continues to be considerable cross-over in membership between Revolutionary and Civil War era reenactors, and although the Revolution took precedent during the bicentennial years, after the commemoration of the Yorktown surrender in 1981 Civil War reenactment became once again the largest aspect of the military living history phenomenon.

The experience of one veteran reenactor illustrates how many have progressed through "the hobby."[15] Phil Chetwynd was looking for a hobby in the early 1970s, hoping to find a recreational way to pursue his lifelong interest in the Civil War and particularly in Abraham Lincoln. Unable to locate any nearby Civil War reenactment units, he accepted an invitation to join a Revolutionary War group run by his brother. He "fought" the whole cycle of the bicentennial reenactments with this group, concluding with the Yorktown event, which he found very poignant on two different levels:

> When we did this at Yorktown, for a lot of these guys, this was goingto be the last thing they did,because they weren't going to stay in reenacting... So as emotional as it was originally [in 1781], this was also emotional, because as the British marched through the two ranks of troops, we all understood that this was really, you know, we're not going to see each other that much anymore. So it was, you know, we've been serving in the field with these guys for four or five years now... It was like, you know, a lot of bonding, a lot of good friends... So in a lot of respects it was just as emotional as the original surrender must have been.

Phil was one of the reenactors who did not quit after the bicentennial, although "unit politics" eventually prompted him to leave his Revolutionary War unit and renew his search for a Civil War group. Using his contacts in "the hobby," he located a unit in Maine, of which he soon became president.

Along with his new administrative role and his continued participation as a soldier, however, he began to develop a new characterization--that of his longtime hero, Abraham

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[15]Although reenactors themselves often admit that their activity is much more than just a hobby, the term "the hobby" is used by most. To me the phrase is significant and succinctly descriptive. The use of the word "hobby" seems to signal the subjunctivity that permeates reenactment and distinguishes it from "real life." The addition of the definite article, however, seems to indicate the importance of this activity in its adherents' lives. The dual message contained in this wording encapsulates the mood of extremely serious play.

Lincoln. In the interests of making a better nineteenth-century impression, he already wore a partial beard, as Lincoln did; when he lost a considerable amount of weight for health reasons, people around him began remarking how much he resembled Lincoln.

> And it clicked in my brain, because here I am, you know, always read about him, and that interest I had since I was a little kid, and I said, yeah, I know all this stuff about Lincoln, I mean, I don't know everything, but what I don't know I can do more research [about]... So I said yeah, that's an idea! And it just kind of clicked in my mind.

Phil was making a progression that many long-time reenactors experience, from a generic impression to a "first-person" role. (These distinctions will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.) He continued to hone his portrayal of Lincoln as an adjunct to his soldier role, until eventually it became the main focus of his reenactment activity. As he says,

> The years that I spent in reenacting, doing Lincoln with the Civil War group, were a training ground for me. That's when I developed, I developed my thing over those years... I knew the information, but to make the transformation from just having the information and becoming Lincoln, acting, those years I spent doing it in reenactments were kind of like a training ground, gave me a chance to develop it.

Like many veteran reenactors, Phil has experienced different aspects of "the hobby," including, in his case, different time periods, portrayals, and levels of participation. His case is unusual (although not unique) in that his reenacting has now evolved into a business: he portrays Lincoln professionally for audiences at schools, encampments, social and historical events, and has even recently moved to Washington, D.C. to try to establish himself as a full-time Lincoln presenter there.

My own unit, the 10th Massachusetts, also experienced a rejuvenation during the bicentennial years. Its debut in 1954 had been a one-time affair, but its colonel felt the experience had been successful enough to warrant a similar performance in celebration of the bicentennial. He assembled a corps of "recruits" drawn by a newspaper advertisement worded in nineteenth-century style:

> WHO FOR THE GRAND OLD 10TH?
> The 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment is now accepting recruits. Volunteers 18 years of age and older, upon being sworn, will be equipped with an 1853 Enfield rifle and proper accoutrements... Upon giving their oath all may look forward to a very favorable period of service.

The same theatrical costume company provided the uniforms, although the unit history states that "it soon became apparent that time and moths had not been kind to their stock." After the event a nucleus of about a dozen recruits expressed interest in forming the unit on a permanent basis. A local VFW post provided financial and logistical sponsorship, enabling the group to outfit itself and establishing a close tie (which remains) between the

10th Mass. and the veterans' community in and around Northampton.

Almost immediately after the bicentennial, the reenactor community entered into a new cycle of commemorative activity with the 125th anniversary of the Civil War.[16] The 1986 reenactment at Manassas, described as the first "mega-event" (Hadden 5), attracted 6,000 reenactors; the 1988 event in Gettysburg featured more than 10,000, and became a recurring element in reenactor lore. As Hadden reports and a reading of the reenactor magazine Camp Chase Gazette from the period confirms, the later events of the 125th celebrations were hampered by "the twin demons of profit and liability" (Hadden 5). The immense costs and logistical difficulties of staging an event with many thousands of participants have continued to be thorny issues for sponsors.

The tensions between the official and the vernacular continue to manifest themselves around reenactments, as well, although as reenactors have continued to hone their skills, their earlier reputation as beer-drinking good old boys has waned and museum and other heritage professionals have begun to make greater use of their skills.[17] At 125th Gettysburg, though, those tensions persisted. The reenactment of the battle took place on private land on June 24-26, while the NPS presented its own program on the battle anniversary itself during the first week of July. However, the many reenactors in attendance during the NPS activities decided to hold their own impromptu commemoration of Pickett's Charge on the actual site, conflicting with the NPS's ceremony at the peace memorial and drawing off about three thousand spectators from the official event (Linenthal 103). Between eight hundred and a thousand reenactors staged a reunion at the wall on Cemetery Ridge, shaking hands as the original veterans had done at their own reunions.

Despite the growing sense of "professionalism" among many reenactors, the activity continues to be characterized by the kind of individuality displayed in the alternative Gettysburg ceremony in 1988. As noted above, the Civil War reenactment community differs from groups like the National Muzzle Loading Association or North-South Skirmish

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[16]By common consent among most of the reenactor "umbrella" organizations now involved in staging large-scale events, the notable battles of the war are now being presented in five-year cycles. In 1996 I participated in "135th First Manassas," for example; Shiloh and Antietam will be "national" events in 1997. The exception is Gettysburg, which is generally a feature of every reenacting season.

[17]As noted above, movie producers, too, have found reenactors eager to exchange their knowledge for a chance to appear on film. During the 1980s several Civil War movies and television mini-series, notably "The Blue and the Gray," "North and South" and "Glory," used reenactors as extras. "Gettysburg," an iconic film for most reenactors, utilized more than five thousand reenactors for its battle scenes, sparked a controversy within the community about the role of amateurs in profit-making ventures, and led to the formation of an extraordinary, long-term encampment on the site of the filming (Hadden 5-6, Camp Chase Gazette 1992-93).

Association by virtue of its lack of any central structure of authority. Although there have occasionally been voices calling for some such structure for purposes of organization or enforcement of standards of historical accuracy, the suggestions are inevitably defeated by the highly independent nature of most units and individuals involved in the activity. The entire endeavor tends to be somewhat "oppositional" in character, a trait which will be examined more closely in Chapter IV.

The Camp Chase Gazette, founded in Ohio by reenactor Bill Keitz in 1972, remains the closest thing to a central clearing-house of opinions and information for Civil War reenactors, although computer technology (ironically representative of the fast-paced 20th century world most reenactors seek to escape) is quickly coming to provide a kind of "virtual campfire" around which reenactors can communicate outside of encampments. As well, the formation of brigade or battalion structures, begun in the early 1970s among groups who wished to portray larger-scale military maneuvers and tactics than could be accomplished with single units, has become widespread. Increasingly, individual units are aligning themselves with permanent command structures whose combined expertise allows for more complex recreations of battles and camp life. As organizers become ever more experienced at staging "mega-events" involving thousands of reenactors, they rely more and more upon the brigades and battalions to provide oversight of sometimes extremely large military components. The study of Civil War reenactment has afforded an opportunity to observe the negotiation that attends the staging of extended performances by groups and individuals who wish to retain a high degree of control and identity within the larger event.

Since 1865, then, there has never been a significant length of time when the Civil War was not being reenacted through some form of vernacular cultural performance in the U.S. Most of these performances have had a dual public/private nature, satisfying needs within the communities which produced them as well as presenting historical events to the wider world. In the case of Civil War veterans' groups, reunions, post meetings, and nostalgic "campfires" offered settings which "fostered common bonds and offered a refuge from the outside world" (Logue 119). Reinforced by the bonding which took place within these largely-private settings, veterans also sought to explain their version of the Civil War to the public, through commemorative, educational, and political activities. The pageant movement emphasized pedagogy as well as spectacle, often pursuing assimilationist social goals aimed toward participants while attempting to unite the larger community through depictions of the "melting pot" ideal. And contemporary Civil War reenactment, like its forebears, offers both community and commemoration, a chance to pursue personal

satisfactions while at the same time making public statements about the meaning of a highly-significant social drama.

Each presentation of the Civil War discussed above has constituted a response to contemporary circumstances at least as much as it has been a re-creation of historical events. Veterans used depictions of the past in an attempt to resist the encroachments of advanced capitalism on the society they had been born into and had fought to preserve. Pageant organizers sought to reconcile the need for a collective patriotic narrative with the presence of many new elements in American social and cultural life. Modern-day reenactors, born into an era that simultaneously seems to require a continuation of many male and military roles and to question the very nature of those roles, seek for an experience of more clearly-defined individual and national identities.

These are simplistic explanations of the motives of these groups, of course, and a greater range of motivations among contemporary Civil War reenactors will be examined in forthcoming chapters. For the purposes of this historical overview, it is sufficient to note that as Robert Penn Warren contended, the "felt" history of the Civil War does continue to live in the national imagination, prompting Americans and others to seek privately and express publicly their particular vision of its multi-faceted reality.

Chapter III

What I did in the war: An observer-participant among Civil War reenactors

In action of consequence there is no frontier between appearing and being.

Richard G. Mitchell, Jr.

The questions "who am I?" and "who or what do I want to be?" recur for human beings at all phases of life. Issues of identity and aspiration underlie perhaps the majority of human transactions, certainly those which fall under the heading of "cultural performance." This chapter will reflect on the intersection and expression of those issues as I encountered them in my pursuit of both Civil War reenactment and ethnography.

Who am I? Who do I want to be?

When I began to plan my graduate study in early 1995, my first decision was that I would portray a field musician rather than a soldier or a "lady." This choice was prompted by several considerations. From the perspective of my work as a researcher, I wished to be as close to the center of the "action" as possible at reenactments, and despite some reenactors' preference for the "living history" aspect of the Civil War (generally understood as the less overtly martial), military maneuvers are indisputably the performative center of most reenactor events.

As well, during my earlier experience with reenactors, I had been struck by the way reenactors privileged sensory data--sound, taste, smell, sight--in the creation of their encampments. Music, an important part of the atmosphere prized by reenactors, was a skill I already possessed. Aside from providing a niche for me, I hoped it would give me some insight into the non-factual materials from which reenactors compose their version of historical reality. My musical skill also allowed me to bring something useful with me into

the reenactment community, so that I would not be arriving empty-handed and simply seeking instruction. This was a personal preference which happened to overlap productively with my emerging understanding of how individual reenactors tend to create roles for themselves by combining elements that satisfy them personally while contributing something to the larger setting.

Finally, in "real" life as well as its reenacted version, I am not personally drawn to traditional configurations of women's roles as wife, mother, ornament, caregiver. I find contemporary conventions of female social and physical presentation to be as unappealing as I was certain I would find hoop skirts and bonnets to be. I wished to present myself as a reenactor in a way that would be faithful to my everyday persona.

This instinctive preference not only mirrored the process by which most reenactors construct their Civil War identities, but also touched on important questions of gender-based identity which would later illuminate for me some of the negotiation of everyday issues that sometimes takes place through reenactment. Even within the male-dominated activity of reenactment, part of the appeal of which seemed to be the chance to portray a time of more clearly delineated gender roles, it seemed that the desire for absolute definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity" did not preclude a great deal of contemplation about what those categories actually meant. I decided to enter the field, then, acting as a woman disguised in male clothing, an already-double role that came quite close to approximating my "real life" persona, and that allowed me to experience first-hand some of the ways in which reenactors use their weekend performances in order to express and rehearse their "real" selves.

Enlisting in the 10th Mass.

A contact from my undergraduate research provided the names of the groups with field music geographically nearest to my home. Purely on the basis of proximity (the others were several hours away) I chose the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, based in Florence, MA. In response to my query, the captain invited me to attend a unit meeting at the group's headquarters in the basement of the Florence VFW hall. I followed my initial meeting with a written request to join the unit, explaining my project and its parameters. I began attending weekly rehearsals of the fife and drum corps at the end of March and was officially accepted as a member of the 10th Mass. in June of 1995.

The unit and I were equally cursory in our choices to be associated with one another. I needed a music section that was close to home; the 10th Mass., as I later came to realize, was a marginal member of the larger reenacting community, and so tended to have difficulty attracting and retaining active members. I offered them a reliable and

competent presence as a musician for two seasons; in return they offered me a place to begin my research. In general this unstated reciprocal agreement remained viable, although my eventual desire to move more fully into mainstream reenacting did somewhat strain our initial uncritical acceptance of one another.

I attended many of the 10th Mass.'s monthly business meetings between March 1995 and December 1996. Reenactor units approach this administrative aspect of their hobby in different ways. Some minimize meeting time, or combine it with "rehearsals" such as drills or educational programs. Many units hold an annual meeting or one major organizational meeting per year (usually during the winter) to choose a schedule of events for the following season and settle financial and other matters. Other groups, like the 10th Mass., hold regular monthly meetings. The 10th Mass. incorporated ritual elements such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, singing a hymn, and saying a prayer.

It was clear from my first attendance at 10th Mass. meeting that there were two competing factions within the unit. The dominant, more long-standing part of the group preferred commemorative functions (primarily parades) to reenactments. In this they were reflecting the original character of the group, which had been reactivated in 1954, well before contemporary reenacting had evolved into its present form (as seen in the preceding chapter). The unit's now-inactive but still influential leader, a World War II combat veteran, had no personal taste for "playing war," and conceived of the reenacted 10th Mass. as a commemorative, educational, and representational group, not a group of performers seeking a truly "authentic" experience of Civil War life. In addition, the group was affiliated with the Florence VFW, an alliance of considerable emotional importance for the more long-standing 10th Mass. members, and of virtually no significance for the newer recruits, most of whom were not military veterans.

The VFW required the unit's presence at three parades each year: Memorial Day, Veterans Day, and the annual VFW convention. All of the reenactor units I encountered participated in Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies; reenactors see themselves as embodying a unique and important aspect of their community history, and take particular pride in associating themselves with occasions honoring "their" unit or Civil War memories in general. However, non-Civil War commemorations (such as the VFW convention), whether undertaken for reasons of tradition, financial gain, or sense of obligation to the VFW, formed a large part of the 10th Mass.'s activities, something which was a constant cause of friction between the older* and newer members.

* My use of the term "older" is intended to convey those of longer terms of membership in the group, not necessarily those of greater chronological age; some of the most long-standing members of the unit were the teenagers in the music section.

These newer members tended to have been attracted to the unit by the appeal of the recreational, encampment-centered aspects of reenacting which had developed into their present form during the 1980s and 90s. A number of these newer members had left the 10th Mass. in 1993 to start their own unit, and a similar faction was developing by the time I joined in 1995, composed of a small group frustrated by the majority's lack of interest in extending the unit's activities. The music section, to which I belonged, was situated somewhere between the two factions. It was the most consistently active component of the unit yet tended to remain outside the official debate over the group's character. Over the course of my two seasons with the 10th Mass., the tension between the two factions developed from discussion to confrontation, and concluded with the newer members resigning in order to pursue their reenactment-oriented interests independently or with other units.

Issues of class were evident in this dispute, which tended to expose fundamental differences between white- and blue-collar members of the group. One particularly vocal member of the "parade" faction frequently commented, with a combination of deference and resentment, on the differences in financial and educational status between the older and newer members. A frequent criticism of the new, reenactment-oriented recruits was that their approach to reenacting was overly dependent on historical knowledge, and not sufficiently attentive to the extremely strong affective bond the older members felt for the group (and particularly for the memories of its own "good old days").

The use of debate over historical presentation to express underlying disagreements among reenactors will be discussed in Chapter V. I will merely note here that the conflict within the 10th Mass., as well as being a clear instance of reenactors expressing social tension (in this case, over class distinctions) through a focus on historical issues, also seemed to provide a microcosmic version of reenactment's own role within American culture. Reenactors have often been criticized and derided for what is perceived as an insular, light-hearted, largely emotional depiction of the Civil War. Within the reenactor community, the 10th Mass. was often viewed in exactly that light:
clownish, overly-emotional, overly-defensive. Their attempts to be accepted on their own terms within the reenactor culture are largely analogous (and as largely unsuccessful) as the efforts of reenactors in general to be taken seriously for their activities.

It seemed to me that the dominant faction of the 10th Mass., conspicuous in its lack of interest in conforming to mainstream standards of behavior, troubled the reenacting community at large because it so flagrantly favored the social aspect of reenacting that most units choose to minimize during public hours. Still stung by ongoing public perception of their hobby as nothing more than an excuse for a bunch of middle-aged men to get

together, drink beer, play soldier, and have a good time, many reenactors are careful to describe "the hobby" as primarily educational or commemorative, and to separate the personal satisfactions of reenactment from its more public functions.[1]

A reenactor who calls himself Jonah Begone, fond of puncturing reenactment's pretensions in the pages of the Camp Chase Gazette, offered this comment on the issue of justification:

> In my short career as a reenactor, I've heard various explanations quoted by my Living History brethren...as to why they do it--dress up and play war on the weekends, that is. I've read columns in unit newsletters and local papers that somehow ties [sic] reenacting to the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights, a love of patriotism, a love of Ronald Reagan, the spirit of freedom manifested by the people in Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, China, and Romania, a hatred for firearms control, the continuing battle against greed and hypocrisy as exemplified by Zsa Zsa Gabor, Donald Trump or Jim and Tammy Bakker, and the self-appointed duty to provide a factual education in Real History to the public, the National Park visitors or anyone else who'll listen. (Camp Chase Gazette 17:6, 27)

"All told," he concludes, "you can hear less flatulent rhetoric in Presidential campaigns!" Jonah goes on to detail his own reasons for reenacting, which are unabashedly similar to those expressed by the "old" 10th Mass.:

> I get to frequently utilize my carefully-developed distrust of authority by making fun of officers... I like to make noise, but if I fire black powder blanks at work, I'll be the one getting fired. I can indulge myself at events... I like scuffing up the wooden floors of historic homes with the heel plates on my brogans... I enjoy the relaxed sanitation standards found only amongst large groups of tubby, bearded men...

Although Jonah in person fits much more comfortably into the mainstream of reenactment by virtue of his somewhat greater attention to the conventions of "authentic" presentation, his writing mirrors the 10th Mass.'s refusal to pretend to be something they are not. "We're yahoos and we know it," one long-standing member of the 10th told me. In many ways the 10th Mass. exemplified the affective, anarchistic tendencies that characterize the reenactor community as a whole, but so unapologetically that they tended to be villified for it.

The weekend encampment

After attending a training camp and one major reenactment with the 10th Mass., I

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[1]Radway notes an analogous tendency among her own research population, who frequently defend their reading of romance novels with claims, since the books are often set in unfamiliar locations or other historical periods, that reading them is educational. Radway suggests that in a culture which commodifies knowledge and values work over leisure, romance readers (perhaps like reenactors) must justify their pursuit of personal satisfaction through leisure activities by relating those activities to socially-accepted values.

began to feel that the group's preference for remaining on the fringes of the reenacting community, while instructive in some respects, was impeding my own ability to participate fully in reenacting as the great majority of its practitioners understood it. Although I continued to participate as a full member of the 10th Mass., and although the unit continued to provide an extremely useful basis of comparison which allowed me to see and articulate the unwritten "rules" of reenactment (which became very clear through the 10th's frequent infringements of them), I realized that I would need a broader experience of reenactment in order to successfully carry out my study.

In the fall of 1995, I accepted an offer from an artillery unit based in Northampton, Massachusetts, the 9th Massachusetts Light Battery, to camp with them as an adjunct member whenever my schedule with the 10th Mass. permitted. The 9th Mass. had broken away from the 10th in 1989, although its founders remained friends with the 10th's colonel. I attended several encampments with the 9th Mass. and found myself welcomed very warmly into the group, which was consciously working to improve its historical knowledge and performance and to move more actively into a broader experience of reenacting. The 9th Mass. christened me "Horace," providing the nucleus of a Civil War persona, and offered me several opportunities to participate in the kinds of social and military activities that constitute much of the routine at weekend encampments.

Although these encampments range in size from a few dozen participants to many thousands, the structure of events is generally quite similar. I will describe this "typical" structure below, using a participant's viewpoint; it would of course look quite different from the perspective of an organizer or spectator.

The majority of reenactors arrive on Friday afternoon or evening. Friday is a time for setting the camp (pitching tents, digging firepits, hauling wood, water and straw) and for some initial socializing with other arriving acquaintances. With no public presence, there is no official performance; on Friday nights "period" clothing is interspersed with jeans and sneakers, and reenactors' performances for each other are sporadic, mixed in with the pragmatic business of getting the camp set up. In my experience, the mood around company campfires on Friday nights tends to be much more raucous than on Saturday night, as though the tensions and complications of the twentieth-century world still cling to people, and must be dissipated before the encampment can settle into its version of normality.

Some encampments feature realistically military schedules, with specified hours for reveille and taps. Despite considerable complaining about noisy groups who keep other people awake, however, I never saw or heard the "lights out" rule enforced by event

organizers.[2] On Saturday morning there is a sense of the camp coming alive, as evidence of the twentieth century is hidden away and the temporary community begins to function as a whole. Saturday's ambience is more military in character, with companies forming up in their streets and a concerted effort being made to ready the camp for the arrival of the public (usually at nine or ten a.m.).

The one invariable aspect of the day's program is the battle, held during the afternoon. It is the dramatic pinnacle (if not the social one) for soldiers and spectators alike; the day tends to build toward it and slope away from it. In general there are other offerings for the public, which may include speakers, staged scenarios, "living history" demonstrations (for instance, a doctor explaining the tools of his trade), or other displays, either scheduled or extemporaneous. These displays tend to involve "civilian" reenactors; for the "military" people, there is the "real" work of drilling, which forms a popular spectacle for the audience but is as much functional as theatrical. Part rehearsal, part performance, part ismorphism (Civil War soldiers also spent most of their camp time in drill), this activity parallels the public presentation and underscores the dual public/private nature of reenactment. Most of what happens at encampments occurs on more than one level at the same time, giving reenactment its multi-layered sense of reality. A reenactor eating to appease his hunger may pause to discourse about camp cooking to an interested spectator. An encampment may be the site of a ceremony or ritual (a "real life" wedding, memorial service, or other commemoration) or a dramatic scenario from which the public is not excluded but which is not specifically intended for their eyes.

Often a formal military formation will be held, frequently in the morning or preceding the afternoon battle. The battle itself is generally "fought" some distance away from the camps, so participants and spectators alike form a parade to and from the battle site. To an experienced reenactor, what constitutes a "good battle" is some sense of novelty, either through an inventive battle scenario or the use of some new tactic, skill, or geographical feature. By the end of my second season I was beginning to understand the disenchantment of "veterans" with static, predictable battle scenarios. I elected to "die" twice, and to be "wounded" once during my two seasons, in order to experience some of

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[2]Many event rules (such as those banning alcohol, pets, "soldiers" under the approved age of 16, "non-period" items in camp, etc.) similarly seem to go unenforced, if not unremarked, at many events. It may be that rules are written in part simply to protect organizers against potential lawsuits (if an underaged soldier harms himself or someone else, organizers can point out that he was in violation of the official rules), or that the majority of reenactors recognize that enforcing authority above a unit level is extremely difficult, since each unit tends to have its own rules and style. The question of enforcement of official policies will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter VI.

the range of dramatic options available to reenactors on the battlefield. (Except during unusually tightly-scripted battle scenarios, "wounds" and "death" tend to be decided on the spot by whim, plausibility, level of energy or exhaustion, or last-minute orders from a superior.)

Once the "high" of Saturday's battle has worn off, a tremendous sense of mellowness generally envelopes the camps. Most reenactors feel that Saturday evening is the social peak of any weekend, and of life in general. Formal dances, informal singing and conversation around the campfire, the sharing of unidenfied (sometimes unidentifiable) spirits out of unlabelled bottles, all contribute to an atmosphere that is far distant from participants' "real" lives. Most of the peak performative experiences (generally known as "magic moments") reenactors told me about occurred during reenacted battles, but most of the sense of camaraderie central to their love of reenacting is described in terms of "sitting around the campfire," usually on a Saturday night.

After the mellowness of Saturday night, Sunday mornings tend to be more relaxed in camp as well. Sunday schedules frequently feature some kind of religious services. Often Sunday's battle takes place earlier in the afternoon, to allow more time to strike camp and make the trip home. Sometimes a closing ceremony or formation will formally end the reenactment. Once the battle is over and the camps are closed to the public (which usually happens simultaneously) the canvas village constructed on Friday disappears within about an hour. Trucks and cars fill the camp streets as people load gear and say goodbye to each other. Reenactors often comment on the bittersweetness of these endings; "Every one of them is the end of an era," as one of my interview informants phrased it. Another said,

> ...probably one of the biggest things that are inexplicable about reenacting, at the end of an event,let's say, you're driving home at the end of an event, you've probably got a four-hour drive ahead of you at least, it's Sunday evening, you have to go to work the next day, you're probably sunburnt, you're absolutely filthy, everything you've got smells like wood smoke and gunpowder and sweat, and those are the *good* smells, if there's been a tactical you're probably scratched up some, you're absolutely exhausted, and you can't wait to do it again.

I experienced this post-encampment exhaustion and euphoria after each of the thirteen encampments I attended. It was a tremendous source of insight into the question of what motivates reenactors to continue in their activity, as I came to understand the combination of physical, social, and intellectual challenges that drive "real life" temporarily far away and produce a sense of clarity and integration difficult to attain elsewhere.

"Impressions" and identity

My association with the 9th Mass. Battery contributed both opportunities and

difficulties for my research. As mentioned above, in bestowing on me the name "Horace," the unit provided me with the framework of a reenacting persona. Since the 10th Mass. had no interest in playing distinct historical roles, it was useful for me to reenact with a group in which I had to begin to consider myself in more overtly performative terms. The 9th Mass. itself was in the early stages of assembling personas for its own members; although its captain was knowledgeable about the life of the historical battery captain, most of the others in the group, like me, were relatively new recruits who were still in the process of assembling their roles.

Reenactors differ in their use of "impressions," or adoption of performative personas. Many prefer to depict "generic" soldiers or civilians, blending selected historical information with autobiographical or imaginative details, and generally retaining their own names--a man named John Smith may "enlist" as Private John Smith, for example. These portrayals may evolve into highly-sophisticated historical presentations with time, practice, and added knowledge, although the basic role generally remains quite close to the reenactor's everyday character.

In other cases, a new name and character may evolve, for reasons of preference or practicality. In my own case, the 9th Mass. made it clear that as a woman "disguising" herself in uniform, I needed a masculine name, and "Horace" was supplied by the first sergeant. When this same sergeant barked at me one morning in formation, demanding to know my last name, I replied automatically, "Tupper," borrowing the name from an acquaintance who had once himself created a fictional and musical persona named Horace Tupper.

Initially the only thing I knew about "Horace" was that he had musical skill, and that he was really a young woman disguising herself as a young man. A further element of his biography fell into place during an improvised scenario staged by the 9th Mass., whose lieutenant was attempting to foster greater ease in role-playing among the unit members. Each of us had received written suggestions about scenes to stage at some point during the weekend, mine being "Sneak into the line twice during pay call." When I tried to collect another private's pay after claiming my own, I was exposed and punished by having to assist the laundress for the remainder of the afternoon. In my defense, I shouted, "But I need the money--I'm trying to put myself through music school!" Horace, then, appeared to be a student, evidence of my real life showing through Horace's facade.

The written "prompts" supplied by the 9th Mass. helped me gain confidence in my portrayal of a Civil War fifer. Horace did not evolve biographically far beyond that point, although when I met up with an extremely compatible female drummer named Hank, the two of us decided that Hank and Horace were probably cousins who had enlisted together

as musicians, and that were we to continue reenacting as a team, we might work on a more complete biography for ourselves, including a story to cover the question of our disguised gender.

Many reenactors who adopt such fictional personae become extremely thorough in their knowledge of their characters. In one unit I encountered, each member was required to know his or her Civil War autobiography in great detail; a frequent Saturday-night campfire activity was to recite their fictional/historical life stories to one another, adding and refining details to create an ever-more holistic presentation. Those who craft their roles in this way generally act in "first-person"--that is, when performing in public, and sometimes even in private, they speak and act as though their character were real, just as a traditional stage actor would. An extended "first-person" (or "firper") portrayal is a performative tour-de-force, requiring not only extensive historical knowledge and acting skill, but also the complicity of one's fellow-performers. It is extremely difficult to sustain the Civil War illusion over time in a setting so rich with anachronism,[3] and most reenactors employ some combination of first- and third-person roles, often working gradually toward more prolonged first-person presentations. Some experiment with different roles, as in the case of two sisters I met who had both previously portrayed women disguised as soldiers, and vivandières,[4] before settling on roles as "ladies" of an independent, free-thinking, early-feminist bent.

Both third- and first-person portrayals may also be based on historical characters, in which case a reenactor has at least some components of a biography with which to begin constructing a characterization. Even in this case, however, and even with extremely well-known and well-documented figures like Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, reenactors seem to find themselves relying at least as heavily on imagination as on the historical record. This is not to say that they falsify the record, but merely that, like all actors, they

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[3]Spectators themselves provide one of the biggest performative difficulties in presenting a "first-person" impression. How does a supposedly nineteenth-century individual directly address a contemporary audience without stepping out of character? Some reenactors negotiate the difficulty by remaining in "first-person" themselves while another reenactor acts as a kind of interpreter between time periods. Others pretend to ignore the difference between themselves and their audience, speaking as though to a nineteenth-century crowd and assuming a degree of knowledge most twentieth-century specators do not possess, but which gives rise to possibilities for further discussion between presenter and listeners. Some tackle the discrepancy between eras head-on, demanding to know why members of the public are dressed so strangely, and what those shiny wagons are parked at the edge of the field. One professional costumed interpreter I saw introduced himself at the outset as a ghost returned to tell his story, thereby admitting the discrepancy while at the same time allowing himself considerable knowledge of his audience's time period.

[4]This role is defined in Chapter VI.

"flesh out" their characters by drawing on imagination and personal experience.

The evolution of Horace Tupper, limited though it was, clearly illustrates the blend of personal preference and experience, historical knowledge, suggestions from other reenactors, and happenstance which combine in the creation of a reenacted identity. This is an essential point about the construction of reenactor personas: a great deal of the "restored behavior" exhibited by reenactors is made up of personal memories, characteristics, and imagery. "My character is me," one reenactor with a particularly highly-evolved persona said to me. "And I am me, whether I'm in uniform or not, that's the way I am." Another, with both extensive stage acting experience and an extremely active imagination, admitted of his Civil War persona, "I think Toothless Dan is probably very much like what [my] modern-day [self] would have been... I am aware of putting on the uniform and going into a different mode, and from that point on it's just very natural." A third, speaking of his "impression" as a Civil War chaplain, told me that, "It's not natural for me to try to get inside the mind of my nineteenth century counterpart. What's natural is for me to project my own personality onto that time period." The relationship between reality and performance, as revealed in the construction of alternate identities among reenactors, is an extremely close one.

Hank and Horace

Although my participation with the 9th Mass. Battery allowed me to begin construction of my own alternate identity, it also created two new methodological difficulties for me in my role as a researcher. The first served to underline the extreme insularity of most reenactor groups, something I had already noticed in the 10th Mass. To varying degrees, reenactor units function like families, and as in many families, unquestioning loyalty may be demanded of the individual by the collectivity. The 10th Mass., with its awareness of its marginal status within "the hobby," tended to close ranks and defy convention in response to external criticism, while requiring commensurately greater allegiance from its members. The 9th Mass. was similar, though in a less defensive fashion, and my status as an informal affiliate of the group, consciously resisting closer involvement, eventually created some tension. In addition, some pivotal people in each group tended to view the others as rivals, a situation which made it somewhat difficult for me to maintain an active relationship with both.

Further, although Horace had his genesis in the 9th Mass., I soon discovered that the unit offered fewer performative opportunities than I had originally been led to believe would be possible. As a lone fifer, with neither a music section to perform with nor a historically accurate role to play within an artillery group, I was often at loose ends or

steered into roles that were clearly fabricated simply to give me something to do. I had found many occasions during my attendance at reenactments simply to observe members of my own units and others; what I still had not experienced was the "core" reenactor experience of stepping into a historically-prescribed role and participating fully within that role.

The female drummer mentioned above provided the chance for me to do that beginning in the fall of 1995. This drummer, like me, was a relatively new reenactor, and a female dressed as a soldier, who had a strong desire to be in the center of reenactment activity. We shared other personal traits and tendencies, and I also found her an interested and intelligent listener for my observations on reenactor society, so that for the first time I could integrate my roles as researcher and reenactor, making that sometimes-difficult dual status much more comfortable to maintain. We also formed a natural and historically-appropriate team, as most infantry companies had a fifer and drummer on their rosters. "Hank" and I gained considerable expertise in our roles over the 1996 season, and in this new setting, I could more fully experience something of what it felt like to be a reenactor.

Further, Hank's unit, the 25th Mass., proved to be a very congenial host for my needs as a researcher. I discovered the truth of what several experienced reenactors had told me: that most successful units are composed of people with similar backgrounds and approaches. Perhaps because of my own middle-class background, I seemed to fit in more naturally with the 25th's generally middle-class membership. Without having intended to, I was no doubt responding to the same undercurrent of class tension that was making itself felt in my home unit, the 10th Mass. As well, many new reenactors seem to experience an initial phase of experimenting with styles and surroundings before they find a unit and a persona where they feel at home. Interestingly, my search for a compatible setting was mirrored by the efforts of a family who were among the dissatisfied newer faction within the 10th Mass. This family spent much of the 1996 season traveling with other reenactor groups and "researching" the wider community in much the same fashion I was doing. We discovered that our explorations were helpful to one another, as they could provide me with information about groups I had not encountered personally, and I could share with them my conclusions about the range of organizational and performative styles within the groups I had been observing.

"Hank" was typical of the 25th Mass. in being quite aware of and articulate about the many subtleties of performance in reenactment. The unit provided many opportunities for me to test my growing understanding of the dynamics of performance as mirrored in the works on performance theory which I was reading. The 25th was very willing to let me create my own role within the group, and much more attuned to the larger trends within the

reenactment community,[5] opening an avenue that had been closed from within the 10th and 9th Mass. I attended two encampments as well as parades and other events with the 25th Mass. during the 1996 season, while continuing my primary membership in the 10th Mass. and my adjunct status in the 9th Mass. Battery.

It will be clear from this chapter that my research population was drawn mostly from northern Union units. I did interview some northern Confederates and traveled to three reenactments in Virginia, but I gained no first-hand knowledge of "real" Confederate reenactors or of the somewhat different ambience of reenactment south of the Mason-Dixon line. I abandoned my original plan for an extended southern trip as part of my fieldwork when I realized that it would likely yield somewhat superficial results, while staying closer to home would allow me the opportunity to get to know one corner of the reenactment community in some depth, rather than to experience more of it in a sketchy manner. Some groups in both the north and the south do "galvanize,"[6] or portray both Union and Confederate units, but I chose to wear only blue, in order to become as well acquainted as possible with one particular aspect of reenactor society.

Participant-observation and the observer-participant

> ...[G]rasping others' meanings is not simply an intellectual process but a deeper form of experiential learning. At the core of fieldwork is not the collection of "facts" or the controlled observation of "objective" events, but rather a deeper holistic experience of learning about the lives, behaviors, and thoughts of others. Much fieldwork is at least potentially a deeply personal and transformative experience, as the fieldworker's self, providing the major research instrument, is often fundamentally affected by and perhaps changed in the process. (Emerson 15)

The ethnographer's task requires both participation and observation, intuition and analysis, objectivity and subjectivity. The balance among those components is always a delicate one, which may be rendered even moreso when an ethnographer is working within his or her own culture. An activity like reenactment, itself highly performative and reflexive, further obscures whatever neat lines might be drawn between categories of behavior

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[5]For instance, the 25th Mass. was a member of a national "brigade" organization, which gave me first-hand insight into this increasingly common tendency among individual units to align themselves with larger collectivities.

[6]The term, derived from the process of coating one metal with another (hence changing its color), was used during the Civil War to describe Confederate prisoners of war who gained their freedom by agreeing to join the Union army to fight Indians in the west. These soldiers came to be known as "galvanized Yankees." There is an ongoing controversy in the reenactor community over the policy of some event organizers who require "forced galvanizing," meaning that in order to balance the two sides, some units (generally Confederates in the south) must agree to switch uniforms for at least part of the encampment.

(performer/audience, researcher/informant, participant/observer).

Finally, as Clifford, MacCannell, and others have pointed out, the condition of the ethnographer is complicated by the awareness of being in a postmodern world where all meaning is understood to be relative and constructed, and in which the notion of truly discrete cultures is increasingly undermined. In such a world, Clifford writes, ethnography is "a pervasive condition of off-centeredness in a world of distinct meaning systems, a state of being in culture while looking at culture, a form of personal and collective self-fashioning" (9). "There is no master narrative," he concludes (15), describing contemporary ethnographic efforts rather as "a process of dialogue where interlocutors actively negotiate a shared vision of reality" (43). I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of some of the ways in which both my findings and my character were involved in that process of negotiation. This section is intended not so much confessionally, as in an effort to examine some of the implications for my research of my use of a particular methodology.

When I began to question reenactors seriously about their activity in 1992, the most common comment I heard was, "You won't really be able to understand this unless you *do* it." During my first weekend experience as a participant at an encampment, the truth of this statement became abundantly clear. For all reenactors' emphasis on the public, educational, and commemorative aspects of their efforts, it was obvious that the private, communal, affective side of "the hobby" was at least as important, if not far more so. From the beginning of my study, then, I knew that I would have to be much more of a participant than an observer if I were to gain access to anything approximating a genuine experience of reenactment.

As described above, my initial choice of unit kept me at a considerable distance from the center of activity among reenactors. Epistemological concerns prompted my search for a more "typical" setting from which to explore that activity. Having arrived there, however, I found myself dealing with new methodological dilemmas. Now that I had found a place where I felt I belonged, did that sense of belonging--always intense among reenactors--threaten the level of objectivity I still needed to retain? In my growing ability to *be* a reenactor, rather than just acting like one, had I crossed a line beyond which my status as a researcher had been compromised? Had I "gone native" in some irretrievable way?

That this kind of questioning of one's motives and status is necessary in any ethnographic undertaking has been generally accepted since the 1960s and 70s, when anthropology, like many other disciplines within the traditional academy, began systematically to examine how its own methods had affected its results. As Robert Emerson

states,

> ...self-consciousness emerges with the recognition that field work itself is a social phenomenon, inescapably part of the very social worlds it seeks to discover, describe, and analyze. This recognition dispels any last vestiges of the belief that the fieldworker can somehow avoid or transcend the sorts of practical concerns and personal involvements that pervade everyday social life. For not only is the subject matter of fieldwork the social worlds of others, but its methods for apprehending these worlds are social as well. Stressing the social character of fieldwork, we are in a position to see more clearly the variety of personal, interactional, moral, and political processes that lie at its core. (viii)

Viewed in this light, the growing scholarly literature on performance itself can be seen as a product of increasingly heightened reflexivity about the ways in which we present ourselves, individually and collectively.

An awareness of these questions provides at least a partial answer to the problem of maintaining a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. Researchers who are carefully cognizant of their own role and predisposition are more likely to detect instances of bias or influence when they arise. However, awareness is not the same as avoidance, and in participant-observation research, where the aspect of participation is integral to the project, the researcher inevitably becomes a part of and affects what is being observed. In my case, I was actively seeking an intense experience of involvement in Civil War reenactment, an activity whose practitioners--amateur and professional--often seem to have difficulty maintaining a critical stance toward their own methodology.[7] How could I experience the enthusiasm of the participant while retaining the critical distance necessary for scholarly observation? As well, I was attempting to study the ways in which Civil War reenactors present a particular vision to the public and to each other, yet I was myself participating in the construction of that vision. It was thus impossible to achieve my research objective without to some extent altering the picture I was trying to see.

Terence Turner has addressed the dilemma of those who undertake ethnographic fieldwork under increasingly reflexive cultural conditions. After several decades of fieldwork among the Kayapo people of Brazil, Turner became aware that his own presence as a researcher had contributed toward an awareness in his Kayapo informants of the possible political value of emphasizing their own ethnicity. Turner found his role as academic expert shifting to include political advocate and cultural advisor as the Kayapo adopted many of the techniques of the dominant society (primarily its media-fluency) in

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[7]The work of folklorist Jay Anderson on "living history," for example, provides an example of how a scholar/practitioner's enthusiasm consistently undermines his stated intention to look analytically at the subject. "Despite its comparative dimension," Richard Handler comments in a review of one of Anderson's books, "living history does not encourage its participants to question the values that animate living history" (Handler 341).

order to negotiate with that society on their own behalf. Turner found that his activities had come to require

> ...a shift in methodological and political stance from that of objectively detached "participant observer" to that of an observing and communicating actor, aware that his very activities of observation and communication had become integral parts of the process he was struggling to observe and understand. (305)

Turner proposes "a shift from participant observation to observer participant" (309) to cover the reality encountered by ethnographers entering a fieldwork situation that is already (or that is becoming) reflexive in nature. Acknowledging that the concept of "culture" itself is in flux, he argues that a closer attention to "the process of defining cultural reality" (310) among researchers and researched alike is crucial to any negotiated understanding of those realities.

Turner's solution to the ethnographic dilemma still resonates faintly with colonialism (having, for example, "decided that the Kayapo were ready to dispense with representational middlemen and could proceed directly to making their own films" [310-11], Turner facilitated the funding and training of several Kayapo filmmakers, a step the Kayapo might conceivably have managed as well on their own). Yet the central point is not his particular resolution of the dilemma, but his acceptance of the fact that he had come (albeit unintentionally) to play an active role within the ethnographic setting. In a world where cultural boundaries overlap in every direction, "natives," filmmakers, funders, political opponents, and the anthropologist himself become part of an ever more complex human environment where "observer participation," far from being unique to the researcher, may in fact characterize the roles of all.

My own eventual acceptance of my status as an observer-participant among Civil War reenactors emerged gradually over the course of my two seasons of research. There were two particularly epiphanic realizations, however, which clarified my thinking on this subject and heightened my awareness of the reflexivity that permeated all aspects of my research setting. First, as I began to question experienced reenactors during my first season of fieldwork about how they created their personas and community, I began to see how closely their efforts paralleled my own. I had embarked on my study with a sense that my own search for meaning and expression, sited within an academic framework, was somehow qualitatively different from theirs, undertaken in a seemingly more recreational spirit. It soon became apparent, however, that what we were all engaged in was an attempt to construct roles for ourselves (perhaps temporary, perhaps with more lasting implications for "real" life) based on a close and subjective study of the lives of others by whom we were fascinated.

Moreover, our studies of the "others" who fascinated us were similar in their

performative nature, a fact which imbued the entire enterprise--my research into their activity--with its highly reflexive atmosphere. We did not merely exist together on a single plane of reality, but constantly manipulated and experimented with that reality on many levels, as all performers do. As Richard Schechner has pointed out, "performers can't really say who they are. Unique among animals, humans carry and express multiple and ambivalent identities simultaneously" (1985, 4). There was an added layer of performance in my role--that of ethnographer--but that was again a difference of degree, not of kind. And occasionally even that extra layer was pulled into the general activity, as reenactors played with my presence among them as an observer ("Hey, Horace, are you going to put that in your book?"). Observation--and the observation of others' observation--was built into the reenactors' activities, as participation was built into mine.

Beyond this recognition of the essential similarities between those activities, I experienced a second realization, more personal in nature, which allowed me to accept my "observer-participant" role more comfortably. Although I fretted constantly in my field notes about the many interactional subtleties that arose during this study, I eventually came to realize that there were elements of my own personality that seemed to act as natural checks and balances on any temptation to let myself be absorbed wholly into reenactor society.

First, as a female, I was to some extent an outsider in a male-dominated milieu. More importantly, I was not an American, and thus shared few of the preconceptions and received knowledge of someone who had grown up in this country. The male American military ethos, then, was a closed book to me, and one which I could only understand by attempting to see it through my informants' words and actions. In fact, this represented probably my biggest source of personal bias, since like many Canadians I combined a liking for Americans on an individual basis with an innate skepticism about many aspects of American military and social policy, past and present. My informants' often-uncritical acceptance of facets of America that I had grown up questioning created important opportunities both for study and for a reexamination of some of my own preconceptions.

Beyond biographical considerations of distance between myself and the people I was studying, I also came to realize that no matter how absorbing the activity I let myself be drawn into, there was always some part of me that remained at a slight distance, noting my own actions and reactions along with others'. Even when I was part of a circle of people singing around the campfire on a Saturday night--for me, the most satisfying activity of an encampment and the moment of my greatest immersion in the reenactors' world--I was paradoxically still very aware of the extent to which I was absorbed.

On consideration, I came to understand that this detached, analytical part of myself-

-something I had previously seen as something of a detriment, and which had in fact sometimes made close relationships difficult--was perhaps my most valuable tool as an ethnographer. I seemed instinctively to realize, as Pollner and Emerson have observed (in Emerson 1983), that

> In a range of situations fieldworkers will be unwilling or unable to preclude, avoid, or evade overtures; rather, they commit themselves to deep involvement. At these moments the individual may find that the sole link to their identity as "researcher" of "observer" is through their ability to recollect and remind--indeed to re-collect and re-mind--themselves of their original project. (249-50)

Further, I came to see that my natural distancing of myself from others tended to be most harmful only when I was actively trying to repress it. For example, my conscious efforts (too conscious, in retrospect) to achieve rapport with some members of the 10th Mass. led to later difficulties that might not have arisen had I been more at ease with my own tendency toward detachment. By the time I began to be more aware of how that tendency worked in my relationships, my patterns within the 10th Mass. were already established. During and after the acrimonious split in the 10th's ranks late in 1996, it became clear that my earlier warmth (and my continued presence after the resignation of the other newer members) was misinterpreted by some as a sign of greater loyalty and affection than I in fact felt. The situation was a clear instance of the collaborative nature of the researcher/informant relationship; out of our separate and differing needs for acceptance, we had created a somewhat fictitious sense of fellowship which could not survive when I became clearer about my own role within the relationship.

For me, then, fieldwork became not so much a struggle to resist closer participation in the research setting as an opportunity to push more deeply into it. Distancing was natural to me; immersion in new experiences was not. My study of reenactors gave me a chance to learn to do the latter without abandoning the former, as I came to realize that I could rely on my innate analytical proclivity as a kind of methodological bungee cord that would keep me from reaching the limits of any headlong plunge. Within the intensely self-reflexive environment of ethnographic fieldwork, then, I was able to examine my own disposition methodically in a full range of activity from exceptional detachment to exceptional involvement, and to see that when I was cognizant of it, my instinctive re-collecting and re-minding could in fact lead to a greater sense of clarity and balance in my perceptions and actions in "real" life as well as at reenactments.

The performative nature of reenacting itself seemed to foster this kind of self-scrutiny in a way particularly compatible with the balance of affective experience and critical judgment necessary to approach an ethnographic understanding of the complex community in which I found myself. The powerful euphoria that follows a Civil War encampment is composed of

many elements, but I have come to believe that the opportunity to experiment with presentation and identity in a setting removed from everyday life--an opportunity offered by both reenacting and ethnography--may be one of its essential components, and one which I only grasped by allowing a significant interweaving of the lines between subjective and objective experience, between myself and my informants, between appearing and being.

Chapter IV

The company street: Demography and community

From the various attempts that have been made to explain contemporary Civil War reenactment, it seems clear that some kind of dual perspective is necessary for any real understanding of this activity, which, like most cultures, seems as difficult to understand from wholly within as from wholly outside.

Reenactors themselves are highly and continuously critical of the materials from which their constructed world is made, yet largely uncritical about their reasons for constructing that world in the first place. Many will pursue the question halfway, pointing to the necessity of preserving history and particularly Civil War history, and to the centrality of the Civil War in any understanding of American identity. But few stop to examine that centrality in any significant way, or to scrutinize too deeply the reasons why they themselves are so strongly drawn to the subject. Reenactors do occasionally speculate about the reasons for their own involvement in "the hobby," but their suggestions tend either to be joking ("We must all be nuts") or mystical (many reenactors wonder whether their intense bond with the Civil War period--strong enough in some that it seems to suggest foreknowledge--results from a past life as a Civil War soldier).[1]

For all reenactors' emphasis on studying history, their explanations for their activity seldom take into account their own historical circumstances and the specific demographic profile of the great majority of their "pards." Most seem reluctant to bring too much analysis to bear on what is primarily an intuitive, affective activity. They reenact because it feels right to them, and the satisfactions of pursuing that sense of rightness make it unnecessary--perhaps even dangerous--to dissect the component parts of that feeling. The

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[1]A recent book by a hypnotherapist who has "regressed" several Civil War reenactors, and who claims to have found enough evidence to support this hypothesis, has attracted considerable interest and quite a degree of credibility within the reenactor community (see Barbara Lane, Echoes from the battlefield: First-person accounts of Civil War past lives. Virginia Beach: A.R.E. Press, 1996).

shared intuition and affect that motivate most reenactors tend to lead to the creation of an extremely insular community, whose intense camaraderie in turn works strongly against extensive critical examination.

Observers from outside that tight little world, however, often seem equally ineffective at taking a comprehensive look at reenactment. Both journalists and scholars have tended to be either largely accepting of the claims of "living historians" (see, for example, Anderson, R. Turner) or determined to "de-bunk" its paradoxes and inconsistencies (Barth, Handler and Saxton, Horwitz, others).[2] Many in both fields have focused so exclusively on a single aspect of reenactment (its playfulness, for instance, or its relationship to historical fact) that they have not been able to view the activity in its entirety. Those who have made a more successful attempt to site reenactment in its historical context have tended to be historians themselves (Cullen, Linenthal) and thus have not set out to offer either a theoretical view that might allow cross-cultural comparison, or an examination of how reenactment functions as an aesthetic.

My intent in this paper is to take a more holistic view of Civil War reenactment. In this chapter I will first address briefly what I see as an overlapping set of satisfactions which I believe act as motivating forces for all reenactor activity. Then I will move to the more important question of precisely who is motivated by these forces. This section will focus on eight primary demographic features which, taken together or in varying combinations, characterize the great majority of Civil War reenactors. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of why these particular people are moved by this particular

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[2]For example, a recent article in Outside emphasized the beer-drinking, frat-party aspect of reenactment:

> I overhear a tourist dad describing the leaders of the real battle of Gettysburg to his young kids. "There was Armitage [sic], who was an old pal of the Union's Hancock..." Just then, a resurrected Reb swaggers past, ripping off his heavy coat and shirt, taking a swig from a can of Miller Genuine Draft, and letting go with a loud burp: "Don't forget *Brrrrrobert* E. Lee."
>
> No, indeed. With men like this honoring his memory, his name will resonate forever. (Barth, 92)

There are many more examples of journalistic treatment of the subject, including the 1994 Wall Street Journal article, now famed in reenactor lore, which made sport of the fact that some extremely "hard-core" reenactors had found that the best way to achieve an "authentic" patina on brass buttons was to soak them in urine. ("Button-pissers" has passed into regular reenactor usage as a result.)

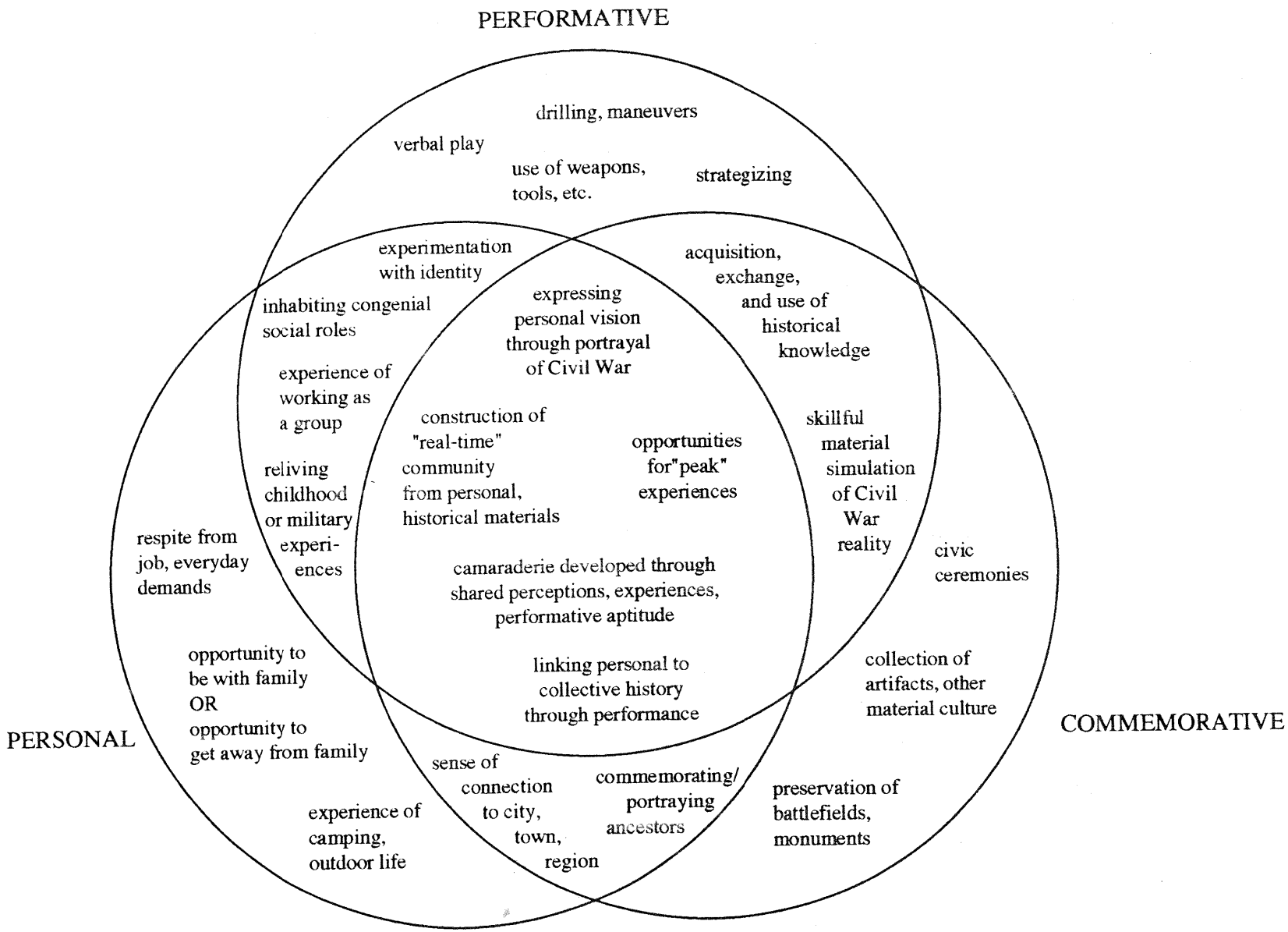
In more a scholarly vein, anthropologist Richard Handler and philosopher William Saxton see reenactment by definition as a failed enterprise; since true authenticity--that is, actual isomorphism--is not possible, they say, whatever experience reenactors manage to find is a "mutant form" (Handler and Saxton 259), relative and commodified in a manner typical of postmodern social experience, a diminution rather than an enhancement of the ideal of a truly authentic life.

set of motivations at this time in history. In short, Chapter IV will address the primary question to which this study was devoted: Who are these people, and why are they reenacting the American Civil War?

My fieldwork among reenactors reinforced my initial sense that this was a type of behavior in which many layers of experience overlap. As one reenactor put it during an interview, "You can't separate it. If you took away the educational part, the camaraderie wouldn't be as intense. If you didn't have the camaraderie, the rest of it wouldn't be as much fun. It's all tied up together." Any understanding of reenactment, then, must be based on a view which incorporates several overlapping layers of motivation or satisfaction.

I believe that those layers can be separated into three distinct categories: personal, commemorative, and performative (see diagram, p. 62). The "personal" sphere includes motivations generated and answered within individuals--for example, the desire to belong to a group, the wish to relive an important formative experience, a craving for a momentary relief from the various and sometimes contradictory demands of life in the late twentieth century. The "commemorative" category encompasses behavior specifically intended to honor the memory of those who fought in or lived through the Civil War, whether that intention is expressed before members of the public or in private. The "performative" circle includes satisfactions derived specifically from the physical portrayal of the Civil War--the adoption and refinement of alternate identities, the experience of simulating "period" practices, the verbal play that is such a prominent feature of reenactor culture.

In practice, it is extremely difficult to pull these three categories apart. However, for the purpose of illustration, I will suggest three personal examples from my fieldwork which seem to me to represent the different types of satisfaction in their undiluted state. Undoubtedly the experience of singing around the campfire on a Saturday evening was one of purely <u>personal</u> pleasure for me, resonating strongly with my own memories, experiences, and talents. As a researcher and a non-American, I felt no particular connection to the <u>commemorative</u> aspects of reenactment; however, at a ceremony honoring the National Guard unit which was the military descendant of the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, I did feel a sense of enjoyment at being present with the 10th Mass. in order to provide visual evidence of the group's ancestry and continuity, connecting past and present in a graphic physical way. Finally, in a purely <u>performative</u> sense, I found considerable satisfaction in learning and executing new maneuvers on the drill field. The formality and structure of this activity (and, no doubt, the fact that as a musician I had to spend relatively little time doing it) suited my taste for formal ritual



Areas of participant interest and satisfaction in Civil War reenactor activity

movements and a sense of order within groups of people.

For "real" reenactors, instances of unmixed satisfaction probably tend to be much rarer than they were for me. Typically, I believe, the three spheres overlap much more tightly for Civil War reenactors, leaving, as the diagram suggests, little room for activities that do not answer two or even three of the different kinds of motivating needs. Drilling, a purely formal and uncomplicated activity for me, would more usually provide a reenactor with a sense of reliving the experience of having been in the military (a personal satisfaction) as well as affording an opportunity to portray, and hence honor, historical Civil War soldiers (a commemorative motive). Thus the performative pleasure of executing a difficult maneuver competently is overlaid with personal and commemorative satisfactions as well. Research, in which most reenactors engage to some degree, is another instance of a multi-layered activity. There are entirely personal rewards in learning and expanding one's knowledge, which may also invoke memories (common among reenactors) of having researched history, and especially Civil War history, independently during one's youth. However, the process can also be commemorative, particularly given the sense among many reenactors that Civil War history is in danger of being lost, and that the recovering of as many facts as possible is an important labor in the saving of this essential piece of the American past. Although research is not itself performative, it undergirds reenactors' "impressions" insofar as they utilize facts in the performance of their roles.

As the reenactor quoted above suggested, the three categories are so entangled as to be mutually dependent. But although the model of the three overlapping spheres illustrates the multi-layered nature of reenactors' reasons for doing what they do, it does not address the question of who is moved by these reasons, and why. The examination of reenactor demography which follows will begin to shed some light on where this system of satisfactions and desires originates.

Who reenacts?

Case study: Rob Robitaille

Rob Robitaille is a reenactor who in many ways typifies the core constituency of the reenactor community. Rob was the 1st sergeant of my home unit, the 10th Massachusetts, an athletic, easy-going, good-looking man in his early thirties whose military experience seems to show in his forthright stance and close-cropped dark hair. He is married, with three daughters. He likes to spend as much time as he can with them, and given a heavy work schedule at the chain restaurant he manages, he has little time left at the moment for reenacting. As he warned the unit when they elected him, "I'm going to be a real part-time kind of first sergeant, guys. I mean, I've got to pay the bills first before I can play." At

the encampments he does attend, though, he is comfortable taking charge and convivial around the campfire. Reenacting is something he does to escape the stresses of a busy working life. "When I got into it, I was like, man, I need something for me," he told me.

Rob's family background is a combination of French Canadian and Irish. He is a third-generation American who grew up in a small Massachusetts town with a father who managed a supermarket, a mother who ran an office, and one younger brother who shared Rob's natural athletic ability and got into college on a baseball scholarship. Rob's own interest lay in the engineering field, although he has had a lifetime fascination for the military, particularly weaponry, and at once time considered trying to get into a military academy. The fact that he is color-blind stood in his way, although he did later join the National Guard when he was searching for a way to pay for his own college education. Enlisting initially as a medic, he was told that his color-blindness was a problem there, too. "But they showed me their superior logic by making me a radio operator with bad hearing!" he laughs.

He views his service in the National Guard as a positive experience. "I learned more about myself in that two or three years than I'll probably ever learn about myself," he says, adding that practical considerations aside, he felt that serving in the military was important in other ways:

> There's pride and there's duty, and I served my time, and my father did, and his father did, and my mother's father did, and it goes right down the line, you know... None of them were career people. They just did their short little stint and that was that.

Like many reenactors, Rob was not very interested in the versions of history he learned in school, but he pursued his passion for military history through independent reading and study.

> From a school point of view I didn't care much about it. However, at age twelve I could tell you every single aircraft that we flew in World War II, the nomenclature, the armament, the ships that we used and what theater they were in.

"I have been absolutely fascinated with weapons since I was a kid," he says. He hunts occasionally, but more for the experience of shooting and "getting out in the woods and having a good time" than of killing; last year, on a black-powder hunting trip, he drew a bead on a deer and then watched it walk away.

Rob completed a college degree in engineering, only to discover that his timing was bad and there were few entry-level jobs in his field. He worked out of state for a couple of years, remaining in the Guard while he was away and shooting competitively on his unit's pistol team. When he decided to move back to Massachusetts, he began working at various small businesses, most of which he ran, and eventually realized that he would not likely

find his way back into the field he had trained for. His job with the restaurant chain is demanding, but provides a comfortable living.

He encountered the 10th Mass. through his mother, who had seen the group and thought it might interest her son. Rob went to a unit meeting without having seen a reenactment first, thought the whole enterprise sounded intriguing, and decided to join up. The 10th, always in need of leadership, elected him 1st sergeant the following year. One unusual feature of Rob Robitaille's involvement in "the hobby" is that despite his passion for military history and weaponry, he had little specific interest in the Civil War until he began reenacting. He admits that the 1990 Ken Burns series about the war did "kick me in," and that he has subsequently watched the series "probably forty, fifty times," leaving the tapes in his basement workshop and popping one into the VCR there whenever he is working on a project.

Rob and his wife have what he jokingly considers a mixed marriage: she is a liberal, he a staunch conservative. In fact, he cites his frequent political disagreements with his wife as the reason why he has become unusually articulate about his beliefs. Rob feels strongly that the United States, at least as the country was originally conceived, is far superior to other countries and systems. "We have the best situation," he says.

> I mean, we're lucky, too. I don't say it's just all us. But we've got the best resources in the world, and we've got people that have just sacrificed, you know, we've gone through so much through the centuries here, that they're just willing to sacrifice to keep it. And there's nothing wrong with that. As well as doing some goofy things, we've done some very noble things, I think, in history too. Just the whole thought process that went into this country, I think is something to be very proud of.

He worries, though, that the country is losing its sense of unity. He sees several causes: the words and deeds of those who criticize the status quo without offering positive solutions; special interest groups who are reluctant to compromise on their stances; an unwillingness among many in America to take responsibility for their own advancement, along with a tendency to blame others for their misfortunes; and some ethnic groups' insistence on retaining their original identities without wanting to "be an American first, and then go on from there." Rob is ambivalent about the country's involvement in the Vietnam War. But he is quite certain about the war's legacy: Vietnam, he believes, was a turning point in America, after which some essential national sense of identity has disappeared.

He is equally clear about the military lessons of Vietnam: "I thank God we learned *something* from that whole mess. To say, we go in all or nothing when we go in. If we're going to use our military might, we crush 'em. And we can. There's nobody we can't." The 1991 Persian Gulf War, he believes, showed not only America's military capability but the fact that the country can still unite behind a common cause.

> It's a nice feeling when you're rallying around the flag and everybody's kicking in and doing the same thing together for a common goal. When's the last time we've had a common goal? World War II?

After the Gulf War, he points out, "It's a good feeling. Everybody came back saying, "All right! We did something good here!" Especially after Vietnam. How negative had things been? *Everything's* been negative."

Reenacting, with which he's been involved for four years, "just seems to touch a whole bunch of different things from different parts of my life," he says. He finds that a common experience of the military is one of the most central elements that binds reenactors together, and enjoys being able to talk with a group of people who generally share the same outlook on life.

> How often can you find, can you get ten people together that all think alike? I mean, you kind of debate something, you say, "Well, that's a little too extreme," or whatever, but you're all going to be thinking in the same direction. And you know, we're all pretty conservative, that's pretty obvious from the first time you meet us. But it's nice to get together with that. And then you start talking, and talking more than you've ever talked before, and that's enjoyable. That is definitely an appeal.

Like many of my respondents, Rob sees reenactment's appeal as multi-layered, and says that articulating the whole of its attraction is difficult. "You can't explain the adrenaline, you can't explain the political motivation, the patriotic motivation, I mean it's just a blend of so many things," he told me.

Rob finds that encampments create a world that is "our own little corner for a while, for a couple of days," where there is a chance not only to share good times with like-minded "pards," but to share his knowledge with the public as well. He has been active in presenting school programs for the 10th Mass., and says,

> I want to make sure as many people know as much as I can teach them about what I've learned, about the Civil War and about the Civil War soldier and about what they were thinking and why they did what they did. Because I don't think you could pick another point in American history that was more pivotal than that...

He has a heartfelt admiration for "the American rifleman," the citizen-soldier, and admits that "I don't cry very often, but patriotism is definitely what breaks me down a little bit."

After the interview from which much of the above material was drawn, Rob added the comment that he has always liked to be on the winning side in whatever he undertakes--it frustrates him to lose. And he said he realizes that as a white male northern American, he always *has* been on the winning side. When I suggested that things might look very different to someone on the other end of things, and that perhaps it was difficult for a perennial winner to grasp what that different perspective looks like, he replied, "I can see that. But I'd still rather be on the winning side!"

Rob Robitaille's background and experience provide a useful starting-point for a discussion of the constellation of characteristics which tend, in some combination, to typify reenactor culture. In my observation, the great majority of reenactors fit into at least half of the following categories:

American
conservative
history buffs
male
middle class
military veterans
30-50 years old
white

Approaching these characteristics as a cluster may seem to focus on a core constituency to the exclusion of the very large number of reenactors who do not fit the core profile in every respect. There are, after all, many reenactors who are women and non-veterans; some are non-Americans; a few lean to the left politically; many are under thirty, some over fifty; black reenactors are an increasingly common feature of the community, along with a few members of other ethnic minorities; there is even a very small percentage of reenactors who are motivated by reasons other than a desire to immerse themselves in history.[3] Of the above list of categories, the only one that might be said to apply to all reenactors is "middle class," although this is also the vaguest attribute on the list. I encountered no reenactors (to my knowledge) who were living entirely on either inherited wealth or public assistance, but under the broad rubric of "middle class" I did meet people who ranged from unskilled manual laborers to highly-skilled professionals; I also observed that income levels and standards of living were by no means always correlative to occupation, giving the term "middle class" enough variation that it was difficult to generalize about reenactors based solely on class identification.

The issue of class is much more usefully approached not statistically, but through a discussion of reenactors' attitudes about work and economics. Here it is possible to see broad similarities that seem to unite blue-collar and white-collar, low- and high-income reenactors. Moreover, these same attitudes also tend to unify those who identify themselves as conservative with the few liberals and progressives in "the hobby." There *are* core demographic characteristics that apply to the majority of Civil War reenactors, but more important are the core beliefs and definitions that reenactors tend to apply to those

[3]I encountered a number of reenactors who participated primarily to accompany spouses or other family members. Although most of these people did eventually seem to become interested in acquiring more Civil War knowledge to apply to their "impressions," it was not necessarily an interest when they first began to reenact.

characteristics. What is it about reenactors' definition of Americanism that enables a Canadian to participate in it through reenactment? How does reenactors' perception of masculinity unite members of different ethnic groups? How does generational identity bind together people who may be very dissimilar in other ways?

Each of these characteristics could be analyzed individually, but the exercise would be somewhat repetitious, since they tend to function collectively in reenactors' lives. Thus Rob Robitaille is male, but elements of his perception of what it means to be male (a provider, a defender) are informed by his understanding of what it means to be an American (a capitalist, a protector of others' liberties), and his national and gender identities have both been influenced by his relationship to the image of the American citizen-soldier. The interconnectedness of these features for Rob is evident when he comments about his military service ("I served my time, and my father did, and his father did, and my mother's father did, and it goes right down the line") and about the courage and commitment of the Civil War soldiers he simulates ("It was what was right, and to be a man that's what you did, and you did it and that was that").

Rob Robitaille happens to fit each of the demographic categories I have identified as central to the reenactor constituency; as I have stated above, the same is not true of all reenactors. However, Rob also illustrates and articulates two perceptions of identity and reality which I believe are crucial in the binding together of reenactors across national, gender, and other lines: first, that such perceptions and the definitions that undergird them are immutable, and second, that these immutable definitions are currently being challenged in significant and troubling ways. A reenactor who fits only some of the core categories, then--for example, a black 60-year-old liberal--may still find considerable common ground with a white 40-year-old conservative through a shared definition of what it means to be male, or what America's role in the world should be, or a shared faith in the immutability of historical fact. A Canadian female reenactor may share with an American male a desire for more precisely-defined gender roles, or for a presentation of history that allows for more unambiguous pride in one's country. The remainder of this chapter will examine the categories listed above as they relate to this paired sense of immutability and challenge.

Immutability

Rob Robitaille and most of his fellow reenactors will most likely take issue with at least one of the statements I have made about them above. In saying that Rob's sense of identity has been constructed by the particular circumstances of his having been a white American male, I have implied that such identity is relative and conditional, not absolute. Most of the reenactors I spoke to tend to hold that certain truths about reality are self-

evident, and that to challenge them is to challenge common sense and the historical record. These "absolute truths" tend to cluster at the most deeply-felt points about reenactors' identities, most notably their gender identification and their views of what it means to be a patriotic citizen.

Many reenactors expressed to me their belief in America's inherent superiority among nations. As Rob Robitaille put it, "We're certainly not perfect in this country. But--we're still the best thing out there. There's no doubt about that." Another member of the 10th Mass., explaining to me why he believed the Civil War fascinated so many people, said that, "The war was unique, because America is unique. There's never been anything like it." "It's the greatest nation on earth," a member of the 9th Mass. Battery told me. It is revealing that the two Canadian reenactors whom I interviewed expressed admiration for Americans' pride in themselves. One of them, speaking about the tendency of some American reenactor units to advertise their state affiliation through chants and cheers, said of his own unit,

> Sometimes we'll sing when we're marching and stuff like that, but we just don't do that kind of high-school football cheer type thing, with the pompoms. It's just so un-Canadian... On the other hand, I do greatly admire the American sense of patriotism, even though it's somewhat jingoistic. It's just that they're very proud of their country and they wave the flag and that, and I greatly admire that. Canadians are very, very subdued about those things.

More than simply being subdued, Canadians are increasingly uncertain how to express a sense of nationalism, and indeed, uncertain about what their nation is and might become. For Canadian reenactors, their American counterparts' belief in their own nation's immutability and superiority is to be praised and perhaps wished for.

When my American respondents talked about flaws in the American system, they tended to state that these were inevitable and did not affect the overall goodness of the nation. Speaking of racial and other inequities in the U.S., Rob Robitaille said,

> I think it's a product of capitalism. It really is. I mean, if you believe in capitalism, then that's always going to be there. There's no doubt about it. You want to minimize it, obviously. You don't want it to be as, you know, torture, but it's always going to be there.

On the same subject, the 10th Mass.'s colonel emphasized to me that "Life just *isn't fair*," echoing Rob's view that capitalism tends to produce a certain amount of injustice which is simply inherent in the system. A reenactor who runs his own business told me he believes labor unions served a purpose at one time, but that their "anti-capitalism" stance is now weakening the economic system rather than strengthening it. "I don't envy somebody that does better than me," he said. "Good for them, and that's wonderful. And it's a big world. You want to be like them, go try. But don't taint them. And just because they have

it, don't think that somebody else should share in it. It's a free world." On the whole, reenactors do not seem envious of those wealthier than themselves, often citing them as examples of the fact that the economic system still contains opportunities for all. They tend to see those on public assistance, on the other hand, as people who have failed to take advantage of those opportunities. Even the two members of the 10th Mass. who identified themselves as liberals felt that it is always possible to change one's environment and circumstances, and that "the weight of American ideals is on the side of egalitarianism," so that the means are always available for those seeking to better themselves. A black reenactor whom I interviewed had a somewhat more nuanced view, but still showed faith in the system as a whole:

> I think there's opportunity for everyone, but you have to know when that opportunity comes along and when to take advantage of it. At the same time, there are some people that just can't get ahead. They're blocked right there... So the country has some shortcomings, but... The opportunity's still there. You have to sort of try to discover it and you can't, you have to persevere. You're going to have doors shut and you have people don't want you to have something, so you find other ways to get it, you know. What I believe in sometimes is, find out how they do it, and beat 'em at their own game.

Only one of my respondents, a reenactor with unusually left-wing views, made any overt critique of capitalism, seeing it as a destructive system that "tends to pit people against each other." For the great majority, that tendency is simply endemic to an economic structure that they do not question deeply, if at all.

In considering reenactors and "the American dream" in which most so fervently believe, it is interesting to note that the great majority of my interview respondents, and many of those with whom I spoke more informally, are the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of immigrants who came to the U.S. in the period from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century.[4] Like Rob Robitaille, many within the New England Civil War reenactment community are of French Canadian ancestry, and these reenactors seem to identify strongly with their working-class forebears who came to the U.S. to better themselves economically. Rob, in common with a seemingly very large proportion of reenactors, claims some Irish heritage as well, and indeed Civil War reenactment is strikingly steeped in Irishness. Many reenactors tend to adopt some form of brogue when

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[4]From 1815 to the beginning of the Civil War, 5 million immigrants came to the United States. Half of these were from England, another 40% were Irish. Between the end of the war and 1890 another 10 million immigrants arrived, largely from north-western Europe (England, Wales, Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia). A third major wave of 15 million immigrants, consisting mostly of eastern and southern Europeans from Poland, Russia, Italy, the Ukraine, and other countries, came between 1890 and 1914 (Foner and Garraty 534).

they step into "first person," and Irish music is always popular--if not outright obligatory--on the march and around the campfire.

It seemed to me that the particular view of America held by many reenactors is strongly colored by inherited or acquired memories of previous generations from many countries--the Irish being perhaps the most prototypical and numerically greatest--who encountered and overcame social and economic obstacles in order to prosper in a new land. Further, it seems that the memory of successes--of which reenactors themselves see their own lives as the proof--have perhaps blotted out less positive memories. Reenactors seem able to focus on America's boundless possibilities without having to consider too closely either the prejudices encountered by their ancestors or their own contemporary version of the same misgivings about foreigners coming to America in search of economic and social advancement. Rob Robitaille, without seeming aware of it, echoes previous generations of Americans (including those who sought to assimilate immigrants of his grandparents' generation through patriotic pageants) when he says that:

> I don't think you can lump this country as one big thing anymore. I mean, we're too diverse now. I think we've become too diverse. We've lost our national sense, because everybody's running around trying to hold onto their own national sense, their own previous one. It's more important than our, than what we had, you know, our country.

For Rob and other reenactors, their "national sense" is a specific perception which they do not see being taken up by new Americans or passed along to new generations. While approving of the "melting pot" ideal, reenactors often seem uneasy with the actual processes of negotiating cultural diversity. Both a theoretical acceptance and an underlying reluctance are evident in Rob's comment that:

> If you want to be a citizen, be an American first, hold onto your ties to what you have, because that's important, and it's always brought in new things to our country, you know. And I wouldn't pick on one race or people or color or anything. It's just, be an American first, and then go on from there. If not, don't come here, you know? Don't come here for the dollars and then not want to deal with what we are. Or what we were. And you know, what we've become.

The belief in an unchanging core of national identity and a wish to retain social patterns with which they feel comfortable is particularly evident in reenactors' approach to issues of gender. It is clear that for many men in "the hobby," to be an American male is to accept a certain set of domestic and civic obligations, in which providing economically for one's family and being willing to serve one's country militarily are preeminent. The role of protector/defender/provider seems to have evolved from a view of life as inherently competitive, and of human relations as essentially confrontational. As with perceptions of American identity, this view is rooted in the belief that "that's just the way it is," a variation of which, "boys will be boys," might serve to sum up many reenactors' approach to gender

identity as clearly as any more academic description. In considering the ambience of reenactor society and the areas around which the greatest tensions over identity seem to arise, it has seemed to me that the tension generated by contemporary reassessment of both masculinity and femininity is the most crucial characteristic to examine in seeking an understanding of what reenactment is and how it operates in its adherents' lives. (Although I have not included the category of "heterosexuality" in my list of basic reenactor characteristics, I should note that the majority of reenactors, like perhaps the majority of American men with traditional concepts of gender identity, are clearly made uncomfortable by the idea of both male and female, but particularly male, homosexuality.)

The role of military service in many American males' definitions of masculinity is one that, as a female Canadian pacifist, I was slow to grasp. But it became very clear to me that for many reenactors, doing one's time in the military was an essential rite of passage and a dividing-line clearly separating those who have served from those who have not. For many, military service was their first experience of a broader world beyond home and family, and an initiation into a setting where they were expected to rise or fall on their own merits. Moreover, it was something that once tended to cut across class lines and to unite young American men, rather than heightening class differentiation and polarizing male attitudes and experiences as the subject of military service has tended to do since the Vietnam War era. At a 1996 event in Vermont, I camped next to the headquarters tent at the invitation of the event organizer, a long-time reenactor and veteran of the Korean War era. Several times that weekend, I heard him telling other reenactors about his own astonishment when a young male staff member at the site failed to recognize the term "water buffalo" when it was used to describe the water tank parked in a field for the reenactors' use. "He thought we were bringing in some kind of exotic animals or something," he said. "It hadn't struck me until then that there's a whole generation of kids now who've grown up without having to do military service." Similarly, during the struggle between older and newer members of the 10th Mass. for leadership in the unit, one of the long-time members pointed out to me that "The leaders of the 10th Mass. right now are not military," recognizing the fact that the newer and more active members, most of whom were not military veterans like the majority of the older members, did not share the core attitudes and loyalties around which the group had originally formed. The many reenactors who are veterans[5] tend to be indulgent, at best, about the performance of

[5]In a survey I completed in 1992, I found that 38% of my 50 respondents had some past or present service in the military. Of the twenty-three reenactors I interviewed in depth in 1995-96, eleven were veterans, including two combat veterans. The extent of identification of masculinity with military service was borne out by the fact that my one female veteran

"officers" at encampments who have never served in the real military.

Many reenactors who were veterans also talked to me about the intense camaraderie that they experienced during their time in the service, a sense of bonding and unity that they have found difficult to replicate elsewhere in their lives. Citing what he called "the hardship and sacrifice factor" that operates both in military service and, to a lesser extent, in reenactment, a retired career military veteran said of the intensity of reenactor camaraderie:

> The closest I've seen is the actual military. The camaraderie that you find in the real military, the closest I've come to finding it on the outside world is in reenacting, without a doubt. I don't know if it's because of the paramilitary nature of reenacting, or, you know, what it is. But there's that camaraderie that exists there that you find basically nowhere else in the civilian world that I know of.

Many reenactors explicitly made that connection between their time in the military and their experiences in reenacting. A member of the 54th Mass. correlated his Marine Corps service with his sense of connection not only to his contemporary "pards" in the reenacted 54th, but to his historical forebears as well:

> Once you go in, you know nothing about the Marines, but by the time you get to boot camp and once you're in the Marines for a while, you have this built-in pride and this built-in idea of respect for other Marines, and you love being with other Marines... And I can kind of relate that back to the 54th because they had a common bond, a common respect because when they joined the 54th, the respect that they gained from the 54th among themselves was unparalleled.

This intense camaraderie seems to be a motivating force in itself for continued participation in both the real-life military and its reenacted version. The feeling of bondedness and affection operated quite strongly even upon someone like me, an outsider through both my researcher's role and my lack of commitment to--indeed, my downright disagreement with--the core values shared by most reenactors.[6] However, it seems clear that for the core constituency of reenactors, that opportunity for camaraderie would be much less satisfying if it ceased to be linked to the image of the heroic citizen-soldier, willing to sacrifice his life

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respondent had enlisted primarily for the educational benefits, without any of the somewhat mythic overtones that were such a feature of men's memories of the service; she did cite the extraordinary camraderies developed during her years in the Air Force, but the experience did not seem, as it did with her male counterparts, to have formed an essential part of her identity. Similarly, a young female member of the 10th Mass. who enlisted during my second season with the unit successfully sought to be discharged several months later, having discovered that the educational benefits offered were substantially less comprehensive than her recruiter had led her to believe. For these female reenactors, pragmatism far outweighed idealism in their views of military service.

[6]John Keegan has written persuasively of how military structures have always relied upon this camaraderie and intense group-identification to motivate soldiers to go into battle. See, for example, The face of battle: A study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme (London: Penguin, 1976).

for his country, which presents for many an ideal of masculinity and an essential component of male American identity.

Wes Clark, a veteran reenactor (and Marine Corps veteran), has articulated some of what he calls "secret guy stuff" in correspondence with me. Wes, unlike many of his fellow reenactors, does not view reenactment as an educational or commemorative mission, but purely and simply an opportunity to be a male in the sense that he understands it, in the company of other men with similar views. He does share the sense of many reenactors that human gender identity is biologically determined, not socially constructed:

> I think, given human nature and the assurance that there will always be an enemy of some sort (whether shooting at you in a war, or confronting you in a subway, or harassing you as a lawyer, etc.) that males require the protector/defender role. It's essential to us, and gives us our sense of self-worth in society. Perhaps, for us, the next best thing to creating life, which we cannot do, is to protect and defend it.

When I asked Wes how it feels when a contemporary woman refuses a male's offer of protection or support, he replied:

> Doesn't matter: protect and defend you we will. And if you resent it we're profoundly confused and put off... You see, we're genetically rigged that way. We can no more deny this than we can insist that taking out the trash is a woman's job. So, refusing the proffered protection from a man is to partially emasculate him (This is where modern feminism gets a resounding thud from men)...One doesn't rationalize or analyze this stuff - one just DOES IT.

Wes's sense of how reenactment functions for its primarily male adherents is similar to ethologists' analysis of "ritualization" among non-human species: for Wes, reenactments are a setting for behavior that feels instinctive and natural, a place where he can inhabit a role he sees as genetically, not culturally, ordained. To a large extent he inhabits this role in his "real" life as well, supporting his family as a computer engineer while his wife is a homemaker. The Clarks have two daughters and a son, in whose behavior Wes sees further evidence that male and female attitudes and desires are intrinsic, and not a product of cultural conditioning.

Although as a female researcher I did not have access to reenactors' most unguarded comments about gender, I frequently observed how much more comfortable both men and women in the reenactment community seemed to be with gender roles modelled on nineteenth- rather than twentieth-century social norms. For instance, a very common response among those who had momentarily been fooled about my gender was to apologize for their error, as though they had insulted my femininity rather than complemented my acting ability. A particularly interesting incident took place at the end of an evening I had spent in the company of a young infantry officer at a Virginia encampment. Having met at an impromptu jam session in a music dealer's tent, we had arranged to drop in on a general musicians' gathering later in the evening, after which I

invited him "home" to the 9th Mass. Battery's campfire to play and socialize. Since the camps had been turned into a quagmire by torrential rains the night before, and since the officer had no lantern to help him negotiate the boggy trek back to his own camp, I felt that the "gentlemanly" thing to do at the end of the evening would be to escort my guest through the worst of the mud with my lantern. When we reached dry ground, however, instead of the goodnight handshake I had been expecting, he kissed my hand, demonstrating clearly that none of my attempts to be "one of the boys" had superceded his own inclination to rely on traditional modes of social form. This was not the only instance when a male reenactor kissed my hand while I was in uniform, and each time it seemed to point clearly to a reliance on a largely archaic social order, a reliance that obviously went far beyond any consideration of the picture that was being presented by one "soldier" kissing another's hand.

One New England Confederate reenactor explained the appeal of the Victorian era for him by saying, "You know, the define codes of conduct or of social conduct is one of the reasons, is what made that era tick. It's one of the things that's missing in today's society, is there are no codes of conduct." In discussing how those codes were acted out in social settings such as formal dances, he also stressed the benefits of more defined gender relations for both men and women:

> You didn't turn a gentleman down. If he came and asked you to dance, after being properly introduced, you weren't a lady if indeed you turned him down... But in the same vein, this gentleman didn't expect anything more than a dance.

Reenactors tend to rely on these formal relationships in their dealings with one another, frequently citing "gentlemanly" or "ladylike" behavior as worthy of praise. Even when a reenactor's behavior in everyday life may be incongruous with nineteenth-century precedent, that reenactor's emphasis at encampments is still likely to be on maintaining, not challenging, the older order being emulated. One of my interview respondents, a woman extremely active in the administration of her unit and the organization of local encampments, seems to see herself on an entirely equal footing with her male peers in "real" life, but during reenactments she is at ease with a male-centered and more formal social order. "It's a guys' thing," she told me.

> I've always looked at this hobby--it's male-driven, it's male-dominated, it's male-oriented. It's their show, you know, and that's fine. And we can be a good part of that. But if you ruin their time you're only going to ruin their own. And there's no sense getting in the way of that.

Wes Clark described the same social arrangement from a male point of view:

> I want my growlery! (A "growlery," in case you don't know, was an English institution for men only, a club, for instance. The female counterpart was a "snuggery." Both served the purpose of refuge from the other sex.)

> Men and women need this. I don't begrudge women their snuggeries, they shouldn't horn in on my growleries.

Typically, when asked whether women should necessarily be excluded from "growleries" that happen to offer access to social or political structures of power, reenactors like Wes will reply that once women *do* gain access to those structures, they tend to become as hierarchical and hungry for power as men--in other words, that such behavior is shaped by the nature of military and political institutions (an argument which tends to work against the view of gender identity itself as biologically determined).

Reenactors' view of certain social systems as more natural and comfortable than others is also reflected in their views about history. They tend to have an overriding belief in the integrity of historical fact, often stating that attention to facts, particularly material facts, allows people to "reach their own conclusions" about what happened in history and what it meant. The woman quoted above feels the schools in her area "emphasize conceptual thinking at the expense of facts," leaving students without that necessary foundation. She and many others, when I asked how they thought history should be taught, said that students should be allowed to make up their own minds based on a set of unimpeachable information. Rob Robitaille echoed many reenactors when he expressed a dislike of teaching that promotes a particular viewpoint:

> I think that our systems try to apologize for what we've done and who we are and what made us what we are, instead of just saying, "This is what happened, this is what they were thinking, may have been right or wrong, let's not make a judgment today on what they did." If we want to teach ethics, that's another course. But to teach history, it's facts. It's what happened, why it happened at the time, what this party was thinking, what that party was thinking. And they don't do that. They try to take a slant on it now, and say, "Well, this was terrible and we should have never done that." And they end up focusing on something irrelevant and missing all the people and things and events that were very relevant.

A recent letter to the editor of the Camp Chase Gazette described the writer's disgust at his recent experience of taking a university history course:

> I was shocked that even a class on Civil War history was more about politics and racism than the actual conflict. By the time the class was over, I felt that the attitude towards the soldiers was one of "We don't care!" it was as if the sacrifice itself meant nothing for all the time that was spent [in the class] on the war itself. (Camp Chase Gazette 24/5, 6)[7]

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[7]This letter, which articulates with tremendous clarity many opinions representative of reenactor culture, is included in its entirety as Appendix B. It is worth noting that the writer praises the movie "Dead Poets Society" for portraying a teacher who awakens his students to "the joy of life" through the study of poetry; an alternate reading of the film is that it shows a teacher encouraging his students to look beyond the traditional hierarchical and militaristic definitions of manhood that have been offered to them in their upbringing and education. Indeed, the primary rebellion that takes place within the film is against a particularly traditional father who counters his son's desire for a different experience of life

Even when the point of view being promoted is a congenial one, some reenactors still seem leery of an overtly interpretive stance. One Union commander who stated that he believed his sympathies would have been with the north in the Civil War nonetheless felt that any pro-northern version of history was wrong:

> I think the history books are all slanted and one-sided. I mean, they don't tell the true story of any war. The victors always write the books, right? So how are they going to write it? They're going to write it in their favor. I think that history ought to be taught from the actual archives of letters and dictionaries and diaries of people that were actually there, not some historian that's putting together a history book to sell to the schools.

Implicit in these views about history and education is the belief that reenactors themselves promote no particular ideology--that they are purely and simply presenting and representing basic facts about history, for the public to do with as they want. Reenactors delight in pointing out historical contradictions and anomalies (for example, the fact that there were both pockets of Unionism and free black Confederate soldiers in the wartime south), as though to prove the impossibility of taking any definite stance on historical material. Believing that "In many books you can pick up a bias," a reenactor/researcher from Ontario sought to include "the good, the bad, and the ugly" when he wrote a volume about his unit's history, relying heavily on material directly from the regimental record, eschewing any explicit intrepretation, and not viewing his own emphasis on military maneuvers and individual soldiers' experiences as itself interpretive.

Underlying many reenactor beliefs about gender, nationality, history, and other components of identity, then, is a sense that certain aspects of identity are--or once were, or should be--absolute and unassailable. However, the age in which contemporary Civil War reenactors live has presented them with a troubling historical fact: from many directions at once, old self-evident truths are being deconstructed to suggest that their character is conditional and that many different biases have contributed to their construction. If white male Americanism is at the heart of the reenactor constituency, it is the *age* of most reenactors--the central core of the community who are between thirty and fifty years old--that has perhaps most decisively shaped Civil War reenactment in its contemporary form. These reenactors live in an age when "immutable" truths are being challenged, and they use reenactment--either as a means of defiance, escapism, or gradual accommodation--as a way of responding to those challenges.

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by threatening to transfer the boy to a military school.

Challenges to immutability

The preponderence of Civil War reenactors from the post-World-War-II generation may have a significance that points in two directions: back, to what Tom Engelhardt and others (Linenthal and Engelhardt 1996) have termed the "culture of victory" that followed American successes against Germany and Japan in 1945, and forward, to the growing "culture of defeat" and questioning of national purpose and identity that emerged as the events of the Vietnam War abroad and concurrent social changes at home began to affect the national consciousness. "Vietnam was an acid bath in which received myths dissolved, and so presented a serious threat to the nation's very sense of self," Marilyn Young writes in "Dangerous history: Vietnam and the 'Good War'" (in Linenthal and Engelhardt, 201). In the same collection, Michael Sherry adds,

> Increasingly under strain...patriotic culture split apart during the Vietnam War. Diminishing faith in the necessity and practicality of enforcing U.S. hegemony abroad was the overarching cause; detached from a widely shared vision of American power, patriotic culture had to change. (97)

A large number of my interview respondents were sons and daughters of World War II veterans, who grew up with a set of stories--some related first-hand by their own fathers--which reinforced an image of America as always fighting for the right causes, an America whose essential nature had not yet been seriously called into question by its white, middle-class citizens. Representative of these is a reenactor in a Rhode Island unit whose father, a World War II veteran, had fought at Guadalcanal and other battles in the Pacific. "It was a good thing, you know, knowing what the old man had done," this reenactor said of his boyhood consciousness of his father's role in "the good war." Although in his youth he had been fully prepared to continue a military tradition extending back several generations within his family, and said he would have considered it his duty to serve in Vietnam had he been drafted, his encounters with anti-war sentiment during his college years changed his views radically, and "literally within a single year I went from being gung-ho to being out on the street protesting." Despite the rapid shift in his thinking about Vietnam, this man told me he still feels a great deal of reverence for American military tradition, even though he has not shared in it himself.

Of course, he *does* share in it to some extent--or at least in an idealized version of it--through his activities as a reenactor. The intersection of age and core demographic categories represented in the reenactor community suggest very strongly that in its contemporary form, reenactment bridges a gap between the perceived world of the immediate post-World War II era and the apparently more problematic world of the present. In listening to reenactors talk about their lives and watching how they respond to instances of contestation around issues of national, ethnic, and gender identity, it becomes clear that

many are seeking a place and a means by which they can reconcile the world as they thought they knew it--where men were men, women were women, no one asked whether history was true, and Americans only fought wars for just causes--with the much more questioning, self-conscious society in which we now live. Civil War reenactors, then, present an oppositional view of history and society insofar as they seek to counter many social and intellectual trends--feminism, multiculturalism, deconstructionism--currently operating in the culture around them.

Reenactors' awareness of these trends manifests itself in many ways. Their extreme unwillingness to engage in overt interpretation of historical facts, as noted above, is perhaps foremost among these. My sense is that what reenactors are seeking in this avoidance of interpretation is a set of facts that cannot be challenged or deconstructed, and a presentation of history based so entirely on provable details and first-person accounts that no one can accuse its purveyors of being biased. Evading the recognition that any selection of material from the historical record--including the selections they themselves make--is inevitably interpretive, they insist that teaching history need not be complex: it should be a matter of putting facts in front of students, and letting them develop their own perspectives.

Implied in this view seems to be the feeling that if one set of people is to be denied the version of history they have always felt comfortable with and believe in, then no one else is entitled to use the public educational system to promote a version obviously tailored to different needs. Another way of viewing reenactors' approach to history is that on some level they themselves do recognize the validity of deconstructionist approaches to historical material--hence their avowed distrust of interpretation--yet they still seek the comfort of some ultimately knowable, familiar historical "truth." Their presentation of history, so minutely focused on material surfaces on the one hand, so affectively and idiosyncratically rich on the other, may be a way of reconciling the realities of the present with the memories of a real and imagined past.

Reenactors' tendency to focus on ordinary citizens and soldiers may also be a form of response to criticism of mythic, larger-than-life, "great man" versions of history. Although most reenactors have particular heroes within the Civil War pantheon, they also tend to state that "the common soldier" or "the little guy" on both sides of the conflict was the real hero of the war. When I asked Rob Robitaille who his Civil War heroes were, he told me,

> Just the riflemen. Just the footsoldier. Oh, God, I've got such a great respect for--you listen to some quotes from Patton, you know, World War II, and he says all the machinery, all the high-tech that we have, it still comes down to the American footsoldier with an M1 grand in his hand that's going to win this war. And did. How much, I mean, how much more respect can you have for a person,

> than, you know, puts on the uniform, puts on the gear, carries a rifle, knows how to use it... The greatest respect goes to the footsoldier. No doubt about it.

Rob was typical of most of my respondents in his admiration for and focus on the ordinary soldiers of the Civil War. It seemed to me that this evinced the sense of solidarity with working-class values and ancestry shown by many reenactors, but also perhaps that this focus allows those who feel the primacy of the Civil War story to be under attack to remain connected to the images and narratives they love without attaching themselves explicitly to historical characters more closely associated with definite ideological stances.[8]

Another sign of reenactors' awareness of the challenges facing their received views of themselves and America can be seen in their comments about the Vietnam War. The man whose readiness for duty changed to college protests within a year was atypical, in that most reenactors expressed a dislike of the anti-war protest movement as well as of the aims of the war itself. However, their responses to my questions about Vietnam were ambivalent at best; I found no one who felt that the war had been waged in a good cause, or that its outcome for the nation had been generally positive. Given the predisposition of most of my informants to support military expressions of American strength, even ambivalence was a striking statement, and told me how troubling the Vietnam War's legacy still is for many raised to believe that America's wars were by definition righteous ones.

This ambivalence can be seen in the responses of many of my respondents to questions about Vietnam. Even Rob Robitaille, usually extremely clear and decided in his opinions, hedged when I asked him whether he thought the U.S. should have been in Vietnam, saying, "No. It was purely a Communist, Communism, trying to stop the tide of Communism--now that's something that can be debated forever, because what if we didn't?" At the other end of the political spectrum, the unusually left-leaning reenactor mentioned above also admitted to a mix of feelings on the subject. His family was against the war, and he himself was in college for most of the time when he might have been subject to the military draft, making "every effort to avoid it." Yet he describes these efforts as "a guilty thing," citing the men in his reenactor unit who had no way out of the draft and "saw a lot of horror" as a result. Despite his anti-war sentiments, this reenactor was not a protestor; he felt isolated in a small town where the primary employer was a military contractor, and "didn't know how" to raise his voice against the war. "I didn't like

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[8]There are of course many possible readings for this strong sense of identification with the common footsoldier. Perhaps primary among them is that reenactors, seeking as "real" an experience of Civil War life as possible, generally choose a portrayal that is easily replicable and also as close as possible to their own experience or image of modern military service. It may also be that their emphasis on disseminating this information through public education reflects their desire to reinforce a positive view of the military, which they feel to be under threat in contemporary society.

the hippies, either," he said. "*Everybody* scared *me*!" Another reenactor, who also successfully avoided the draft, resolves the dilemma of American involvement in Vietnam in his own mind by blaming insufficiently strong political leadership:

> My philosophy of Vietnam was that we had a president with a lot of backbone. He backed Khrushchev down without incident. And I think that if he was not assassinated Vietnam would have been over before the year was over.

Only one of my interview informants was a Vietnam combat veteran; this man, badly wounded in 1967, admitted that he had no real knowledge of the issues implicit in the conflict before he was drafted, learning about them only after he had been sent home. Again, this reenactor was generally quite direct in his statements, and had had many positive things to say about his stint in the Marine Corps and the sense of identity and self-worth it had given him. Yet when I asked him about how he now felt about his experiences in Vietnam, his answers became much more circuitous, as though he wanted to make another positive statement but had difficulty in carrying it through:

> I saw another side of the world which I experienced, and I don't want to wish that on my kids or anyone else, but it was something else that I experienced in life. So I can look in a positive way at this particular incident, although at the time it may not have been as positive because of the circumstances and what happened, leading up to the circumstances, and then what happened after the particular event that happened on that particular day [when he was wounded].

For reenactors who were strongly against the war, direct statements on the subject seem relatively easy; others, clearly caught between patriotic loyalty and unresolved doubts, tended to offer answers that went back and forth or around and around, illlustrating, I think, just how profoundly the Vietnam War unsettled the generation of Americans who came of age under its shadow. Only one reenactor offered an explicit consideration of how the experience of Vietnam makes the Civil War--distant in time but comfortingly familiar in subject matter and iconography--so appealing to contemporary reenactors:

> You know, a lot of the guys in [our unit] were in the service, but the Civil War really, like woke them up. See a lot of them didn't believe in the Vietnam era type thing--now they don't, anyway. But the Civil War thing, once they touch bases with it, it glues them to it and they just can't stop... And I don't understand what that means, but I just think the Civil Was has much more, something going for the people, in my opinion, than Vietnam. Because Vietnam I think was somebody else's war.

Avoidance of overt historical interpretation and ambivalence about the major American war fought in their lifetimes are just two of the ways in which reenactors' awareness of the challenges to their own notions of identity manifest themselves. A vocal and heartfelt dislike of any form of political correctness--one member of the 9th Mass. Battery was angered when a fellow-member used the term "artilleryperson" even in jest--

indicates how deeply reenactors resent any attempt by non-male or non-white groups to alter public behavior or discourse. Although he admitted that "I'm sure there are people who would disagree with me," one member of the 25th Mass. told me that "there are some words in the English language that are [gender] neutral, like 'man.'" Attempts to make language more inclusive or overtly neutral (this man cited the term "selectwoman" as ridiculous and ungainly) are as disliked among reenactors as attempts to suppress the image of the Confederate flag on the grounds that through its usage by white suprenacy groups it is a symbol of hate.[9]

There is a range of responses among reenactors to the challenges of an era when feminism and multiculturalism have become vocal presences in American social life. As I have stated at the beginning of this chapter, there are many reenactors who do not fit all of the demographic categories I have listed as central to "the hobby," and even within the core constituency who *do* match each category there is a variety of views. Some reenactors are angry, resentful, and frustrated over social changes they do not accept and cannot understand. Others are more accepting of these changes in principle, yet disinclined to alter their own patterns of behavior to conform with new social currents. Still others have accepted newer norms and demands with varying degrees of enthusiasm.

But uniting all these responses, I believe, is a reluctance to abandon the stories, imagery, and ideals that have shaped the core constituency of reenactors in powerful and lasting ways. Even when reenactors seem to show an implicit acknowledgement that there may be some validity in the criticisms levelled against patriarchy, capitalism, hegemonic versions of history, and the entire complex of characteristics that has come under attack in the past thirty years, they show an equal or greater aversion to jettisoning those systems. Reenactment seems to offer a buffer zone where contemporary desires can be re-framed as historical presentation, where there is once again a sense of uncomplicated nobility and purpose in being an ordinary American soldier, where reenactors can steep themselves in

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[9]Reenactors contend that the Confederate flag was originally a battle flag, and that they and others who feel a strong connection to the heritage of the historical south should be allowed to fly it to celebrate that heritage if they choose. They often cite the fact that hate crimes have been committed under the stars and stripes as well as under the stars and bars, yet no one blames the American flag for those events. In a fascinating post to the reenactor list on the Internet, a reenactor recently described the historical circumstances that led to the widespread adoption of what is now known as the Confederate flag; in fact, according to this researcher, the flag was originally specific to a particular Confederate army, which in the immediate post-war years successfully gained ascendancy over other veterans' groups and also over the imagery that many people have come to associate with the Confederacy and the 'Old South.' For all their emphasis on primary sources, then, reenactors do seem capable of promoting historical 'truths' whose provenance may be questionable. Chapter V will examine reenactors' use of historical authenticity in more detail.

the still-powerful imagery of a time when social order seemed more clearly defined and it was easy to feel proud of being white, American, a soldier, a gentleman, a lady, a place where it is still possible to glory, as Rob Robitaille does, in the experience of being on the winning side.

Many male reenactors seem to share a sense that they are being expected to apologize, to feel guilty, for the very things that not only make up their identity but that have often made them feel proudest--being strong, being Americans, providing for their families, being willing to fight for their country, feeling connected to a tradition of citizen-soldiery that helped to found the nation and to refine it in the crucible of the Civil War. As one man put it:

> The white male Anglo-Saxon of today really doesn't know what he's supposed to be. Society says one thing,families say another, the media says another, his significant other says another. I think a lot of the younger guys, young to middle-aged guys, are just looking for a simpler day, to where they can go out and not feel guilty about, you know, being quote-unquote "a man." And you know, I think there very much might be something in that, and in the same time, ladies tend to, again, very much like to be treated as a lady, and in reenacting they can do this without feeling guilty... In hindsight, we take the very best things out of probably the most tragic and tumultuous period of our history, and just savor and enjoy those.

In talking about how history is taught in schools, Rob Robitaille echoed this sense of being pressured to feel guilty for who and what he is:

> There's almost like a guilt complex, you know. And I don't agree with that guilt complex at all. I'm proud of everything that--I mean, we made mistakes. Come on, it's not a perfect--the world is not perfect, and we're certainly not perfect in this country. But--we're still the best thing out there. There's no doubt about it. But there's groups and types of people out there that don't see it that way, see the bad of everything, you know. And want to make sure that everybody knows just how ruthless and cruel and, you know, that kind of thing we were. And yeah, we were. That's the way it goes. You know?

It is possible to view Civil War reenactment as a whole as a response to a lost sense of immutability, a sense among a particular segment of the post-World-War-II population that the certainties they had been led to believe they would find in history and society are no longer there. As Jim Cullen has stated in writing about The Civil War in popular culture,

> ...the fear that in this increasingly diverse society, events such as the Civil War (which so many European Americans hold near and dear to their hearts, and in which they have such personal, familial, or assimilationist interests) may become less relevant. In this light, reenacting becomes a ritual...by which a majoritarian United States reassures itself that it, too, has a past, and that that past is as dramatic, interesting, and important as the alternative, multicultural pasts that are increasingly competing with it....[T]he Civil War has become a banner around which millions can rally, a point of reference that can shore up a center that fears it may not hold. (199)

Civil War reenactment, then, is a cultural performance which responds not only to the

powerful social drama of the American Civil War but also to the realities of the performers' contemporary lives. Out of their personal pasts and their desires for the future, reenactors create a version of Civil War reality that allows them to remain connected or to reconnect with important emotions, experiences, and images that have been challenged in their everyday lives.

As a performance, however, Civil War reenactment is much more than a static object that can be described and delineated once and for all. As Victor Turner and others have shown, ritual, theatrical, and other performative behaviors are both multivocal and processual, subject to a multiplicity of influences and changing over time. It has not been my purpose in this paper to examine the interrelationship between reenactors and their various audiences--students, spectators, and others--but to view reenactment from within, as it is experienced by its participants. Even with this insular view, however, it is possible to see, along with statements of particular belief and identity, processes of negotiation and adaptation. For many, reenactment seems to provide a safe and familiar environment in which ideals can be not only expressed and acted out, but also to some extent examined and questioned as well. This examination is extremely muted, but it forms a subtext to reenactors' performance, often implying an indirect admission that at least some of the criticisms levelled against traditional versions of history and identity may be justified.

Thus for all their stated faith in free enterprise, reenactors tend to deplore those who seek to "make a buck" from their performances, or from the packaging of history in general.[10] For all their familiarity with and surface adherence to hierarchical military models of governance, the great majority of reenactor organizations are extremely egalitarian at heart, operating much more on consensus and personal loyalty than according to either military or democratic rules. Their insistence on avoiding ideological interpretation itself seems to imply a recognition that once an interpretation is clearly put forward, it is subject to challenge by a competing one. A retreat into unquestionable matters of material detail may be their response, as Cullen points out, to the realization that their favored version of the story is now just one contender among many.

Finally, it is fascinating to speculate on the choice of the Civil War itself as a means

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[10]The negotiation between the producers of the film "Gettysburg" and the reenactor community--which provided the thousands of extras used in the film--clearly illustrates reenactors' ambivalence about the rapacious commodification typical of advanced capitalism. Although the community did participate willingly in the film, largely because it mirrored their particular contemporary values and Civil War visions, it did so only after both they and the production company had successfully found a way to frame that participation as a matter of homage, duty, and preservation, rather than simply as part of a profit-making venture.

of expressing a view of a more unified and stable social world. In most ages, and in most societies, group solidarity and common purpose are seldom stronger than in times of national crisis, of which war is usually the most extreme example. Are reenactors, themselves children of a generation who experienced first-hand the exhilaration of a sense of national cohesion, perhaps striving to capture that sense through the simluation of war? Are they, in their endless repetition of archetypal blue versus archetypal gray, iconoclast versus preserver, mutineer versus unionist, expressing what they feel to be true about American identity: that it pulls people, particularly males, in more than one direction at once, demanding that they be both rebel and conformist, both strong and apologetic, both rugged individuals and partakers in the core beliefs of the society they inhabit? Is the representation of the Civil War perhaps the most symbolically accurate statement of the reality that reenactors experience in their daily lives: a society at war with itself, divided in its sense of purpose and identity, grappling with questions for which the old authorities, the old solutions, no longer seem to be the answer?

It is clear that there are many appealing things about the traditional Civil War story for the constituency I have discussed in this chapter. As we have seen in surveying the history of Civil War reenactment, the initial performative and educational presentations of the war were heavily influenced by the white male veterans who had fought in it, and who sought successfully to influence the meaning of the conflict for post-war society. Reenactors today respond strongly to that version of the tale, which resonates with their own experiences of life and their perceptions of how the world is or should be. Yet even here, as with any cultural performance (as succeeding chapters will show) there is room for variation, for negotiation, and for change. It seems possible that the choice of the Civil War as a source of respite and solace may appeal to reenactors *because* of its chaotic history, not in spite of it. For those living in a time of far-reaching social transition, when the future of old versions of identity is by no means clear, it may be profoundly comforting to return imaginatively to a time when America fought bitterly with itself and yet somehow managed to remain united.

Chapter V

The powerful play: Aesthetics and authenticity in Civil War reenactment

That you are here--that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse...

- Walt Whitman

Although the Civil War reenactment community incorporates a range of participants, its core constituency tends to form around a cluster of categories, as I have shown in the preceding chapter. I have also suggested that this community is largely united in its perception of several key components of their identity as immutable and presently under threat by those who question that immutability. The question remains: if this cluster of categories is so central to Civil War reenactment, then why don't all heterosexual conservative white middle-class American male history buffs and military veterans from thirty to fifty years old reenact the Civil War?

A final characteristic might be added to the list to differentiate those who reenact from those who do not: a performative sense. Although there is a wide range of performative abilities among reenactors, from the clumsy to the highly-skilled, virtually all seem to have at least the desire to perform, to express their visions of history and identity in tangible and theatrical ways. Reenactment, then, is an aesthetic production constructed from the particular set of demographic materials discussed in Chapter IV.

In retrospect, I realize that this is the aspect of reenactment that most intrigued me when I first encountered reenactors in Gettysburg. To sit in a meeting room and discuss the Civil War at a "roundtable" seemed like one thing; to put on nineteenth-century clothing and improvise a role in public seemed much more creative, much riskier. There was real audacity, it seemed to me, in making so public a statement of one's inner vision, especially when that vision was frequently derided as regressive by feminists, ethnic minorities,

educators, and others. And although my own views about politics, society, and history are much more in alignment with those who tend to criticize reenactors' presentations of the Civil War, I am still moved by the originality and skill of reenactment as an aesthetic endeavor. Beyond that, I am fascinated by the evidence--much of it extremely subtle--of accommodation and adaptation within a community that exists largely to resist and defy social change.

This chapter will examine Civil War reenactment as an aesthetic, first by taking a brief look at the primary affect created by reenactors and then by discussing in more detail the central value of the reenactor world: "authenticity."

We have already seen some of the broader ways in which reenactment reflects the backgrounds and beliefs of its participants. Chapter V will focus on some of the actual mechanisms by which reenactors create their weekend worlds, showing how "authenticity" may frequently be a surface medium through which reenactors engage in more complex discussions about issues of authority, inclusivity, class, and shifting social consciousness. This discussion will provide the necessary background for Chapter VI, in which I will follow one of the most visible recent debates over historical authenticity--the question of whether to allow women into the ranks disguised as soldiers--to discover how a volatile contemporary issue is being negotiated through the apparent pursuit of more accurate representation of the past.

Emotion and competition

Many of my reenactor acquaintances expressed (and are still expressing) astonishment that I would consider quitting "the hobby" merely because my two-year research project was over. The 10th Mass.'s music sergeant was particularly insistent that I should not sever all my ties to the reenactor community when my research was done. When I explained to him that I did not intend to end friendships irrevocably, but that I needed some distance from the community as a whole while I was writing about it, he asked, "Yes, but do you *feel* it at all?" He wanted to know, I think, whether my largely intellectual interest in reenactment had been touched by the intensely affective aspects of "the hobby." Again and again during my research it became clear that reenactment is a highly-charged emotional activity for most of its participants, perhaps offering them an opportunity to experience and express feelings that seem out of place in the "real" world, or that they can only articulate safely within a familiar, traditional, idealized setting. Affection, anger, frustration, elation, loss--all of these emotions color reenactors' performances, forming a vivid subtext for their portrayal of the Civil War.

Richard Schechner has shown in his model of "restored behavior" how all

performances necessarily make use of actors' personal repertoires of experience and emotion. This is particularly clear in a very subjective undertaking like reenactment, where actors usually develop only a single role, often over a long period of time. Moreover, there are few formal guidelines for performative technique, leaving each reenactor to construct and present an identity based on a largely personal selection of materials. Dean MacCannell and others have seen in some types of cultural performances a particularly immediate relationship between what is being signified and *how* it is signified. As MacCannell writes of the type of cultural performance classified as "spectacle":

> The force of the spectacle derives from its *direct* representation of good and evil, daring, endurance, coordination, cunning, sensuality, luck, pulchritude, and other qualities. Spectacular enactments, when they occur in 'real life,' necessarily involve a great deal of actual good and evil, daring, and so forth in their accomplishment... (235)

One of the things that makes reenactment work as a performance, then, is its extremely close fit between reality and illusion. The camaraderie reenactors "perform" is also an emotion they feel as a result of participating in the contemporary community they have created. Just as Civil War soldiers fought to preserve a particular vision of nationhood and identity, just as the same men fought as veterans for a slightly different vision, reenactors fight--and feel an attendant unease and determination--for their vision of what America is and for their own place in it. The love of country, frustration with opposition and obstruction, uneasiness about social change, and hunger for heroes and mentors felt by contemporary reenactors are not merely copies of the emotions of long-dead soldiers, but extremely vital emotions in the present.

Reenactors frequently deplore the argumentative nature of their community. "In the words of that great American, Rodney King, 'Why can't we all just get along?'" is a plaint often heard at encampments and found on the reenactor list on the Internet, which mirrors all the factionalism and disputatiousness of the "real" community. In my view, contention is a natural product of a culture where so many important emotions are so close to the surface. Indeed, inasmuch as reenactor society serves as a forum for feelings that its participants may otherwise tend to repress, the surprise is not that the Civil War reenactment community is contentious, but rather that it manages to hold together at all. That it does so is evidence of how signficantly, despite their constant disagreement about how to express them, reenactors' core emotions and visions overlap with one another.

The affective element of the reenactor aesthetic can be seen in many of its conventions (for example, the fact that reenactors seem reluctant to put complete faith in any organizational structure, preferring to give a great deal of weight to intuition, affinity, and observation before granting actual, as opposed to merely titular, authority). Similarly,

the second essential aesthetic characteristic of Civil War reenactment, its agonistic quality, emerges in many facets of the activity. The playful, the competitive, the defensive, all appear in reenactor discourse, actions, and beliefs. Reenactors frequently feel themselves to be embattled, fighting not only for a particular view of the past and the present but also for their hobby itself. Gun-control and other laws designed to curb use of weapons and explosives, and legal decisions on issues of inclusivity (which will be discussed in Chapter VI) cast reenactors in the roles of real-life combatants battling political correctness and other forms of left-wing ideology. Within their own community, factionalism is widespread, and even when everyone does happen to get along, mock rivalries spring up within the context of the performance and are perpetuated from year to year, with participants keeping track of who won last time and the time before that. Even in informal exchanges, there is a constantly challenging tone, a quality of testing and pushing, an unending improvised performance. Statements are not simply received, but challenged and transformed. Civil War lore is blended seamlessly with references to popular culture and insider jokes. Members of the 25th Mass. turned the group's admiration for their drummer "Hank" and me into a Beatles routine: first, they decided, Hank and Horace would embark on a world tour, then we would see the "Leather Sole" album, and then would come the inevitable revelation that Hank and Horace had been caught experimenting with a controlled substance known as "hardtack." (Such experimentation, it was noted, had been known to lead to the use of more dangerous substances like "Bill Cutler's breakfasts" and "Mark Slayton's camp coffee.") The group of musicians that joined around the 25th's campfire became known as "Captain Burbank's Lonely Hearts Club Band," after the unit's leader.

While much of this agonistic exchange is humorous, some is not, and even the humorous parts sometimes communicate a more serious intent. At the end of the filming of the "Pickett's Charge" segment of the film "Gettysburg," for example, some of the several thousand reenactors who participated in the scene shouted, upon reaching the stone wall that was their object, "Keep going, boys! Let's take the Visitors' Center!" The riot immediately envisioned by nervous film crew and National Park Service personnel did not materialize, but the moment did encapsulate not only a lingering desire among many southern reenactors to rescript the moment popularly cited as the Confederacy's "high water mark," but also reenactors' sense that they, not the official or commercial portrayers of history, are the ones who share and thus have a right to express the "authentic" spirit of the soldiers who fought the Civil War. This feeling of guardianship, along with the fear that the story they love so much is being wrested from them and from its rightful place in the center of American history, is part and parcel of the view of gender that allocates the "protector" and "defender" roles to males, and of the whole complex of behaviors--from

childhood games to basic training--that teaches men to be competitive. In Homo ludens, his 1950 classic on play, Johan Huizinga saw the interrelationship between the kind of play reenactors engage in and the real wars that both generate and are generated by such play. "[T]he application of the word "play" to battle can hardly be called a conscious metaphor," Huizinga wrote. "Play is battle and battle is play" (41). Historical preservation, rivalries between reenactor factions, gags and puns, staged and impromptu "battles," presentations for the public, attempts to impress or challenge other reenactors with a new piece of equipment or information--all reveal the agonistic nature of reenactment, and all reflect and promote a view of the world as an essentially competitive place, where life is a struggle and where those who would win must constantly hone their competitive skills and keep their powder dry.

Far be it from me: Authenticity in Civil War reenactment

Civil War reenactment, then, is an aesthetic rich in both emotion and competition, grounded in its participants' very strong feelings about the meaning of the Civil War (feelings which often have few, if any, other sympathetic outlets) and their perception of the world as a place of struggle and competition. How do reenactors translate those feelings and that perception into performance? Primarily, they do so by simulating the past. And so the exact nature and extent of that simulation is of crucial importance to all reenactors.

No subject is debated more heatedly or consistently among reenactors than "authenticity." "Authenticity is a dominant value of living history," Richard Handler and William Saxton write, "and we speak of the quest for authenticity to suggest the fervor with which it is pursued" (243). The obvious impossibility of ever truly duplicating the past has not kept Civil War reenactors as a community from moving gradually toward ever more accurate physical (and, to a lesser extent, social) representations of the era they seek to reproduce.[1] Nor is this the only paradox contained in the subject of "authenticity." The concept itself, as used by reenactors, shifts frequently to express many of the tensions and desires implicit in reenactment. The final section of this chapter will examine reenactors' use of the concept of "authenticity" and how it reveals their awareness of themselves as performers.

The Civil War reenacting community divides itself into three primary groups:

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[1]Many veteran reenactors recalled for me the days when they wore uniforms consisting of gray or blue work shirts and trousers from Sears and other makeshift substitutions for the more historically-accurate equipment now available to reenactors. Indeed, the making and selling of reenactor gear and clothing has become a cottage industry, with many full- or part-time merchants (called, following Civil War terminology, "sutlers") operating storefront, mail-order, and traveling businesses.

farbs, hard-cores, and authentics. Not only are the origins of the term "farb" lost in reenactor mythology,[2] but its definition, like those of the others, is impossible to delineate precisely, because each category exists only in relation to the others. "In a way I am still farby," writes one veteran reenactor known to the community as a particularly devoted "hard-core":

> My barrel bands on my Enfield still aren't correct, my slouch hat isn't properly lined, the buttons on my shirt are possibly hard plastic, and I don't have period drawers. There doesn't seem to be a fine line between hardcore authenticity and Farbism. It looks to be a very grey area.
> (Camp Chase Gazette 20:8, 47)

A reenactor who chooses to sleep in a camper may be seen as farby by one who sleeps in a tent, but a tent-dweller who uses a sleeping bag or propane heater on cold nights may be considered "soft" or lacking in dedication to historical reality by fellow tenters who sleep on the ground with only a blanket to keep them warm. Those reenactors, in turn, may be viewed as less than authentic by those who eschew tents altogether, sleeping either under the sky or in improvised forms of shelter.

My home unit, the 10th Mass., was very definitely on the "farb" end of the authenticity scale. Although standards varied among individual members, the group as a whole made no attempt to regulate appearance, and allowed such things as modern eyewear, wristwatches, and sneakers to pass without comment. The females in the music section were not required to make any real attempt to disguise our gender, and despite occasional statements by leaders that the company camp should be "de-farbed" during public hours, modern items such as aluminum cans and plastic bags, along with unit members in modern clothing, were nearly always to be found in the 10th's company street.

The 9th Mass. Battery was considerably more strenuous in its attempts to present an appearance of authenticity. All members were required to own and wear "period"

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[2]The most commonly-offered etymology is that "farb" is short for the phrases "Far be it from authentic..." or "Far be it from me...," used by reenactors to point out one another's deficiencies (as in "far be it from me to tell you you're wrong, but..."). Veteran reenactors discussing the issue on the Internet recently traced the term's use to the Civil War centennial years, in particular to the speech patterns of one particular prominent early reenactor. Alternative (if unlikely) etymologies include: an acronym for "Fast and Researchless Buying"; a derivation of the German "farbische" ("manufactured") or "farbe" ("color," implying bright or inappropriate colors); a reference to Farberware, presumably the favored camp cookware for early reenactors. In an interesting recent twist, paralleling the appropriation of racial or other epithets by the groups thus labelled (for example, "queer" as used in a positive sense by members of the gay community), those who feel they have been labelled as "farbs" sometimes suggest that the true farbs are those who seek to denigrate rather than educate their fellow reenactors. "I would opine that farbishness should be equated with rudeness rather than any sort of material measurement," a reenactor wrote in May 1996 on the Internet. (Camp Chase Gazette 18:3, 39)

clothing and gear[3] and the women in the unit were given male names and expected to make some effort to look like men. However, beneath the surface were many of the same anachronisms used more openly by the 10th Mass., such as coolers and propane heaters. The 9th Mass. also belonged to a segment of the reenactment community sometimes referred to jokingly in the Camp Chase Gazette as "The Impedimenta Guard"; the unit carried a great deal of equipment, including a cast iron cookstove, a considerable amount of furniture, and rugs for the floors of the officers' tents. The 9th Mass. was viewed as a rigorously authentic unit by the 10th Mass., while other units saw the 9th as somewhat farby because they did not aspire to the more stripped-down kind of camping that Civil War soldiers would have experienced while on campaign.

The 25th Mass. was slightly closer to that campaign model. Its members, both individually and collectively, tended to bring much less equipment and to camp in a somewhat rougher style. Some, in fact, bordered on the "hard-core" in their use of shebangs rather than enclosed tents, or their preference for occasionally sleeping outside on the ground or eating only what they could carry in with them or "forage" during the encampment. All of the 25th's twentieth-century items were hidden away in a single small tent, the flap of which was kept carefully closed.

I did encounter groups farther along the authenticity scale, like the Canadian 10th Louisiana. As with most units, the 10th LA includes a range of members, some of whom prefer the comfort of a tent with a cot in it at encampments. The two Canadian reenactors whom I interviewed at length, however, were part of a contingent within the unit that prides itself on camping with only the equipment that will fit in a knapsack. Rather than weighing themselves down carrying heavy blankets, these reenactors "spoon" together for warmth at night under the makeshift shelters they contrive from canvas "shelter halves" and rubber ponchos. One of my interview informants joked that "We're not hard-core, we're just hard up!", pointing out that aside from offering an experience closer to the historical model, this was one way to minimize expense in an activity that tends to act as a drain on its participants' pocketbooks.

Some reenactors (particularly those at the extremes of the authenticity scale) scorn those with different approaches. Among reenactors in general, though, there is considerable tolerance for variance in styles, provided no one attempts to impose a single

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[3]In the hair-splitting world of reenactment, even the question of what constitutes "authentic" period gear is disputed. Reenactors argue constantly about which sutlers offer the best reproductions, and which sell only second-rate goods. Some reenactors go so far as to count the number of threads per inch of material to determine whether the copies match the originals with sufficient accuracy.

standard on everyone or to make too strident a claim of superiority. "Reenacting is a great bell shaped curve with most of us in the middle," Camp Chase's editor stated, in an editorial taking the hard-core minority to task for an implicit attempt to dictate standards to the majority (Camp Chase Gazette 21:9, 5). What is clear is that the community as a whole is moving gradually in the direction of greater historical accuracy while maintaining roughly the same proportionate distribution among the three levels of authenticity. As an informal guess (based on observation and conversations with many reenactors), I would place less than 10% of the community in the true "farb" category, less than 10% in the true "hard-core," and the remaining majority somewhere between in the catch-all central category of "authentic," with gradations toward one direction or the other. A 1995 Camp Chase Gazette (12:10, 52-4) survey polled approximately 250 reenactors (an admittedly small and self-selected sample) to derive the following statistics on the issue of authenticity:

Individual impression:
Extremely authentic - 17%
Generally authentic - 79%
Somewhat authentic - 4%
Hardly authentic - 0%

Unit impression:
Extremely authentic - 13%
Generally authentic - 75%
Somewhat authentic - 11%
Hardly authentic - 1%

Other local units:
Extremely authentic - 2%
Generally authentic - 61%
Somewhat authentic - 31%
Hardly authentic - 14%

Other units at national events:
Extremely authentic - 4%
Generally authentic - 76%
Somewhat authentic - 18%
Hardly authentic - 1%

Food/cooking situation:
Totally period... - 18%
Period/some already prepared - 26%
Period/modern mixture - 51%
Mostly/all modern - 5%

Camping situation:
Completely period - 16%
Period - modern items hidden - 80%
Period/modern mixture - 2%
Modern camping - 2%

A veteran reenactor, attemping to define "farbishness" through examples in a 1996 Camp Chase Gazette, offered a useful comparative view of how farbs, authentics, and hard-cores approach some of the common experiences of reenactment. The farb, for instance, "Pops a Bud and guzzles it down"; the authentic reenactor "Discreetly pours a cold one into a tin cup," while the hard-core "Drinks some unknown liquid brought by his pard" and "Spends the next several minutes trying to guess what it is." The farb eats Spam and Dinty Moore stew; the authentic "Eats a good Mulligan and hardtack"; the hard-core "Subsists on greasy pork nodules, hardtack and unknown fuzzy masses from bottom of haversack." Typical attitudes toward reenactment are "Hey, it's fun" (farbs); "It's a hobby and educational, too" (authentics); and "It's a lifestyle" (hard-cores). While obviously tongue-in-cheek, the article, like much reenactor discourse, manages to convey through humor what is difficult to define more pedantically (Camp Chase Gazette 23:5, 52-4).

The boundaries between the categories of authenticity are extremely fluid. To some

extent, individual members of units vary in their dedication to the pursuit of authenticity, although each unit as a whole generally establishes some parameters inside which members are encouraged to remain (particularly on the "farby" end of the scale). Thus the 9th Mass., like many other "authentic" units, made use of many twentieth-century items, but required that they be hidden, especially during public hours. Although the overall trend in "the hobby" is toward greater authenticity, individuals may choose to change in the opposite direction for a range of reasons (advancing age being primary among them). Virtually everyone I talked with admired the zeal of those more authentic than themselves (in my experience the "old guard" of my home unit, the 10th Mass., was unusual in their overt hostility toward more authentic reenactors).

However, not everyone chooses to emulate that zeal. The "authentic" majority of reenactors, despite their surface preoccupation with historical accuracy, bring to their efforts a considerable awareness of the artificiality of their endeavor, and of the limitations and opportunities that artificiality creates. "Farby" reenactors have little patience for the artificiality; "hard-cores" tend to see it as an impediment to true Civil War experience. Most "authentic" reenactors, however, accept and work within that artificial framework. In other words, they approach their activity as a performative endeavor, accepting and embracing the contradictions inherent in any performance.

Approaching reenactment performatively, rather than strictly in relation to literal historical fact or to the possibility of actually recreating that fact, is what enables both the researcher and the reenactor to navigate the territory between past and present, between history and the reenactment of history. Turner (1974, 1982 and elsewhere) has written of the role of "liminality" in culture and cultural performance; Schechner (1985, 1988 and elsewhere) has taken up this theme and examined its specific workings in a wide range of performative behavior. Liminality, in Schechner's view (1985), is "the essence of in-betweenness," a state exemplified by performance, which allows "multiple selves [to] exist in an unresolved dialectical tension" (6). Both Turner and Schechner envision everyday life and performance interweaving, a spiral, in Turner's terms, where "each turn transcends its predecessor" (1982, 14), or, in Schechner's words, a möbius strip, with "each turning into the other" (1985, 14).

In this performative view, there is no contradiction, as there is for researchers or reenactors who take a literal view of the quest for historical accuracy, between the attempt to portray a Civil War soldier and the impossibility of ever completely doing so:

> The beauty of "performative consciousness" is that it activates alternatives: "this" and "that" are both operative simultaneously. In ordinary life people live out destinies--everything appears predetermined: there is scant chance to

> say "Cut, take it again." But performative consciousness is subjunctive, full of alternatives and potentiality. (Schechner 1985, 6)

In Chapter I of this paper we have seen how Turner conceptualized the relationship between this state and the kinds of events ("social dramas") which serve as the impetus for the creation of cultural performance. In this theoretical view, reenactors are reacting performatively to an event so culturally significant--the American Civil War--that it requires ongoing responses from those affected by it. In Chapter II, I examined some of the performative responses to the Civil War over the past 130 years; Chapter IV explored some of the possible reasons why reenactors in our particular era respond to the war the way they do. It remains to examine the extent to which "authentic"--that is, mainstream--reenactors are aware of the performative subtleties of their activity, and finally, in Chapter VI, to examine what occurs when a particular social tension is negotiated through the medium of performance.

Like me, my drummer friend "Hank" is a woman dressed in soldier's clothing. Both of us support our "impressions" with very short haircuts, very tight bras, and as much of a masculine physical projection as we can manage. Unlike me, though, Hank does not remove the earrings from all three holes pierced in her ears. She leaves one in, usually a small black onyx heart. When I questioned her about it, she told me that the earring had several layers of significance. First, she likes to remind herself that she is in fact a woman, although she's dressed as a male soldier. She enjoys the occasional experience of fooling someone who thinks she's headed into the wrong bathroom, but beyond that she recognizes that she's not really fooling either herself or anyone who takes a close look at her. The earring is also a reminder to herself that although by nature she tends to become somewhat obsessive and knows she could easily be drawn into the quest for "total" authenticity, she knows such a search cannot be satisfied and that she will be happier working within a set of limits that seems reasonable to her in her less-obsessed moments. Like the frequently-heard reenactor mantras "Lighten up" and "It's only a hobby," Hank's earring is a way of underscoring that this is *not* reality, but a carefully-contrived illusion. Finally, she told me that there was a historical connotation to the earring. During the Civil War, she's been told, soldiers who could afford it would wear some piece of precious jewelry that could be used to pay for a funeral or their body's return home for burial if they died. Hank enjoys that connection, although she admits onyx and silver will probably not buy her much of a send-off.

Like Hank, the majority of reenactors whom I interviewed and talked with on the subject agreed that the "authenticity" line is extremely arbitrary and subjective, and that

everyone draws it in a slightly different place. For Hank, the line is represented symbolically by the small onyx heart; for others, it is most often expressed through the limits beyond which they are not willing to pursue historical accuracy. "I'm an advocate of 'reasonable authenticity,'" a commanding officer told me. "Your standards have to be reasonable within the confines of the twentieth century." This same officer takes care never to give an order that would be disobeyed; for instance, all-night guard duty, while highly authentic, would be balked at by most reenactors who are at an encampment primarily to have a good time. He added,

> The rank means nothing, and that's where a lot of people get real hung up. They start thinking their stripes or bars or stars on their collar mean something, and no, they don't mean a thing. Because the lowest private and newest recruit in that rank can tell you to pound sand, and there's not a thing you can do about it.

Another reenactor wrote to me that

> I do this as an art form. My impression is just that, my impression. I study this stuff, and I do what I feel I want to express. In my Chaplain impression for instance, I do as I feel I would have done it if it was ME back then. It may be incorrect because I didn't actually live back then, have 19th century ideas and upbringing, but as I say, it's MY impression. Its [sic] not natural for me to try to get inside the mind of my 19th century counterpart. What's natural is for me to project my own personality onto that time period.

Another unit commander deliberately works at keeping the spectacle and emotion of recreated battles from overwhelming him, largely for safety reasons but also because he finds that losing his sense of performing, of being simultaneously himself and someone else, ultimately creates a less convincing illusion. "We had some guys that were really caught up in it," he told me, "and we found that they didn't do well."

Many reenactors have experienced what they call "magic moments" when illusion and reality, past and present, seem to merge. Some feel a sense of "really being there" in the Civil War; others feel rather that they have been transported out of ordinary reality into some different state. These peak performative experiences--seeming very close to what Mihaly Czikszentmihalyi has called "flow"--are usually brief but extremely intense, and those who have had them tend to speak of them in vivid, heightened terms, even many years after the fact. However, reenactors who strive to stay in this state as much as possible, for whom reenactment is a series of opportunities to get high on the experience of time-travel, tend to be unusual and rather marginal in the community. They are the ones who are "really caught up in it," who do not maintain a more consistently balanced performative consciousness as mainstream reenactors do. Similarly, on the other end of the authenticity scale, those like the 10th Mass., who do not choose to enter into the illusion to any great extent, tend to find themselves excluded from the "authentic" middle

ground in reenactment.

The extent to which one's level of authenticity tends to be a personal choice was illustrated for me by my own responses to the 10th Mass.'s overall presentation. Although my role as a researcher was primarily to observe those around me, I found that as a participant in reenactment I was often made uneasy by the 10th's breaches of basic reenactor etiquette. For example, when the music section was standing quite near the crowd of spectators during a battle and one of the young fifers held her camera to her eye for some time, waiting for the cannon to be fired, I suggested that perhaps she wait until closer to the actual moment of firing so as to be less obtrusively anachronistic. My own concern about matching the scene around me was much stronger than the 10th's, and I felt much more comfortable with units like the 25th Mass. whose group sense of authenticity was much closer to my own.

The 10th Mass.'s authenticity sense sometimes reflected a lack of awareness or knowledge, sometimes a deliberate resistance to the norms of the community. This resistance seemed largely an outgrowth of the feelings of its colonel and founder, who had no personal taste for "playing" at war. A World War II combat veteran and one of only a handful of survivors in his Marine unit during the assault on Iwo Jima, the colonel felt battle reenactments to be so contrived and artificial as to be insulting to his memories of the reality of battle. "I'm sure the original Civil War soldiers would be laughing their asses off if they could see us out in the field," he told me, adding that it also seemed ridiculous to him to have a handful of men representing an entire company of soldiers. His literal approach clearly shaped the unit's character, which, as noted in Chapter II, was originally conceived as commemorative in nature, and was established before recreational reenacting had assumed its current form.

The Vietnam combat veteran mentioned in Chapter IV provides a revealing comparison with the 10th's colonel. Although his experience of battle was not unlike the colonel's, (he was one of only three survivors, all wounded, from two squads of men nearly overrun by North Vietnamese soldiers), he found nothing insulting about portraying battle performatively. As he told me, "Other than the similarities of the maneuvers, I don't cross the two between combat experience with the shooting back and forth, anything like that. It's an experience where you, if you have the real combat experience, you learn to appreciate the faking." Where the 10th's colonel saw reenactment as simply a highly inadequate copy, this man seemed able to approach real and mock battles as two entirely different activities with merely surface similiarity. In fact, he felt his experience of true battle actually enhanced his ability to see reenacting for the act that it is:

> When I go out there in a [reenacted] combat situation, I know we're going to portray as close as possible to the real thing, knowing full well that we cannot duplicate it to the point where it's exact. There's going to be points that we're going to miss... I'm clear where that line is, but I think my reason I'm so clear is I'm an ex-Marine, with combat service. So I'm able to draw that line, as opposed to not having anything to draw. If you don't have anything to draw on, you can't draw a conclusion... I know left, I know right, now, you see, this is right down the middle.

This reenactor embraced the artificiality of reenactment, something my unit's colonel was unwilling or unable to do. "Being focused is one thing to putting on a pretty sincere show," the Vietnam veteran told me, articulating his acceptance of the way in which sincerity and illusion coexist in performance.

Another Vietnam veteran, also wounded in action, was equally clear about the distinction between the reality and the performance. "Safety is the line," he told me, articulating an awareness of what Erving Goffman (1974) has termed "keying," or changing the meaning of a behavior by setting it into different contexts. The only "key" the colonel of the 10th Mass. could perceive was that of tangible reality; for others, more attuned to the different pitches made possible by recreational reenactment, there was no essential contradiction in playing a game or staging a performance that happened to look somewhat like war.

The need for safety itself, an issue of crucial concern to reenactors, significantly undermines the possibility for truly accurate representation. Bayonets are not attached during battles; rifle barrels are elevated, not leveled at an approaching "enemy"; artillery pieces usually fire only once every three minutes, no matter how quickly their crews can swab and load them. These are, of course, common-sense considerations. But as I watched the almost ritualistic fervor with which reenactors observe their own safety rules, I began to wonder whether there was also some performative point being made. The constant and vociferous stress on "safety, safety, safety," like the often-repeated phrases "Lighten up" and "We're here to have fun," seem to serve as reminders--like Hank's earring--that this *is* a performance, not reality. Indeed, the pursuit of safety often becomes an integral part of the game or performance. One unit commander told me about watching an officer charge toward the opposing lines with an unsheathed sword pointed directly at the enemy. "For some reason he objected when I tackled him to the ground," the commander said. Some reenactors almost seem to see safety as an art form in itself, a kind of reverse contest to see who can most effectively neutralize the dangerous toys they play with.

The reenactor who stated that "safety is the line" also talked about the times "when that window opens" between imagined and concrete reality. In order to get the window to

open--to experience the "flow" of performance--there must be both an imaginative leap and an intention to remain safe, paradoxically remaining grounded in reality while giving oneself over to the illusion. Despite some surface similarities between reenactment and its historical model, the two are nevertheless utterly different in intent. The possibility of real danger is what makes the window open into the liminal mood of performance, but the intention of staying safe keeps the window from locking shut once the reenactor has passed through it. It seems to be that tightly-controlled territory--between safety and danger, play and reality--that so many reenactors find so exhilarating.

This awareness of the nature of performance--of the necessity of behaving as though the situation is real while remaining cognizant on some level that it is not--emerges from much reenactor discourse and behavior. When Camp Chase surveyed reenactors in 1992,[4] 76% of respondents described themselves as "authenticity purists," yet many of their answers were qualified by statements which reveal their recognition of the impossibility of true isomorphism. Although 69% answered "yes" when asked whether their reenacted impression would blend undetectably into nineteenth-century life, one asked, "Can we really say this?" Another commented, "No one from 1992 would blend in perfectly, you know that...", a third stated, "Let's be honest 99% of us would stand out for various reasons. I don't know anybody who would blend in perfectly." Another felt "it would be arrogant to say I would be undetectable during the CW era." Among the 27% who answered that they believed they would immediately be detected as time-travellers, one said, "So would everyone else!" and another wrote, "I believe anyone would. You can't unlearn a lifetime" (Camp Chase Gazette 20: 1, 30-33).

Perhaps the most telling evidence of reenactors' essentially performative view of their activity was furnished in the first few weeks of my involvement with the reenactment community. I "enlisted" during April 1995, and so had an opportunity to observe reenactors' reactions to the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building that month, and to the subsequent revelation that this act of terrorism had apparently been carried out by people with striking surface similarities to themselves: unregulated white paramilitary groups who met to drill and to express their dissatisfaction with many of the currents of contemporary American society, including, most notably, gun control. Despite these parallels, however, reenactors were appalled by the events in Oklahoma City and dismayed that the public might see them as dangerous gun nuts and reenactment as a potentially anti-social activity. As noted in Chapter IV, the great majority of Civil War reenactors have a

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[4]The total number of responses to this survey was not revealed, although the author's comments lead me to believe it was substantial (perhaps several hundred).

heartfelt belief in existing social institutions (although they often dislike those who inhabit them) and a tendency to express their vision of America through creation, not destruction. "Real" militias, like those connected with the Oklahoma City bombing, clearly approach their activities as a rehearsal for actual battle; but reenactors pitch their military portrayal in a very different key, and are angered by the use of the repertoire of symbols and images they revere (primarily the flag and the American rifleman) for purposes they consider ignoble.

The concept of "authenticity," then, cannot be understood as a simple one-to-one relationship between an item or event from the past and a reproduction of it in the present; and indeed the majority of Civil War reenactors do not seem to understand it in that simplistic way. Another phrase I heard frequently, "The word 'reenactor' contains the word 'actor,'" underscores the performative consciousness most reenactors bring to their activity. And with this shift in perspective, from history to performance, the contradictions that frustrate those at the extremes of the "authenticity" scale, as well as many who have attempted to understand reenacting from outside its boundaries, are placed in an "unresolved dialectical tension" (to use Schechner's term) which allows reenactors to continue not only despite, but perhaps because of, the very impossibility of accomplishing their publicly-stated aim.

Chapter VI

Women in the ranks: Negotiating issues of gender and identity through cultural performance

Among the many topics over which contemporary Civil War reenactors argue, two most frequently provoke a strong reaction: "forced galvanizing"[1] and women in the ranks. In each case, anomalous precedents--Confederates fighting for the Union, women disguised as male soldiers--are invoked in order to justify a performative technique that originates in the present, whether to guarantee more even numbers on the battlefield or to conform to current legal and social views of "male-only" institutions as discriminatory. And in each case, the vigor of the opposition makes it clear that important contemporary issues of identity, not merely historical representation, are at stake.

Either of these issues might serve as a starting-point for a discussion of how contemporary tensions are resisted, negotiated, or accommodated within a community ostensibly dedicated to preserving and portraying the past. However, given the regional focus of my research, I do not feel qualified to examine the issues expressed through opposition to "galvanizing," although these clearly reveal many important things about regional identity and the persistence of Old South mythology, particularly in the imagery of the rebel and its implicit relationship to authority and individualism.

I have chosen therefore in this chapter to follow the debate over women in the ranks, not only because I have more reliable knowledge and experience of it, but also because I see the issue of gender identity as centrally important for Civil War reenactors in all regions. Although the complex of social factors that prompts people to reenact is not

[1]"Galvanizing" refers to the practice of reenactors switching from one side to the other. Although some units willingly do both Union and Confederate "impressions," controversy arises when event organizers, usually attempting to ensure enough Union troops at events in the south, require that Confederate units be willing to galvanize for at least a portion of the weekend. Opponents of forced galvanizing often cite their strong emotional ties to the Confederate cause or to ancestors who fought for that cause, maintaining that to wear a blue uniform would make a mockery of their reasons for reenacting.

reducible to any single issue, I believe that questions of gender are more inextricably enmeshed with the whole than are, for example, questions of ethnicity, class, or political views. Even in a more narrowly-defined issue like southern regionalism, the presence of gender-related questions is readily apparent; the iconography of the southern belle and the beleaguered but indominable rebel is imbued with a particular and still-vivid set of gender roles and relationships.

Although Civil War reenacting is a primarily masculine endeavor, then--or rather, *because* it is a primarily masculine endeavor--its parameters and tolerances can best be understood by observing what happens when they are changed or tested by women. This paper will conclude with an examination of an ongoing recent challenge that has polarized and to some extent re-shaped contemporary reenactment: the debate over whether to allow women to portray soldiers.

Prompted by a range of motives from "patriotism and love of adventure to a desire to stay with husbands or lovers who enlisted" (Burgess 1994, xi), a small number of Civil War era women (perhaps several hundred) disguised themselves as men and enlisted to fight in the war. While some were discovered and ejected from the ranks, others maintained the deception for considerable lengths of time, often remaining undetected as women until they were killed, wounded, or ill (or, in a few exceptional cases, until they gave birth in camp). In at least one case, a woman successfully continued the masquerade until 1911, when she, like some of her sister soldiers, attempted to claim veterans' benefits, in this case by moving into an old soldiers' home where her gender was finally revealed (Meyer 96).

In its early years, recreational Civil War reenactment was virtually an all-male activity. When women did begin to participate, they generally did so in traditionally female roles: nurses, soldiers' wives, ladies' aid or sanitary commission workers. Most female reenactors today choose these roles, very occasionally adding a feminist twist by touching on such topics as temperance or female clothing reform. As "the hobby" has evolved, however, a small but growing number of women have chosen to take to the field rather than staying in the camps. One role available to them was that of vivandiere, a woman in a quasi-military uniform who accompanied some regiments as a kind of mascot or nurse. Vivandieres were a historical anomaly as well as a contemporary conundrum. Reenactors often seem uncertain how to make use of them performatively,[2] and it is easy to see how

[2]At one large national event I noticed a group of six or eight vivandieres standing on the battlefield during the fighting, obviously having been told to stay there and not get in the way. Detached from their own units and not apparently given to play-acting in the form of

their "neither fish nor fowl" quality led to their being dropped from most regimental rolls during course of the Civil War. Another kind of compromise, one which seems more generally successful, is to portray a musician, as I chose to do. Aside from slightly removing the female reenactor from the male bastion of the ranks themselves, the musician's role adds a generally-valued and historically-accurate aspect to reenactment, and seems to make most male reenactors more willing to accommodate a woman in their midst.

However, some female reenactors, often having tried a vivandiere or musician role first, eventually choose to personify soldiers. Like their historical counterparts, their motives vary. Some wish to honor the women warriors of the past, but my sense is that many (like myself) simply find the military aspects of reenacting more stimulating than the civilian roles available for women. In Jim Cullen's The Civil War in popular culture, a woman who chooses to reenact as a soldier admits that "I don't want to stand around looking pretty! That's boring" (192). The decentralized nature of Civil War reenactment makes an accurate census impossible, but at a very rough guess, it seemed to me that perhaps half of the mainstream "authentic" units I encountered included one woman soldier. Estimating the male military reenactor population at 20,000, with "authentics" as 75% of the total and an average field strength of ten soldiers per unit, there may be as many as 750 women doing this impression. Even if this figure is extremely high, it is still clear that they appear in in reenactment numbers greatly disproportionate to the historical record, one indication of the extent to which reenactment tends to be used for contemporary purposes rather than to replicate the past.

The presence of "disguised" women reenactors in the ranks has been a hotly-contested issue within the reenactment community over the past decade. Ethologists contend that most "ritualizing" behavior tends to cluster around questions of sexuality, hierarchy, and territory, and the "women in the ranks" debate seems to support this. On the surface it is an argument over whether it is historically accurate and appropriate for females to impersonate male Civil War soldiers, but the longevity of the discussion and the strength of the feelings it evokes in both men and women clearly shows that the issue touches on important issues of gender relationship, access to positions of perceived power, and protection of a valued piece of male territory (perhaps even more highly valued in the case of Civil War reenactors because to a large extent women have already breached that line in the "real" world).

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dodging imaginary bullets or reacting in any way to the battle around them, they made an odd little tableaux. The 9th Mass.'s vivandiere told me of having been asked to help with crowd control during another national event, which had effectively kept her out of the performance itself.

An incident in August 1989 acted as a catalyst for the controversy. At a "living history" (i.e. not a battle recreation) event at the Antietam National Battlefield Park, Lauren Cook Burgess, a member of the 21st Georgia Volunteer Infantry, took to the field as usual under the name of "Larry." Burgess, in real life a university administrator in North Carolina, began reenacting as a fifer, then decided to take a soldier's role. Aware that her "impression" was an unusual one, she had already documented the cases of several women who disguised themselves during the Civil War, including three who fought at Antietam.

Those disguising their gender for any reason inevitably face the dilemma of which bathroom to use.[3] At the Antietam park, Lauren Burgess opted to use the women's room, only to find herself met on exiting by a park ranger who told her that she could not continue to participate as a woman in a soldier's uniform. When she produced documentation of the presence of disguised women soldiers at Antietam, the ranger replied that the park service's policy was that such cases had not been common enough to warrant inclusion in contemporary presentations. After her follow-up protests of a policy she believed to be discriminatory met with continued defense of the policy from park service officials, Burgess filed suit against the Department of the Interior in February 1991. As she told me,

> These fellows' perception of women soldiers as being "oddball" and "eccentric" is really what touched me off about the whole affair--as if women serving as soldiers, by virtue of their sex, were not deserving of the same respect that we accord the male veterans of the Civil War.

Burgess's lawsuit generated a great deal of media attention and controversy outside as well as within the reenactment community (including a show of public support from sixteen members of Congress) before it was decided in March 1993. A U.S. District Court judge found that the exclusion of women soldiers purely on the basis of gender was unconstitutional, and ordered the Antietam park to reverse its policy, setting a precedent for other public lands. Burgess based her case on the premise that anyone presenting a reasonably accurate portrayal of any documented Civil War soldier (including women in disguise) should be granted equal access to participation in reenactment.

Although Burgess's attorney stated that "This ruling says there have [sic] to be one set of rules applicable to everyone" and that "Across the board standards can be maintained" (Camp Chase Gazette 20:5, 60), the question of what constituted an accurate historical impression was not resolved by the ruling. Performative competence and

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[3]My friend Hank and I, waiting in the inevitable line for the women's room at a Virginia event, were tapped on the shoulder by a male reenactor who told us, "Hey, guys, the men's room is down the hall." He was startled to realize his mistake, but we decided to turn it to our advantage. For the remainder of the weekend, no one complained or even seemed to notice when we used the men's room, which was nearly always available, rather than the women's, for which there was always a long line.

historical authenticity remained firmly in the eye of the beholder, as the surrounding debate made very clear. Burgess herself made the point, often repeated by both male and female reenactors who supported her stance, that "Any man who gets into a uniform can walk in and participate as soldiers [sic], regardless of his age, his weight or any other physical attribute. The only time they start talking about physical attributes is with women soldiers" (Camp Chase Gazette 18:5, 40). She added that in an age when gender difference was more strictly defined by attire than it is in our own time, it was considerably easier for women to disguise themselves as soldiers; hence it was not fair to judge contemporary portrayals of these disguised women by twentieth-century standards.

A guest editorial in Camp Chase Gazette on the subject of women in the ranks, written just before Burgess filed her suit, helped launch a lengthy debate in the "Camp Gossip" section, devoted to letters from readers. Editorialist Nicky Hughes stated his opinion that

> ...few, if any, modern female reenactors are willing or able to do this impression correctly... They are women trying to look like men, and everyone who sees them knows it. It is just not good enough. In this hobby we have to make many compromises... Compromising to allow ill-disguised women in the ranks is not a compromise we should have to make...
>
> The issue is not discrimination; it is competence. Women who want to serve in the ranks must do it right, or not at all... They should be proud to portray women of the Civil War era as they were, not as how we might wish they had been. (18:2, 30-31)

Hughes's piece, and many of the replies to it, attempted to defend by flawed logic what was essentially a claim based on emotion. In asserting that the issue was competence, Hughes left male reenactors open to accusations of incompetence from those who supported the presence of women in the ranks. If a woman could be excluded because she was not competently disguised, challengers demanded, then why were men allowed on the field when they were overweight, too old for Civil War service, or otherwise demonstrably inauthentic? If high standards of authenticity were being invoked in the case of women, then why were they not enforced in the case of men?

A wide range of opinions was aired during the exchange of letters following Hughes's editorial. At one end were statements of absolute gender identity and denials that women had ever fought in the Civil War or should ever be allowed to fight in any war. "To contend that there were many who escaped detection, can only be wishful thinking," one wrote (18:8, 6). "[L]adies in drag really wasn't [sic] all that common," another said. "The fact is that most folks avoided being caught in a war zone... That's just the way it was, sorry, I did not write the history" (18:4, 6). "It's simple, women are not fit for combat duty and if we have to fill our ranks with women then we should close down

reenacting," a unit commander wrote (Camp Chase Gazette 18:3, 6), adding that he had found Nicky Hughes's editorial too conciliatory on the subject, a product of "the type of male who has fallen into the trap of the ERA women and the N.O.W. crowd who want to make the red blooded American male into a "yes dear" wimp." Another writer went farther:

> Perhaps the day is near when some of the men in the hobby will decide to dress as laundresses or nurses and give the public another "view" of the war. Would this type of behavior be tolerated? If not, then why? If we are all as equal as the radical feminists want us to be then shouldn't we tear down all existing barriers between the sexes?... Where do we draw the line? Any line?!
>
> Let's take these women's logic a little further. If women should be allowed to portray men then should white people be allowed to portray negroes in black-face?... Why must Abe Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, etc. always be portrayed by men?...
>
> Until these people stop trying to apply 20th century standards to a 19th century topic I suppose we will never get rid of the problem of women wanting to be men... I only hope that objective thinking and logic, as opposed to the usual emotional diatribe, is given a chance to be heard. (18:6, 7, 44)

In this writer's clearly-expressed anxieties that immutable categories of identity were being questioned, one can see what was for many at the heart of the dispute. Despite his appeals to "objective thinking and logic," the writer of the above letter chose to look far beyond what was actually being sought--that female reenactors be allowed to choose a certain documented impression--to focus on the blurring of social roles that such an impression seemed to imply for both past and present.

Burgess, of course, was not the first to blur those lines. With the dawn of women's and ethnic studies in the 1960s and 1970s, traditional perceptions of Western history as centered around white males have been publicly and repeatedly questioned. What made this instance particularly egregious, in the mind of many reenactors, was that the challenge had arisen from within the reenactor community itself, a place where the immutability of historical truth and the centrality of traditional versions of the Civil War tale were supposed by many to be unassailable.

The emotional resistance that many reenactors felt for the idea of admitting women to the ranks was evident in the tone of their discourse about it. Burgess reports that some of the many letters she received personally amounted to "threatening hate mail" toward her and other female reenactors. The commentators at this end of the range of opinion showed little desire to grapple with the question at all, historically, performatively, or otherwise. The overriding desire seemed to be to banish the issue, as many sought to banish all traces of the "real" world at reenactments. "We must remember that we are reenacting history, that which has already happened and cannot be changed!" one reenactor stated (18:8, 6). "Let's keep the 20th century out of our impressions and out of the hobby!"

Once the opening salvos had been fired, the debate (at least as reflected in Camp

Chase) seemed to change somewhat. As the discussion evolved, many reenactors who addressed the issue began to engage the question more as a logistical or performative one. However, two distinct approaches to performance were evident in these responses. Some expressed concern that the admission of women disguised as soldiers would expose the whole enterprise to public and professional ridicule, revealing it as a "mere" performance rather than a serious pursuit of historical knowledge. These reenactors, unlike many of their fellows, did not seem comfortable with the sense of being performers, or to grasp the paradoxes and possibilities that performance offers. "A sloppy attitude towards women in the ranks will only turn this hobby of pride and work into a weekend game of bang-bang your [sic] dead," one reenactor wrote (Camp Chase 18:5, 6). "[I]f the public is watching I am sure it looks silly to them when they see a lady dressed as a soldier," another said (18:4, 6). In Hughes's editorial, he expressed his concern that "history professionals," always eager to point out reenactors' shortcomings, would seize on the presence of incompetently disguised women in the ranks as an opportunity for deriding 'the hobby.' "The public will notice and laugh too," he added, "and the seriousness of our intent and the truths we try so hard to present will be obscured" (18:2, 30).

A related objection was raised by those (for example, Camp Chase's publisher, in a 1991 column) who felt that a few hundred disguised women among millions of male soldiers were being represented in disproportionately large numbers at reenactments. Supporters of women in the ranks continued to counter these arguments by pointing out that there were many male reenactors whose impressions fell far short of historical accuracy, and so exposed the whole enterprise to ridicule, or that many specialized impressions appeared frequently and disproportionately at encampments. Some opponents suggested using the issue as a starting-point for a general cleaning of everyone's house; supporters replied that this side-stepped the central issue of whether women should be allowed to choose to portray a disguised female soldier.

Other voices speaking of performative issues were clearly more comfortable with reenactment as a performance. In general, in fact, the farther along the continuum from opposition to support, the more abstract were the terms in which performative considerations were raised. Supporters of women in the ranks often seemed more able to see the entire enterprise of reenactment in a broader historical and aesthetic perspective. "We are living in a different century from the one we are attempting to portray, and to bring the two together we must compromise," one reenactor wrote to Camp Chase (18:3, 6). "Requiring perfection from only one class of participants is an unreasonable expectation." Another noted that "My unit strives for pure authenticity in everything we do, however, we haven't lost touch with the fact that this is a hobby" (18:6, 7). One of Burgess's fellow

female soldiers, linking historical and performative issues, wrote,

> If competency and historical accuracy are the standards, any judgements made on other considerations constitutes discrimination, which was a central issue of the Civil War... Aren't we trying to edit history to suit our own priorities? (18:4, 6)

In an overt reference to reenacting's performative nature, one writer stated, "If you can't comprehend the fact that we are reenACTing, not re-creating, then the legal system is all that is left" (18:5, 6). Another phrased the same idea in these terms:

> The root word of reenacting is ACT. Reenactments are merely staged reproductions of past events and life-styles--performed, if you will, by 20th century men and women. Reenacting is a contemporary hobby--not an archetype of the past. (18:8, 6)

These writers and others chose to emphasize the performative definition of the word "act," as opposed to the sense of "acting" as a form of "doing." Many of those who opposed the admission of women into the ranks seemed to view their activity more in terms of the latter definition than the former, showing a more literal approach to reenactment. In general, a survey of the written responses to the issue of women in the ranks seems to indicate that those who were most willing to accommodate the portrayal were those who took the most overtly performative view of their activity. Those who realized the impossibility of isomorphism were most comfortable working within the paradox of their simultaneous roles in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

I read this as a possible indication that skill at performing--that is, at negotiating the balance between illusion and reality--may enable performers better to negotiate complex and contested social situations. It seems possible to me that the tolerance for working with multiple realities fostered in performance may be transferable to everyday life, diminishing the tendency to polarize issues into simple questions of either/or. In other words, although a desire for immutability may perhaps motivate many reenactors, their very activity as performers--particularly for those who become highly skilled at straddling illusion and reality--may work against that desire and ultimately allow them to coexist with others whose opinions they may not cognitively share.

This possibility seems supported by the current state of the debate over women in the reenactor ranks. First, the historical precedent is no longer disputed. Lauren Burgess herself says that

> The obvious consensus that has emerged in the reenacting community is that women, historically, did serve in the ranks. Prior to my lawsuit, I found that many reenactors were not willing to admit that this even happened. Now, instead of saying, "No women in uniform," reenactor event rules say, "you can portray a woman soldier if you can document that a woman fought in this particular battle." The latter is still discriminatory and actionable, unless event organizers specify that all male participants have to document their impressions,

> as well. But at least now there is some acknowledgement among opponents that a female soldier impression could be historically correct. (Personal correspondence, February 1997)

There are indications that reenactors are continuing, with increasing subtlety, to explore the many facets of the issue; for instance, a recent issue of Camp Chase featured a reprinted address from an 1895 Union veterans' meeting on the subject of women's many roles during the Civil War (including the few who served as soldiers) followed by an article about men who dressed as women in the mid-19th century. The brief biography of the author of the second article stated that he "feels any well researched impression, correctly done, should be accepted by the hobby and that history, like life, is in shades of gray rather than black and white" (22:8, 43). Burgess herself notes that "Surprisingly, very little appeared in publications from reenactors opposed to women in the ranks after the [legal] decision was rendered," crediting this fact, in large part, to an article she wrote for Camp Chase describing her research and providing the kind of reference to the historical record which is accorded great currency among most reenactors.

That the issue remains volatile was shown by the vigor of the renewed argument over the subject when the organizers of a recent national event chose to restrict female soldiers' participation as narrowly as legally possible,[4] and by a second lawsuit filed in federal court by an Arkansas woman allegedly barred from participating in a reenactment as a cavalryman. The editor of Camp Chase stated of the latter case, "[This] suit reopens the case of Women in the Ranks vs. Tubby Bearded Guys, leaving it to the courts to resolve issues of authenticity that the reenacting community has been unable to decide on its own." The unresolved issue, of course, is not authenticity *per se*, but the questions of gender identity and relationships that are being negotiated through the medium of authenticity.

There seem to be several modes of negotiation open to those grappling with the question of whether (or how) to allow women into the reenactor ranks. Most reenactors seem to choose performative solutions such as setting particular standards for competence or participation. Different approaches to this will be discussed in the final section of this

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[4]The wording in the event rules was as follows:

> Female troops shall be allowed where it can be shown by originals or copies of research documents that therewas a female in the 1862 Battle of Shiloh, in the unit being portrayed, and that the soldier in question does not have the obvious features of a woman.

By contrast, event rules for another national event in the same season left the question much more open and subject to greater individual judgment:

> Women may portray combatants with the approval of their immediate commanders; however, every reasonable effort must be made to disguise that gender! The host reserves the right to determine what is reasonable!

chapter. This mode of negotiation seems generally quite flexible, although it may break down when groups with different standards must perform in proximity for some reason (for example, when an individual unit with a woman in its ranks finds itself brigaded with a larger group with much more stringent authenticity standards). This does not necessarily negate the comment made above about performative consciousness tending to facilitate co-existence; in general, it seems that groups that work together with any regularity eventually agree on standards.

When this does not take place, or when reenactor practices clash with those of a non-reenactor body such as the National Park Service, the legal system offers another method of negotiation. Here it is fascinating to note the operation of one form of redressive social action--the judicial system--on another--historical reenactment. As Victor Turner showed, real-life events ("social dramas") and redressive processes act on one another; similarly, the different genres of redressive action (legal, theatrical, ritual) can also affect one another, as Lauren Burgess's lawsuit has to some extent affected how the Civil War is portrayed by reenactors.[5]

Historical research and presentation, particularly if conveyed through familiar channels, can also speed the process of negotiation. Thus a popular film like "Glory" opened the reenactor community to the presence of black reenactors, previously unrepresented in reenactment. Lauren Burgess's own research into women disguised as soldiers during the Civil War has similarly contributed to a change in thinking about the issue--if not a change of heart--for many reenactors. Indeed, Burgess no longer reenacts, partly as a result of health problems but also because her passion for Civil War history has drawn her more deeply into its study; she now devotes the time she previously spent "fighting" the war to researching the stories of women disguised as soldiers. Her research, presented in print and in person, continues to affect how such women are portrayed and received through reenactment.

Finally, there are a few reenactors who do address the underlying issues of the "women in the ranks" debate directly, eschewing the intervening medium of historical authenticity. One of these is Camp Chase's "Jonah Begone," who delights in exposing the foibles and evasions of the reenactment community, sometimes to the delight and

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[5]Illustrating the effect of the one system on the other, Burgess relates what happened when, arriving at an event in street attire after she had filed her lawsuit, the man registering her attempted to turn her away:

> I simply let them know what my real name was--I generally register as Pvt. Lawrence Burgess, so I told him that I was "Lauren Cook Burgess, you know, the woman [who's] suing the Park Service?"--you should have seen the guy quaking in his boots!!

sometimes the annoyance of his fellow reenactors. In a recent as-yet- unpublished article,[6] he declares, only partially in jest, that it is time for male reenactors to state what it is that they really don't like about the idea of allowing women into their ranks:

> Boys, we are under siege, and are suffering from a common enemy, women. And ourselves. The venerated elders among us remember the happy days of the Sixties, Seventies and early Eighties, when reenacting was almost exclusively a male province and men weren't concerned with fairness, law suits, or what women may think of us. Oh, sure, we kept up and developed that orthodoxy of "authenticity" to camoflauge the fact that we're really reenacting the dirt clod battles of our boyhoods and not the battles of the Civil War, but the situation has pressed itself onto us and we must now act.
>
> The women are taking over and we are losing one of the last great bastions of male sanctuary: The Hobby.

Jonah recommends abandoning the unsuccessful opposition based on standards of authenticity, and telling women bluntly that men simply wish to be left to their own games. "When women are present, the differences are subtle but there nonetheless," he writes. "It puts a finger smear onto our window into the past." It is impossible to know, of course, whether a direct confrontation of such issues helps by airing subtextual material, harms by removing the performative and historical buffer that seems to allow for gradual accommodation of differing views, or simply constitutes another component of an extremely complex process.

The last section of this chapter will examine not so much what is said about women in the ranks, as what seems to be done about it, based on my own observation and experience of how the issue plays itself out in actual performance. Although it seems clear that tension over gender identity is at the root of this reenactor controversy, the wide range of responses, even among those opposed to admitting women soldiers, illustrates both the difficulty of generalizing too broadly about any human activity, and the ways in which performative space and time seem potentially able to to accommodate widely divergent views and practices.

At a 1995 encampment in Rhode Island, I was able to observe a variety of styles among women who dressed as Federal soldiers. At the "farby" end of the scale, I saw a uniformed woman in the ranks who wore nail polish, makeup, a ponytail, and obviously feminine earrings, making no real effort to hide her gender. Typical of the more authentic mid-range was a woman artillerist in the unit I was camping with for the weekend. This woman, middle-aged and quite buxom, was easily detectable as a female, but had cut her

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[6]In fact, this article was generated in part by an ongoing discussion between its author and myself on the subject of gender relationships and Civil War reenactment, an illustration, perhaps, of the ethnographer as observer-participant.

hair very short to enhance her role, and was referred to by her fellow soldiers in the unit as "Wilbur," her male *nom de guerre*. Wilbur sought to fulfil all the duties of an artilleryman, and eagerly took part in skirmishes, drills, and "scenarios." At an event the previous fall, following her scripted directions, Wilbur bolted in panic when the enemy approached, upon which the captain "shot" her for abandoning her post. When members of the crowd remonstrated with the captain for his cruelty, he explained, "I had to shoot her." Wilbur, lying "dead" on the ground, piped up, "Him! You had to shoot *him*!" "She was running away," the captain went on, to Wilbur's dismay. "He! *He* was running away!" she said. (Wilbur's husband pointed out afterward that her efforts to correct the captain had been somewhat undermined by the fact that she was speaking in a high and obviously female voice.) Wilbur, then, finds a general statement of masculinity, rather than a more complete physical portrayal of it, sufficient for her reading of the role.

My drummer friend Hank was also at the Rhode Island encampment, wearing her one earring as a statement of where she draws her own performative lines. In discussing our approaches at this and other events, we discovered that we had similar standards and aspirations. We both took the "impression" somewhat farther than Wilbur did, attempting to lower our voices when we spoke in public, and to imitate masculine stances and mannerisms to some extent. Our efforts were not always as successful as we wished them to be, largely because at the same time we were learning our roles as musicians, which demanded a different kind of concentration. However, we shared a sense that there was more we could do to create a convincing portrayal; we felt ourselves to be fledgling actors, leaning slightly more toward the "hard-core" end of the scale than Wilbur chose to do.

At the same event I encountered a female soldier who passed so convincingly as a male that it was only after repeated observation that I realized my initial suspicion about her gender was valid. I sought her out to ask her about her own approach to her role, and learned that in everyday life, as well as at reenactments, she is strongly drawn toward active and male-dominated pursuits (she is an Emergency Medical Technician, a horseback rider, a volunteer firefighter, and a scuba-diver). "I don't belong to the Lauren Cook Burgess school," she told me. "My philosophy is, let them find me first. And I make very sure that they *don't* find me." In fact, at that day's battle she had been "wounded," and for half an hour successfully fooled the Christian Commission lady who came to help her. Although her fellow reenactors obviously know her as a female, her impression is good enough that she has been invited to fall in with units known for their historical purity and even their official refusal to allow women in their ranks.

Actual isomorphism would require that a woman in the ranks deceive virtually everyone around her, including her mess-mates. Given the performative nature of

reenacting, with its backstage aspects as well as its onstage ones, this is an obvious impossibility. However, women like the soldier I met in Rhode Island aspire to the next best thing: fooling as many people as possible as often as they can. The *ne plus ultra* is to pull off the deception at close range, as in the above incident. Another reenactor who takes her role as a disguised woman very seriously described what happened when, after several seasons in the ranks, she "outed" herself by presenting the colonel of her battalion with two pictures of herself, one in uniform and one in a ball gown.

> And they passed it around the battalion, and I would say at least three quarters of the guys didn't know that I was female. They're turning to each other and saying, "I didn't know she was a woman. Did you know she was a woman?"... And to me that is the best thing that can happen to me, because it means I'm doing it right.

This soldier, who reenacts under the name of Les, is a member of the "hard-core" contingent of a unit well-known in the reenactor community for the thoroughness of its members' portrayals. Les has made a thorough study of the differences between typical male and female stances and mannerisms, and uses her knowledge to good effect when she is in uniform. At a 1995 event at which I encountered her unit, Les gave me "guy" lessons, explaining that some physical characteristics helped a great deal in passing successfully as male. Flat-chestedness, she believes, is not as much of an asset as is height. Like the woman in Rhode Island, Les is tall. Both are also smokers, another plus. Les pointed out that smoking cigars not only adds to a masculine impression but also tends to lower and roughen a woman's voice somewhat.

The woman in Rhode Island told me that when she bites the paper end off the first cartridge of the day, she always smears a little black powder across her face to giver herself a grubby and unfeminine look. Les, too, finds, dirt a useful element of her disguise. She uses brown theatrical makeup to smudge her complexion and blur the contours of her face. Several women besides Les pointed out to me that wearing a broad-brimmed slouch hat, rather than a more scalp-hugging cap, helps with the disguise.[7] Les used to bind her breasts to flatten her chest, until a memorable battle scenario on a hot day when she suddenly couldn't get her breath and had to be taken off behind some bushes by her filemates and unwrapped. Now she relies on a blanket roll and a loose jacket and vest to disguise her breasts, and wears loose trousers, too.

Les finds that most women attempting to pass as soldiers concentrate only on clothing and other external features, and do not give enough attention to more subtle but very telling details of posture, stance, and mannerism. She pointed out that women

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[7]Passing as a man can be somewhat easier in the Confederate ranks, where there is much greater latitude in matters of uniform. Les's unit is a Confederate one.

frequently tend to interject agreement when listening to someone speak, and to smile and nod a great deal more than men do. She has also analyzed the matter of gait, discovering noticeable differences in how men and women walk. "I clomp!" she told me.

> I clomp everywhere I go, and I drag my heels a bit... You have to roll your shoulders in a bit to hide your chest... Gradually you learn to walk kind of hunched over and looking down, because men always look down...
> A lot of women feel they have to look up and be very strong about the way that they look and they walk, right? And they walk with their hips swinging a little bit, and they walk upright.

Les's tutoring session was a revelation for me. Not only did it illustrate the subtlety with which some reenactors approach their performative tasks, but it opened my eyes to the many unconscious ways in which our gender identities are physicalized and expressed. I had had no idea how often I smiled, nodded, or expressed agreement until Les suggested I try to stop doing it if I wanted to look more convincingly male. I began to notice such behavior in myself and others, in everyday life as well as at reenactments, and to grasp how it related to social interaction, a subject which Erving Goffman has chronicled in great detail. When I turned my toes out and made myself slow my walking pace to match that of the men I was observing, I could feel my stance changing, giving me a glimpse of what it felt like to inhabit a body at once more relaxed about itself and more defensive about what was around it. As I tried to relearn physical habits I had acquired without ever realizing it, it became very clear what Paul Connerton meant when he talked about patterns of authority becoming "sedimented in the body." I began to be able to feel and identify those layers of sediment, and to lift them apart and reorder them somewhat. For the first time I could physically identify the evidence of my own occasional overeagerness to please and conciliate, and to realize that it could be redirected not only through awareness of it, but also through changing my physical presentation--my performance. As I strove to make "Horace" appear more masculine, I was more and more aware of how clearly subtext comes across in any performative situation, and of the specific and personal materials I drew on as I assembled my own "restored behavior."

It also became clear that some women, like those with certain physical attributes, can more easily shed feminine mannerisms or have not acquired as many to begin with. Continuing her discussion about women walking upright and looking around them, Les said, "Well, I can't, I'll walk into things, so I always look down anyway. I trip over things! I'm just a big clod." Les's own background gave her a head start on her soldier impression: she grew up on a farm, with a brother and several male cousins around to foster her own tomboy tendencies. With a strong and outspoken mother as a model, Les learned early to be assertive in her opinions. Her confidence comes across clearly in her

soldier role. Speaking of the line between that role and her "real" self, she said, "I'm not quite sure where the line is. I mean, for me, the line is very, very thin, because Les on the field is the same as Les in street clothes on a street corner... It's the same for me." Lacking her natural level of assertiveness, I found that my own tendency (perhaps still a visibly feminine one) was to try to fade into the scene, to blend rather than to step forward. Horace, I decided, was a shy kid, the kind of teenaged boy who is reluctant to speak in public. When I could remember to keep that shyness serious instead of giving in to a nervous smile, I felt successfully unobtrusive much of the time.

Like me, Les started her career as a reenactor in the music section. Unlike me, however, she belonged to a much more "hard-core" unit. It took her two seasons to work her way fully into the ranks; there was considerable resistance from the men in the unit, who felt a sub-standard impression would detract from their overall performance. At her first event as a soldier, one of her resentful file-mates told her, "Don't let me know you're a woman," and coped with her intrusive presence by ignoring her entirely. After several seasons, however, the men in the group have become extremely proud of her, treating her somewhat as a tomboy younger sister for whom they would cheerfully do anything (they recently joined together to buy her a rifle that, as a university student, she could not afford herself). Interestingly, their apparently-complete acceptance of her as "one of the guys" seems to translate, for some, into a concern that she may have moved too far away from feminine roles in everyday life. As she told me:

> One of the sergeants in our company...said to me that I should act more like a woman because I don't want people to see me as a 'biker bitch.' And I thought, "What the hell!" I said, "I'm not going to put on a front for anybody... My character is me. And I am me, whether I'm in uniform or not, that's the way I am."

Here, it seems, is an instance of a reenactor's desire for some degree of immutability in the realm of gender roles. While admiring Les's portrayal of a man, the sergeant was clearly concerned that there be more of a delineation between that portrayal and her "real" female self, which, in his mind, perhaps cannot be assertive, loud, or grubby. Just as most male reenactors seem uncomfortable with the challenges posed to traditional masculinity by open expression of male homosexuality, they also often seem uneasy about the implications for traditional femininity of women who choose to disguise themselves as men. That this desire for more immutable gender roles was shared by reenactors of both genders was underscored for me when several women who reenact as soldiers told me how the wives of their filemates often assumed, at least initially, that they were either sexually predatory or lesbian.

It is oddly difficult for me to describe how I myself was received as a woman in the

ranks. Although I was attempting to be an active observer of my own behavior and others', I realized that much gender interaction takes place on such subtle levels that although it could be felt and to some degree understood, it is difficult to speak of with any degree of certainty. I can state, therefore, that at various times I felt that the male reenactors around me saw me as a curiosity, a friend, a nuisance, a possible sexual partner, a fifth wheel, "one of the guys," an interloper, someone around whom they had to clean up their language and behavior, someone with whom they could be themselves, a sympathetic listener, and an utterly mysterious being whose purpose in being there they could not begin to imagine. However, most of these were unarticulated expressions, extremely difficult to dissect in a more deliberate way. Moreover, my perceptions were undoubtedly influenced by my own mood as well as that of the men around me, making it difficult to tell, in this dance of the genders, who was leading.

However, it is worthwhile to note that at thirteen encampments over two seasons, my participation as a woman in uniform was never challenged or publicly criticized. People made suggestions for improving my impression only when I solicited them (as I did from Les), and these were offered in a helpful spirit. Several reenactors, in discussing the "women in the ranks" issue with me, complimented me in passing by saying that my own performance was generally good. Many more complimented me unintentionally by mistaking me briefly for a male. Most of the men in the units with which I camped seemed to treat me more or less as one of themselves, especially once I had demonstrated that I was not overly concerned about my physical comfort or appearance. Indeed, it often seemed to me that I had passed muster simply by *not* showing what many men seem to consider typical feminine characteristics such as physical delicacy or a preoccupation with how I looked. Whatever approval I gained was due perhaps as much to not wearing earrings or having long fingernails as to anything else I had done. Among units with higher standards of authenticity, I was often aware that my performance was seen as somewhat farby, and that I was not taken terribly seriously as a reenactor. However, even when I was marching with one of these groups or happened to be in their camp for some reason, I was not openly criticized or challenged. Any disdain anyone felt for my impression or my presence was expressed either privately or not at all.

The norm, then, seems to be accommodation rather than confrontation. The reenactment community is large enough, events numerous enough, and units insular enough that a variety of performative choices can generally be accommodated without denying anyone the opportunity to participate. Often it seems that there is tacit acknowledgement of the impossibility of setting or maintaining any single standard of authenticity, even when event rules imply that such a standard has been established.

Cullen's female-soldier informant describes how the enforcement of those rules can seem to be perhaps conveniently "overlooked" in the midst of all the other performative considerations in play at encampments; describing her first event, at which women were officially prohibited from taking part as soldiers, she says,

> We happened to be in line for rifle inspection, and the commander comes up and he didn't know what was going on... He looked at me right in the face, and he didn't know if I was a young kid or a girl. And he was so flustered trying to get things organized that he didn't know what was going on all weekend. No problem. Never heard another word about it. (192)

Interestingly, I had the sense that it was often women in the ranks themselves who were most willing to criticize others' interpretations of the role openly, seemingly motivated by a desire to police themselves before others could do it for them. "I have no problem going up to a woman and saying, 'You're not doing it right. Change your character,'" Les told me. And the woman at the Rhode Island event declared herself to be similarly blunt about approaching a farbier sister soldier and saying, "Hey, lose the mascara, okay?"

Undoubtedly there is still a great deal of resistance among reenactors to the inclusion of perspectives--like that of the women who disguised themselves as soldiers in order to fight in the Civil War--that tell the story of the war from a very different point of view than the traditional male-centered one. Not all male reenactors go so far as to decry women in the ranks as "vandals at the gates," as does Camp Chase's Jonah Begone. But many still seem to resent not only these women's presence but perhaps even more the contemporary social pressures supporting that presence. There is still a great deal of discussion of the issue, and occasional efforts to restrict women's participation.

However, polling the almost five hundred members of the Internet reenactor list, whose combined experience of reenactment runs into many thousands of years, I heard of only two instances where a woman had actually been ejected from the ranks. Far outweighing these were the many stories (and experiences I both observed and shared) of women who had found considerable support from their "pards." In my two seasons of reenacting, the only ejection I witnessed was for safety reasons,[8] and those I heard about (mostly from members of the 10th Mass.) were for extremely flagrant violations of basic authenticity standards. For all the contention over the issue of women in the reenacted ranks, female soldiers *are* generally tolerated, if not always welcomed. Lauren Burgess herself notes that

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[8]And in this case it was a cannon, not its crew, that was not allowed to participate, although the gun's failure to meet the safety officer's standards did mean that its crew was left without a role to play.

> What I always found interesting was how vituperative the letters were (especially the hate mail), yet not one of those opposed to my impression ever took the time to search me out personally at an event to discuss the matter... The most I ever got at events was people saying rude things loudly behind my back.

To me, this seems to suggest that the multi-layered experience of performance can provide a forum in which even those who seek to resist social change may find a way to coexist with those who work toward it. For some reenactors, this may seem like a defeat; for many social critics, it may seem an insignificant victory. Yet in a world where political and social discourse is increasingly fragmented and polarized, "mere" peaceable coexistence is an achievement to be hoped for and worked toward. In this recreational performative expression--a "liminoid" activity, to use Victor Turner's term for what in preindustrial societies would have been expressed through religious ritual--there seems to be the possibility of common ground in the inexhaustible, endlessly multivalent story of the American Civil War. Although Civil War reenactment was created and is largely inhabited by conservative white males, the story they have chosen to depict can also be used to express much that they seek to escape--multiculturalism, feminism, anti-militarism. And the recent record, as this chapter has shown, suggests that when challenges from those quarters find their way into the world of reenactment, that world is better equipped to deal with them than it might at first appear.

As Turner, Schechner, and others have shown, cultural performances like reenactment are not something wholly distinct from everyday life; they are artificial constructions made out of the same materials, reflecting ourselves to ourselves. In this view, as Schechner states, "Performance is not merely a selective form of data arranged and interpreted; it is behavior itself and carries in itself kernels of originality, making it the subject for further interpretation, the source of further study" (1985, 51).

The view of Civil War reenactment proposed above presents the activity in this light, as a world separate from and yet made out of "real" life, in which we can trace our own preoccupations, tensions, and contradictions. The debate over women in the ranks tells us far more than the simple fact that women often struggle to enter male-dominated settings. It tells us that even those who seem to oppose them most vehemently may be willing to tolerate their presence in order to maintain a larger sense of community, and that resistance and accommodation may paradoxically coexist within the subjunctive atmosphere of performative space and time. It suggests a need for minority opinions to be aired, and aired vocally, along with a seeming desire to achieve general consensus--a trend perhaps mirrored in American politics, where the frequent appearance of outspoken demagogues at both ends of the political spectrum does not seem significantly to alter the preference of

most voters for candidates whose views are closer to the middle of that spectrum. Most important, it shows us that performative endeavors seem to provide a way for those with opposing views to meet on the same field, where, even in disagreement, they are still a part of the same expressive whole.

Conclusion

One of the great attractions of reenactment for its participants is the apparent opportunity to leave the "real world" behind. I say "apparent" because theorists of this kind of behavior have shown, as discussed the preceding pages, that cultural performances and everyday reality are made up of essentially the same materials, and that they respond to and shape one another on many levels. However, the intent to escape is itself highly therapeutic, even if it is somewhat illusory.

Like the "real" reenactors I was studying, I tended to find it jarring when someone at an encampment wanted to talk at any length about my job. There is a wonderful irony in this, in that my job for the past decade has been writing romance novels--books that provide an escapist world for their readers in much the same way that encampments do for reenactors. A further irony is that while I seldom encounter romance readers in the course of my everyday life, I met many at reenactments.

Although I found myself avoiding shop-talk as assiduously as any true reenactor, I could not ignore the potential analogy between what reenactors and romance readers do. Janice Radway has made a compelling case that female readers choose to escape into romance novels because the stories offer an imaginative way to set right some of the tensions of patriarchal culture without actually questioning the basic assumptions of that culture too deeply. Did reenactors, I wondered, make the same imaginative journey, responding instinctively to a sense that the demands of their lives might be unreasonable or contradictory, while framing their response in terms of the very roles and stories that had caused their uneasiness in the first place?

The preceding pages have suggested that this may be very true of Civil War reenactment, whose participants combine a longing for immutable versions of identity and history with a recognition--often in ways that are subtle and themselves somewhat contradictory--of the changeability of history and the complexity of contemporary challenges to traditional systems and forms. Outwardly conservative and escapist, reenactment nevertheless seems to allow its participants not only an opportunity to express a heartfelt allegiance to tradition but also to engage--on a field of their own choosing--troubling issues of identity and social change. This is by no means a straightforward process, as my case study of the "women in the ranks" debate has shown. A yearning for immutability and unity often sits uneasily with an acknowledgement of complex and shifting reality.

However, the medium of performance seems to allow the two to exist

simultaneously in reenactment. And it is here that the analogy with romance-novel reading breaks down. Reading, essentially a solitary, silent activity, offers few, if any, chances to confront or negotiate the stresses that may have prompted the desire to escape. It is difficult to imagine that a social change such as the one typified by the presence of women in the reenactor ranks--heroes who wanted to wear dresses, perhaps?--would be tolerated among the majority of romance readers. And yet the presence of women in uniform, an extremely sore point for many male reenactors, is nonetheless generally tolerated, if not welcomed, perhaps because the act of staging a performance together demands that there be at least surface consensus on this and other difficult questions.

It is the face-to-face, here-and-now nature of performance, as well as its betwixt-and-between character, that seems to both require and foster such accommodation. It seems likely that the processes of performance--of activating alternatives, of being both not and not-not ourselves, as Schechner has shown--may facilitate a shift in thinking that makes us more able to hold opposing ideas in suspension, and to tolerate paradox and tension. Even a reenactor who may declare unequivocally "This is the way things are" subverts that statement by the act of stepping into an imagined identity. Such a step opens the reenactor, however unconsciously, to the reality that things are *not* simply this way or that way. Through publicly and performatively declaring their connection to the story of the American Civil War, reenactors may accomplish something much more subtle, exposing themselves to the complexity of multiple realities and perhaps to some extent equipping themselves to deal with the effects of complexity in their own lives.

In considering this study as a whole, I realize that this was what most fascinated me when I first saw Civil War reenactors in the twilight at Gettysburg six years ago. As one who has tended to remain within the more solitary, silent world of reading and writing, I was moved by reenactors' vivid, tangible statement about how they saw themselves and the world, and by their eagerness to bring that statement to life, where it could be seen, participated in, and challenged by others. It seemed to me then--and still seems to me now --to be an act of courage to make such a bold pronouncement, to express one's passions so publicly, and to test them against other perceptions, other realities.

Although this study has answered many of my initial questions about Civil War reenactment, and provided theoretical frameworks within which I could pursue further research on the same subject, at its core is a tangle of aspiration and behavior that seems, if no longer so mysterious, even more complex and variable than I envisioned. And although my own views have been at odds--often drastically--with the core beliefs of the Civil War reenactment community, I have been struck not only by how a shared performance has been able to make room for those differing perspectives, but also by the necessity, in an

ever more fragmented culture, of finding ways where that kind of coexistence can take place.

This study has also awakened me to the realization that in a society attempting to come to terms with diversity, coexistence may need take place without agreement, and that shared performance seems to be one way to create the conditions required for this delicate balancing act. Although I have resolved many of the paradoxes that first puzzled me about Civil War reenactment, one of the primary remaining ones is that this community, so full of dissent and disagreement, may nonetheless provide a model of sorts for how to achieve consensus in the midst of contestation. As one of my informants phrased it, articulating his own understanding of how he balanced performed and everyday reality, "I know left, I know right, now, you see, this is right down the middle." "Right down the middle" is a place seemingly less and less easy to find in our ever-more disputed cultural landscape, where social discontent increasingly tends to take the form of silent withdrawal from the public debate or violent reaction against it. Yet the majority of reenactors seem to have discovered a path that leads in that direction.

I am left with the question of whether, in a culture where ritual and performative behavior is all too often either archaic or sporadic, Civil War reenactors have intuitively created a kind of cultural performance that enables them to create community and express ideology in ways that are subjective but not exclusionary, based in illusion yet unexpectedly responsive to the everyday world. By stepping into the stage they have created, by invoking and representing a particularly multivalent piece of the past, reenactors are doing something risky and essential, finding a way "right down the middle" between silence and violence, helping to ensure that successive acts in the "social drama" of the Civil War--what Whitman called "the powerful play"--can go on.

APPENDIX A

Fieldwork activities among Civil War reenactors
March 1995-December 1996

(*Events marked with an asterisk were attended as an observer only.)

Unit meetings

13 meetings of the 10th Massachusetts
*2 meetings of the 9th Mass. Battery
1 meeting of the Living History Association, Wilmington VT

Encampments

Charlemont, MA (10th Mass. training camp)	May 1995
Mumford, NY (with 10th Mass.)	July 1995
*Wilmington, VT	July 1995
Lincoln, RI (with 9th Mass.)	September 1995
East Hartford, CT (with 10th Mass.)	September 1995
Uxbridge, MA (with 10th Mass.)	October 1995
Lee, MA (with 10th Mass.)	October 1995
Middletown, VA (with 9th Mass.)	October 1995
Madison, CT (with 10th Mass.)	May 1996
Bristol, RI (with 9th Mass.)	June 1996
*West Hartford, CT	June 1996
Bennington, VT (as independent)	June 1996
Wilmington, VT (with 9th Mass.)	July 1996
Lynchburg, VA (with 25th Mass.)	August 1996
*Boston, MA	August 1996
Millis, MA (with 25th Mass.)	September 1996
Uxbridge, MA (with 10th Mass.)	October 1996

Parades and ceremonies

14 parades and ceremonies with 10th Massachusetts
2 parades with 25th Massachusetts

Rehearsals

more than 30 rehearsals with 10th Massachusetts field music

School presentations

*54th Massachusetts	January 1996
10th Massachusetts	May 1996
*9th Massachusetts, Northampton MA	June 1996

Other events and performances

Amherst, MA Historical Society/10th Mass.	May 1995
Amherst, MA Historical Society/10th Mass.	September 1995
Church pageant, Sutton MA (with 25th Mass.)	November 1995
*54th/55th Massachusetts drill session, Duxbury, MA	April 1996
*Mumford, NY "candlelight tours"	May 1996
Middlefield, MA Town Fair (with 9th Mass.)	August 1996
Ceremony with 10th Mass./104th Infantry	September 1996

Interviews

Total number of interview respondents: 24

Male:		19
Female:		5
Confederate:		4
Union:		20
10th Mass.	6	
9th Mass.	5	
54th Mass.	3	
8th Conn.	2	
25th Mass.	1	
other	3	

Residence:

Massachusetts	15
Connecticut	2
Vermont	2
Ontario	2
Maine	1
New York	1
Rhode Island	1

Occupations represented among interview respondents:

business owner/food supply, community organizer, computer engineer, custodial (3), farrier, museum teacher, painter, postal worker, retail/historical supply store, restaurant manager, retired (2), retired military/EMT teacher, secretary (2), student (2), technician, unemployed, writer/cattle drover/accountant

APPENDIX B

Letter to the editor, Camp Chase Gazette, April 1997

Recently I went to two different schools, and called another and offered to give a talk about the Civil War. I told them I would come to the school in my uniform with all my gear, both Union and Confederate, and talk about what it was like for the soldiers, and have items that the students could view and touch. All three of the schools are are in my local community.

In one case the person behind the desk said she would give my name to the principal and that I would be called. I was, and the offer was turned down. In the case of the high school, my name and number were taken and they said the history teacher would call me. She never did. In the last case, my name and number were given to the principal and there was never a call back. What I had wanted to do was try to make history more real and alive for the students. It seems though, that history is not as important a subject as it used to be, and that honoring those who fought as well as having a sense of our nations [sic] history is anachronistic.

From having taken classes recently at a University, I was shocked that even a class on Civil War history was more about politics and racism than the actual conflict. By the time the class was over, I felt that the attitude towards the soldiers was one of "We don't care!" It was as if the sacrifice meant nothing for all the time that was spent on the war itself.

Out of ten weeks, only one week was spent on the entire four year conflict, and that from a social, racial, and political point of view. I felt that the values and sacrifices of those men and women who lived through it were considered worthless.

Our beloved hobby brings with it a set of values and a camaraderie that is archaic, and anachronistic in a time filled with the word "ME!" When I describe to other people what reenacting is like, and the sense of belonging, community and friendship between reenactors, they at once look almost longingly as if they have missed something in their lives, and at the same time appear perplexed as if my words were foreign. It is sad that the values that we hold close to our hearts, those 19th century ones that encompass, respect, honor, duty, community, others, friendship, and a love and honor of the past, and our heritage as Americans, would now be unusual. When I say that I'm a reenactor and describe the battles and the uniforms and the heat, etc., people questioningly gaze at me with looks of either condescension, or amusement as if I am just a man who never really grew up. When I speak of the past and in reverence for those that fought in our great conflict, and who died, it is as if a curtain comes down over the faces of my listeners and I know that whatever I say, they have closed their ears.

I conjecture that these are people that may have no family history, ties, or roots. They cannot understand my passion for what is past, for they think of "past" as dead, rather than a thing that continues, generation after generation. The concept of an unfolding tapestry of time that ties the past, the present, and the future together is beyond them. They don't realize that those stones thrown into the ponds of time's past create the ripples of today, and that they are throwing their own stones, but I wonder what the consequences of those ripples will be.

In the movie, "Dead Poets Society," Robin Williams is a teacher of poetry who tries to instill in his students the joy of life. He quotes from Walt Whitman's work, "O Me! O Life!" The last two lines of the poem read:

That you are here - that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute
a verse.

Upon reading this work, I reflect that what we believe in, and that which we honor, is so often trampled upon now. But then I am happy that we are here, we have identity and we are each contributing a verse. We support the preservation of Civil War battlefields so

that our history and heritage will not die. We teach the public about this history and make it real, and provide a place for them to bring their families. We ourselves are part of a family, and we are part of the powerful play, and I for one am grateful to be a member of such a company. Like Shakespeare's Henry the V, who said, "We few, we happy few," we are privileged to be part of reenacting. We are fortunate that we have such a common bond, a glue that ties us together in a positive way, and we are in good company.

Ashes of Soldiers
Ashes of Soldiers South or North,
As I muse retrospective murmuring a chant in thought,
The war resumes, again to my sense your shapes,
And again the advance of armies.

Noiseless as mists and vapors,
From their graves in the trenches ascending,
from cemeteries all through Virginia, and Tennessee,
From every point of the compass out of the countless graves,
In wafted clouds, in myriads large,
or squads of twos or threes or single ones they come,
And silently gather round me...

Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass

Alexander H. St. Claire
Pvt. 20th Maine
Oakridge, OR

Camp Chase Gazette 24:5 (April 1997), pp. 6-7

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