Memory of the Civil War in Popular Song

By

Paul J. Edwards

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Introduction: Remembering the Past

John Tasker Howard remarked in his history of American music, that the Civil War era produced so many songs that they “could be arranged in proper sequence to form an actual history of the conflict, its events, its principal characters, and the ideals and principles of the opposing sides.”¹ In this paper, I will explore how historically themed contemporary popular music is constructed and informed by that same era. Specifically, this study will look at three prevailing themes in the antebellum and Civil War era in search of parallels with popular Civil War songs: historicity and fictional romanticization; regionalism and federalism; and masculinity and femininity. What makes this era interesting in a musical context is that the American Civil War was the last major military engagement dedicating millions of Americans (2 million Union soldiers, and 1 million Confederate soldiers) before America’s involvement in World War I. This was the last large-scale war before the invention of the cylinder phonograph in 1877. Before the phonograph and radio, the ability to experience music was kept to the concert hall, prevailing oral traditions, and access to creation and publication of sheet music.

Charles Hamm posits that after the Civil War,

songs in the North, East, and West,...quite understandably had little interest in the problems and struggles of either blacks or whites in the South, and...chose not to write songs dealing with postwar problems in the rest of the country, either. It may have been largely a matter of emotional overload; passions had been at such a fever pitch for so long that there seemed to be little force left.²

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Hamm’s statement rings true with Bill C. Malone’s book *Southern Music, American Music*. Malone’s book skips over the Civil War in describing the history of blackface.\(^3\) For music historians, the Civil War has been an anomaly for exploring the United States in a larger context.

In this era, sheet music publication was nearing its zenith before recordings would become available. Although this is not a study of music publication history, it is of note that the Civil War was a time in which representations on paper was the primary medium of information exchange. The war was well documented in diaries, letters, news, and photography. In the 20\(^{th}\) century the Civil War has dominated literature and art. There is a chronological regression in the way that Hollywood depicted or located action movies. In the years directly following World War II, action movies looked directly back and focused on the fighting of the war against Japan and Germany. Eventually, during the escalation of the Cold War, the Western would become the movie standard. Movies would locate the action even further back in American history. In the early years of the Cold War, the topic of the Civil War returned as a way to discuss war. Thus, the heroes and villains of these movies would be of the Civil War era—Clint Eastwood in *The Outlaw of Josie Wales* (1976), Charleston Heston in *Major Dundee* (1965) and John Wayne in *How the West Was Won* (1962). At once the Civil War was seen both as a way to discuss honor and valor in an American setting and as an escapism to a romantic part of American history. A search on the Internet Movie Database revealed that recently the Civil War has again become an

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Music is deeply related to the period it comes from. The lyrics relate the temperament of the era and become integral in understanding of the period. Popular song is the music of the masses, highly responsive to the changing moods of the times, and as such may not hold the most thoughtful critique of the era. However, as we are looking for the popular perception of history it is appropriate for our purposes to examine these popular songs. It is this popular perception that has become an influential part of how Americans remember the Civil War. As James Davis states in the anthology *Music and History*:

Much Civil War music was used to bind the people, either through political propaganda or by means of declaring one’s loyalties...Singing patriotic songs at rallies and at home was a way for citizens to participate in the war, to be intimately involved in something that was connected to the war movement without being on the front lines.⁵

In this study, we will look at the specific issues of trauma, memory, and cultural shifts as they appear in music. Specifically, we will look at popular songs of the Civil War era as well as contemporary popular songs that continue the narrative themes and traditions of the Civil War. By comparing the past and present we will discover how music works to contain, expand, and control our understanding of our shared history as it relates to the Civil War.

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⁴ I identified these titles through keyword search “American Civil War” on The Internet Movie Database. www.imdb.com.
The Civil War decimated the South, took over 600,000 American lives, and altered the culture of the United States. The high death toll challenged the way Americans previously conceived of mortality, the South struggled with its identity and purpose of secessionism, and women took up a new position within the American culture that had denied them any former participation in male spheres of influence. In this study, we will look at how music helped shape these subjects of the Civil War era.

In the first chapter, I delve into the Good Death, a specific part of the Civil War experience that has become an integral part of how we view sacrifice on the battlefield. When we think of men fighting in the Civil War, we view soldiers from the North and the South as noblemen ready to sacrifice their life for the nation. In song, this was widely represented as showing men going into the next life as witnessing God’s glory and not afraid of the great beyond.

In the next chapter, I delve into the Southern mentality of the loss of the Civil War, known as the Lost Cause. A common expression that accompanied the end of the Civil War is the phrase “the south shall rise again”, a meaningful phrase around the country. Simultaneously it is a question of cultural subordination, military defeat, and economic apathy. In song, the South, “the land of Dixie” has become a wistful place to share the cultural and political importance of the South.

In my final chapter, we focus on the lives of southern women. With figures like Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Tecumseh Sherman, and Jefferson Davis, it is easy to forget the common person, especially the way women were important figures in the war. It is of

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little surprise that women were relegated to the role of waiting wives and mothers on the
homefront. Although women worked as spies, gunrunners, and occupied a host of other
roles, in the songs of the Civil War we find the roles kept in a tight form of masculine
control. However, we will see how women contributed too many different efforts during the
war, from medical and funeral procedures to how they defined the character of the
Confederate nation. In this chapter, we will explore the reality of southern women in the
Civil War as compared to the roles women are portrayed to occupy in song.

While the first chapter will be focusing on death on a massive scale experienced
during the war and its effect on the entire American psyche, the following chapters focus on
the South and the Confederacy as a distinct nation. Few have explored the South as its own
nation as Drew Gilpin Faust has. In the introductions to her books, she discusses how
growing up in the South has shaped the way she explores Southern history. Instead of
viewing the Civil War as just a period of southern rebellion, she fully accepts the idea of the
South as a short lived state with its own perceived national identity. My reading of her three
books has helped define each of the three chapters; the first corresponds to *This Republic of
Suffering*, the second to *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, and the final to *Mother of
Invention*.

In this study I focused on published sheet music and lyrics that would have been
available not only in the urban and rural homefront but also available on the battlefront
where soldiers would rally before battle or sing around the campfire during the war. I take
this as what constitutes popular song for the purpose of this study, and I look at how

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popular songs have transformed the memories of the Civil War. For the purpose of this essay, popular song specifically refers to a piece of music with lyrical accompaniment. The level of popularity is defined by how well a song sells or how well it is known by a mass audience. For example in the 1860s, a song such as “Dixie” would fit the criteria.

Although both the purpose and process of production of popular music has changed, the concept of a “big seller” has remained a constant definition. When it came to selecting modern music to examine in this study, I selected songs by popular musicians that I felt were directly relevant to the topic. They also have RIAA gold records, won Grammy awards, and come from a well-known musical lineage.

The Civil War can be understood as a war over social and cultural difference, where two opposing value systems clashed to assert who was morally superior. For example, the image of the Confederate Battle Flag still raises contention as to its meaning: where one might see a symbol of slavery, others see the memory of rebellion against a tyrannical federal government. Similarly, a song such as “Dixie” poses the question of intended content. Can it be understood as a racist song, or is it an important cultural marker that epitomizes the social structure of the South? The song lyrics can provide a form of escapism, where a narrative takes the listener away from present circumstances and transports them to a different world or era. I will draw connections between the Civil War era’s most important markers: mortality, regionalism, and gender as they relate to contemporary music and how songs of the 20th and 21st century continue to focus on the Civil War; creating the

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same themes that concerned songwriters a century earlier. I will specifically be looking at what is being told and explained through the lyrics of Civil War music.

As Will Hermes of NPR suggests, perhaps the interest in these narratives relates to a return to a specific form of storytelling. As Hermes’ states, perhaps a song about the narrator dying in battle is more inspiring and interesting than “someone lamenting a girl who won't return his text message.”

Each of the following chapters focuses on one of the aforementioned themes and can be taken as its own essay with each following chapter building on the previous. I have been very fortunate to have had professors over the last few semesters interested in my research into Civil War music and national memory. Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow Professor Mark Hertzman of the Center for the Americas allowed me to outline my chapter on the Lost Cause in his course “Black Music in the Americas” and I am grateful for all the advice he has given me for furthering the discourse of this paper. Professor Patricia Hill of History and American Studies also allowed me to work and outline my chapter on the Good Death in her class “The Long 19th Century in American History”. Although the work done for this thesis is specifically focused on music, I purposefully set out on the goal of making this work an interdisciplinary cultural study. Without the help of these professors, my thesis may not have been as focused on the themes selected.

Personal Statement

When I was a freshman at Wesleyan University, I was invited to see *The Last Waltz*. A music documentary, “a rockumentary” filmed by Martin Scorsese. The film chronicles the last performance of the original members of the Band. I was never really aware of the Band until seeing that movie, although I had heard the song “The Weight” before, I never bothered to find out who sung it. After viewing the movie in the Goldsmith Family Cinema, I was struck by the attempt of historicity by the Band. The interviews and personal moments shown by Scorsese added a touch of nostalgia for a bygone era in American history in addition to the concert footage. Although I have come to learn that the footage was at least modestly rehearsed, I wanted to know where they came up with these stories.

When first designing this thesis I was going to look into how the Band and others constructed a musical folk narrative, specifically how musicians create a folkish mystique to their persona and music. However, a year prior to the beginning of my work, Adam Tinkle delved into the topic thoroughly in his thesis, “Back to the Garden: Pastoralism, Country Rock, and Authenticity in the U.S. Counterculture, 1968-1970”.

Dissuaded from retreading on Tinkle’s academic grounds, I came back to a specific moment in the *Last Waltz* movie. The scene is approximately half way through the movie, and members of the Band are sitting on a couch playing a version of “Old Time Religion” on fiddle, guitar, and harmonica. They play the song amazingly sloppy; the fiddle scratches through the song, the harmonica is barely audible, and the guitar is out of tune, but in this short clip, the lead songwriter, Robbie Robertson, comments “it’s not like it used to be.” Scorsese then jumps to a horn section’s lament that leads into “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down.” The song concerned Virgil Cane, a Confederate soldier returning home at the

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end of the Civil War. I didn’t listen thoroughly the first time I heard the song, but the Band over the last four years has become one of the most inspirational musical groups in my life. Coming back to the song over the years has made me question, how did four Canadians and an Arkansawyer come up with a song about the Civil War? This became the nucleus of my thesis. The exact purpose of the thesis has become my search to find how contemporary popular songs are capable of reaching into the past and using the Civil War as not only a setting but as a way of looking at the American pathos.

The contemporary songs I chose all follow a similar criterion as the Band; each song chosen not simply because I like it or relate to it, but because these songs are popular. Beyond the Band, I’ve chosen songs by Wilco, Hank Williams Jr., Justin Townes Earl, and the Decemberists. Each of these musical acts is recognized nationally as popular, with the exception of Justin Townes Earl, each artist has achieved Gold status record sales according to the Recording Industry Association of America. Each group has added import to American music, either through continued musical lineage as Hank Williams Jr. and Justin Townes Earl have done or by delving into the lineages of others as Wilco has done through their commission by Nora Guthrie to record Woody Guthrie lyrics. These musicians have proven to be more than just important to me but also of importance to American popular music history.

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The Good Death in the Civil War Song

In Drew Faust’s book *This Republic of Suffering*, she posits the Civil War marks a turning point in how Americans understood death. For Americans, “loss became commonplace; death was no longer encountered individually; death’s threat, its proximity, and its actuality became the most widely shared of the war’s experience.”¹² One way that this was expressed was through music. As the United States was dealing with the massive loss of life and the burgeoning nature of the military industry, one other major industry that continued to prosper was music publishing. Both the North and South published a treasure trove of music. As John Tasker Howard has written in his study of American music history, the Civil War era produced so many songs that they “could be arranged in proper sequence to form an actual history of the conflict; its events, its principal characters, and the ideals and principles of the opposing sides.”¹³ The purpose of this chapter is to explore how music expressed a shared community during the Civil War era, and how music can retain various concepts and ideals into the present. And do we find the same concepts in contemporary popular songs as those explored in Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering* or are contemporary songs far removed from the 19th century?

The Importance of Music

The reasons for studying the music of the Civil War period are many. Howard has documented both the North and the South were highly productive in music publishing. In

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New Orleans, the Blackmar & Bros. publishing company, published 232 compositions; in the North, Root & Cady published eighty war-related songs and issued 258,000 copies of sheet music and 100,000 music books in 1864. Perhaps even more important is the special quality of the proliferation of music. Unlike other artistic or journalistic products, music, like poems and stories can be recalled and shared with others. In the anthology of Civil War music, David J. Brinkman writes in the foreword,

Perhaps the most important conclusion...is that music does not exist independently of society. Listeners have enjoyed music throughout time for its aesthetic qualities, but music has also been used to convey emotions and ideas. It has been used to enhance patriotic rituals, and to maintain order in social and religious ceremonies...How did the music of the Civil War contribute to the stability of the Union—and to the Confederacy?^{15}

During the Civil War music was produced for a variety of purposes, from patriotic marches, to songs of secessionism to songs for victorious returns.

Faust describes how the South was firmly aware that the printed word was critical in the role of creating a national identity, however all efforts were made by the Union to stop even the procurement of school textbooks, which required an order to be sent to Edinburgh, Virginia. The only stereotyping facility in the South was in Nashville, which was captured by the Union. Faust notes that the limited literacy of the Southern population led to a culture that relied heavily on spoken accounts as a way of disseminating information. In understanding the history of the Confederacy, music became the most important example of “southern orality”. As music was the most produced publication in the South during the war, it became the main mode in which soldiers and those at home could share in an “imagined community”. Even when sheet music was unavailable the nature of music (meter,

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^{15} Ibid, pg ix-x.
rhythm, and rhyme) allowed for the oral tradition to carry on when songs in print were unavailable.16

Dying

From 1861-1865 2.1 million northerners and 880,000 southerners fought in the Civil War. By war’s end over 600,000 people had lost their lives fighting in the conflict. Through this conflict drafted soldiers had to contemplate what it meant to fight and what it meant to die. In this aspect men had to join in the tradition of *ars moriendi*. Established in Jeremy Taylor’s *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*, the book explains “how to give one’s soul ‘gladlye and willfully [sic]’”.17 As Faust points out, America was overwhelmingly Protestant; the Good Death became an important concept for those at home and those in battle. This turned into one of the biggest concerns for young men: the fact that many were fighting and dying far from home. As most soldiers were not surrounded by family, those available, such as fellow soldiers, nurses, chaplains and doctors had to carry on the tasks that would have been relegated to the family. In their dying moments, those around the moribund were to attest to the person’s character. As Faust states “people believed final words to be the truth, both because they thought that a dying person could no longer have any earthly motivation to lie, and because those about to meet their maker would not want to expire bearing false witness.”18 Those who were dying would speak of their religious faith as well as their willing and honorable sacrifice for their country. And in their capacity as a soldier’s family, those who witnessed the death took it upon themselves to pass on the word to the

18 Ibid.
family. For those in the heat of battle, the best that could be done would be to keep paper on hand and pen a letter as one prepared for death. And those that feared they might die instantaneously in battle would pen letters before they went off into battle. The various letters that were sent home became in many ways its own genre. With so many in the field experiencing death around them, it is not surprising that the letters home permeated into songs of the Civil War.\(^{19}\)

Faust comments that “Death transformed the American nation as well as the hundreds of thousands of individuals directly affected by loss.”\(^{20}\) It is this transformation that created the language that persists in American music when reconstructing narratives of the Civil War. Songs of the era were unafraid of tackling the issue of death during the Civil War. Although the music from the era ranged from minstrel music (“Dixie” and “Kingdom Come, Year of the Jubiloh), to marches (“Tramp, Tramp, Tramp”), room was made for songs of the Good Death (“Just Before the Battle, Mother” and “Dead on the Battle Field”). The songs of the Good Death did not stray from gruesome detail despite the fact that the soldiers singing the song around a campfire one night could be fighting and dying the next morning. These fictional songs quote and recall those who have passed. Each song recalls their service and their willingness to fight and those who weep are those outside the battle who recognize the important of their sacrifice. As “Dead on the Battle Field” reveals:

\[
\text{Dead upon the battlefield} \\
\text{The bravest of the brave} \\
\text{In the foremost ranks he nobly fought} \\
\text{And found a soldier’s grave.} \\
\text{His country mourns his loss} \\
\text{A nation o’er him weeps.}
\]

\(^{19}\) Faust, Drew Gilpin. This Republic of Suffering, pg 12-19.  
\(^{20}\) ibid, pg xiii.
But glory guilds the honored name
Our fond remembrance keeps.  

The song is written as a eulogy to one of the thousands of dead soldiers. The ubiquitous experience of death during the 1860s made this song and others a way for soldiers to retain faith in their cause as well as remember those who went before them. The song not only honors the correct sociological responses of the soldier and the nation, but also infers that by fighting in such a noble cause that he has attained immortality through his service.

Many songs gave a chance for those at home as well as on the battlefield to feel a sense of the “imagined community”. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is the song “Be My Mother ‘till I Die” written by Elmer Ruan Coates, which tells the story of a dying soldier who asks an accompanying nurse to portray his mother during his dying hour. As most published songs were accompanied with a reason for publication or a “true story” element to accompany the song, Coates’ song was the story of a soldier who was brought to a house where three sisters took care of the soldier until his death. Faust stipulates the song may have been written after the story of a nurse who was asked to act as the sister of a dying soldier. As was common in the 19th century, people sometimes used the same tune to write a responding set of lyrics. In response to this song, another song was published entitled “ANSWER TO: Let Me Kiss Him for His Mother.”

When considering the concept of the Good Death, contemporary popular songs are still constructing the same narrative. One song that immediately resonated is a song found by the folklorist A.P. Carter called “When the Roses Bloom Again”. Although A.P. Carter

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21 M.L. Hofford “Dead Upon the Battlefield”. 1862.
22 Faust, Drew Gilpin. This Republic of Suffering, pg xiii.
was known for writing some of his own songs, his main talent was in finding songs along the eastern states and reproducing them for recording in the early 20th century. Carter’s lyrics were modified by Woody Guthrie and proliferated by the band Wilco as a b-side from the Woody Guthrie archive project *Mermaid Avenue* in the late 1990s. The song tells the story of an officer who leaves a loved one behind and dies in the midst of battle.

Mid the rattle of the battle
Came a whisper soft and low
A soldier who had fallen in the fray
I am dying, I am dying
And I know I'll have to go
But I want to tell you
Before I pass away

There's a far and distant river
Where the roses are in bloom
A sweetheart who is waiting there for me
And it's there I pray you take me
I've been faithful, don't forsake me
I'll be with her when the roses bloom again

The ending of the song exemplifies a Good Death, as the officer dies with full mental and spiritual faculties and does not fear death. One of the passages in Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering* that immediately draws a parallel was the letter Ethelbert Fairfax wrote for James Robert Montgomery, “I have never witnessed such an exhibition of fortitude and Christian resignation as he showed. In this sad bereavement you will have the greatest of all comforts in knowing that he had made his peace with god and was resigned to his fate” In this letter, there is a clear parallel in how dying men would and should be remembered: a people who nobly fought and died for their country for a great sacred good.

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26 As quoted in Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering* pg 17.
Burying

For the living, the death of a soldier added onto the work at the end of the battle. For the first time in United States history the nation had to deal with such a huge loss of life. Faust makes it clear that although the noble death of a soldier was important, so was the upkeep of the body. To Americans during the Civil War era, the body was something sacred to be taken care of as it belonged to the person as a book or picture might. As soldiers, as well as family and church, were deeply concerned for their physical bodies, officials also made an effort to dispose of bodies as a necessity of the threat to public health. When capable, both sides took time to bury the dead after battle and even place the bodies into coffins. However as the war worsened, the capability to put labor into proper burial was stifled. Up to the end of the war, figuring out how to handle the burial of soldiers was a constant concern.

The concept of “Burying” from the Civil War era has been reclaimed in modern song. “Yankee Bayonet (I Will Be Home Then)” written in 2006 by the band the Decemberists relies on a similar rhetoric of leaving bodies to decompose. The song is narrated by a dead Confederate soldier, who fondly remembers his wife, who reminds her dead husband of the current state he is in. This responds directly with how the dead had to be left due to lack of resources to afford 300,000 dead a proper burial. Where the soldier sings lines such as “Look for me when the sun-bright swallow/Sings upon the birch bow

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27 Faust, Drew Gilpin. This Republic of Suffering, pg 61-65.
high,” his wife responds with “But you are in the ground with the wolves and the weevils/All a-chew on your bones so dry”.

What makes this song so peculiar is the placement of the narrative. This isn’t a story told from the point of view of a dying soldier or from a soldier about to go off to battle, it’s from the already dead unburied body of the soldier. The songs written during the Civil War would have offered a small sense of comfort by placing the story before the soldier had passed away. To the modern day listener of the song, there might be a glimpse of humor in the lyrics, but for those concerned with the disposal of bodies, the lyrics point to a real fear that bodies would not be properly handled after death. Families who could afford it, would have the body brought home if possible and song in this vain would most likely have been too depressing to be of any use to publishers in the 1860s.

**Conclusion**

Faust’s concept of the “imaginary community” may be the best way to understand how modern songs are able to portray the concepts that come from a previous era. However, the very idea of writing home from a far off battlefield has become a common practice from war to war. The nature of the Civil War may have been the first time that such letters were sent at such a high rate. With the massive mobilization of the nation, the fact that music played such a large role in reenacting sociological and cultural roles is not surprising. Music has the ability to not only carry a message or a narrative but also to personify the times in which we live. What several journalists and music critics have commented on is how often songs rely on the tropes of love as a way of exploring a larger

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29 Ibid.
world, but through even more specific songs we can find a more interesting world of discovering our own cultural history.
Regionalism and the Lost Cause Movement

In studying history and culture, understanding the nuances of any era or period has taken precedence for anthropologists, sociologists, and historians. However, the perceived history of the people who lived through the era becomes the dominant narrative. Despite what academics try to bring to light about history, popular belief can often trump historians. In this chapter I will examine how one of America’s biggest myths has permeated and pervaded into popular music and has become one of the firmly held beliefs in American popular history. As mentioned Mark LaSalle’s review of the Civil War movie Cold Mountain,

The South lost the Civil War, but they've won the literature ever since. They even won Ken Burns' "Civil War" documentary...The lost cause of the South has become enshrined as noble, a last gasp of romance and gentility soon to be swept under by an ungainly tide of urbanization, industrialization and immigration.30

LaSalle illuminates the ways in which popular history has become the de facto Civil War history. As the conflict was between sections of the United States, romanticizing the event has become a way for Americans to deal with the harsher truths of Civil War history. In this chapter I will look at how the romantic views of the Civil War have influenced musicians’ understandings of the events of the war and how that subverted view has fed into the larger pathos of the United States.

The songs of the Civil War not only retell stories of battles and the different ideas that each side fought for, but they also outline the prevalent social and political movements

that dictated the lives of Southerners after the Civil War. Where songs written during the war would focus specifically on recapturing events, exultations of military and political leaders, or simply as morale boosters, there are songs that are excluded from Charles Hamm's description of the history of American music, songs of the Lost Cause. Where he mentions the malaise created after the Civil War, we find that in reality a new type of Civil War song arises from the same movement that sweeps the literary and intellectual world of the South.  

**Confederate Nationalism and the Lost Cause**

One part of United States history that is often neglected is the history of the Confederate States of America. Partially due to the idea that “to the victor go the spoils”, the Confederacy is rarely viewed as its own nation-state. But as Drew Gilpin Faust has proved in her studies, the Confederacy had begun to set up not only its own brand of republican democracy, but had also worked on creating national identity by the end of 1860. In this chapter I will show that one of the most compelling and subversive points in creating a rhetoric of nationhood for the Confederacy was through music. “I Wish I Was in Dixie,” a Northern minstrel song that became the anthem of the Southern nation; “I’m A Good Old Rebel,” a Reconstruction era song, and Hank Williams Jr.’s 20th century song “If the South Woulda Won” are all songs that return to the issue of Southern nationhood. These songs show that beyond the political and economic repercussions of forming a new government, there was an earnest attempt at creating, culturally, a new nation.

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31 Hamm, Charles. *Yesterdays*, pg 231.
For historians studying the Civil War, there are several points that are debated when discussing the Lost Cause, also known as the Southern myth or myth of the Lost Cause. However, it should be noted that the beliefs of the Lost Cause vary according to motives for the start of the war and reasons for the loss of the war. One of the most explored tenets of the Lost Cause is the belief that slavery was not an issue of secession. Instead, slavery was a benign institution in which masters were paternal figures to the slaves and that slavery would be abolished progressively within the Confederacy. However, another part of the Lost Cause myth does paint the fight as a poor man’s fight for a rich man’s war, specifically in which non-slaveholders were fighting for the aristocratic slave owners. Another important aspect of the Lost Cause is the belief in Southern nobility in military campaigns and hagiography of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee as opposed to the brutality of Sherman, Sheridan, and Grant’s’ total war policies. The importance of the romanticization of soldiers— not only generals and officers—was to create the image of the noble soldier who fought for higher purposes. Coinciding with the North’s aggressive tactics during the war was the cultural and economic threat the North had over the South, as Southerners were unable to compete with the mass industries of the North. They saw the North as impeding on the Southern way of life.

James McPherson describes the Lost Cause as an understanding that the loss of the war was due not only to external forces but also to forces within. McPherson explains that the internal defeat or the “loss of the will to fight” came through after the Fall of 1863 with Northern victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga and furthered by the capture

of Atlanta and Sheridan’s defeat of Early’s army in the Shenandoah Valley. However, what
McPherson ultimately argues is that each issue of the Lost Cause movement is a fallacy. At
the outset of the war it was the North that was first seized by a feeling of defeatism for the
first few years of the war. For military historians it is impossible to rationalize how the tide
could be turned by victory-related morale boosts.

In Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan’s compendium of essays, *The Myth of the Lost
Cause and Civil War History*, Nolan finds that the Lost Cause narrative began shortly after
the war ended. The term, according to Gallagher, was coined by Edward A. Pollard and first
appeared in his 1867 publication *The Lost Cause: The Standard Southern History of the War
of the Confederates*. From there, Nolan describes how Southern apologists framed the Lost
Cause argument around a myth similar to Germany’s “stabbed-in-the-back” myth. The
entire point of Nolan’s argument is that the Lost Cause is a myth that has overwritten and
erased the history of the cause of the Civil War, and that the victims of the myth have
primarily been the civilian and the common soldier. Nolan explains that by rewriting the
history, it is no longer the narrative of 300,000 deaths fought for the preservation or
dissolution of the Union. It turns, like *Gone with the Wind*, into a story. Retained in this myth
is the character of Southern as intrinsically and racially different: that Northerners are
Anglo-Saxon and Southerners come from the far superior and nobler Norman stock.34

In this chapter we will look at how music preceded, helped create, and perpetuated
the idea of the Lost Cause. Specifically we will look at how Confederate nationalism and the
Lost Cause myth have created a musical dialogue in which music has become one of the
remnant carriers of the short lived nation-state. The ideas first created during the 1860s in

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the South have, for better or worse, become part of the American historical narrative; the ideas of the Lost Cause have become part of popular history. My analysis focuses on two songs from the 1860s and Hank Williams Jr.’s 1980 song “If the South Woulda Won”. Through these three songs I will outline how the Lost Cause myth has permeated and pervaded American popular culture.

“Dixie” and the Birth of a Southern Nation

“I Wish I Was in Dixie” (1859) was written during the Antebellum era in New York City by Daniel Decatur Emmett. “Dixie” traveled from the Northern minstrel stage to the South where it became the anthem of Southern secessionism and became so pervasive within the Lost Cause myth that the song was sung at my mother’s high school in Columbus, Georgia in the 1970s. The song helped establish the word ‘Dixie’ as a reference to the South. Previously, Dixie had three etymological sources, none of which were directly or exclusively tied to the South as a region: the Louisiana currency dix, a popular slave owner in New York named Dixy, and most notable from Congressman Jeremiah Dixon the “Dixon” responsible for the Mason-Dixon line in the Missouri Compromise of 1820.35

The popularity of the song arose from Northern minstrel shows performed first in New York by Bryant’s Minstrels. Although the origin of the music is unknown, the song is believed to originate in Emmett’s youth in Ohio with a neighboring black family.36 The popularity of the song during the Antebellum period points to several elements that would come to define the myth of the Lost Cause. Whereas the first verse portrays a wistful yearning to return to the South, the remaining lyrics focus on the story of a woman who has

35 Cornelius, Steven. Music of the Civil War Era.
36 Ibid, pg 33.
her heart broken, portrayed in a light-hearted fashion. The narrator focuses on the character of a picturesque South, and indeed creates an image of what southern culture means in the popular American mind with its Africanized vernacular.

The song was structured around alternating verse and refrain in an AABC format. “Dixie” was originally set for either a single performer or a small group and as the song grew in popularity the audience sang the “look away” refrain with the performers. In between verses, performers would dance awhile to a fiddle solo.37

The song was popular first in the North, though it became a useful song for the South, as a militant call during the Civil War. For example, a version was titled “Dixie War Song”:

Hear ye not the sounds of battle,
Sabres clash and muskets rattle?
To arms! To arms! To arms in Dixie!
Hostile footsteps on our border,
Hostile columns treat in order
To arms! To arms! To arms in Dixie!

**Chorus**

Oh, fly to arms in Dixie!
To arms! To arms!
From Dixie’s land we’ll route the band,
That comes to conquer Dixie,
To arms! To arms! And route the foe from Dixie.
To arms! To arms! And route the foe from Dixie.38

Another version, called “The Bayou city Guards’ Dixie” specifically targeted Abraham Lincoln

You’ve heard of Abe, the gay deceiver,
Who went to Sumter to relieve her;
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land.
But Beauregard said, “Save your bacon”
Sumter’s ours and must be taken!”

38 ibid, pg 34.
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land.\textsuperscript{39}

The song was used by the North with new lyrics that reflected the changing mood as slavery became a focus of the war. “Dixie Unionized”, mentions slavery explicitly. “O! I’m glad I live in a land of freedom / Where we have no slave nor do we need them”.\textsuperscript{40}

While the original song does involve a prejudiced understanding of race in the South it is interesting to note how this song has moved from a Northern minstrel show to the unofficial anthem of the Confederate States of America. “Dixie” represents one of the few minstrel songs that came from the Antebellum period that Southerners trusted. Previously, Southerners considered minstrel shows as politically suspect. During the first decade of minstrel shows (1843-1853), performances went beyond romanticizing the plantation and its paternal nature. These shows portrayed slaves tricking and sabotaging their masters’ plans and plantations. It was not uncommon to see Gabriel or Nat Turner used in several skits.\textsuperscript{41}

For this reason, the nature of minstrel shows is worth exploring. Believed to have started in 1843, the Virginia Minstrels put on the first burnt cork performance in New York City’s Bowery Amphitheater. The show claimed to be an evening of “Ethiopian entertainment” and soon thousands of ensembles were performing this stylized entertainment form. The shows revealed how race relations were perceived by the white imagination of the time. The burnt cork is noted by historians as not only as a simple racial marker, but also as a disguise in which a performer can satirize white majority values while holding on to the contemporaneous belief structures, and as a mask that allowed

\textsuperscript{39} Cornelius, Steven. \textit{Music of the Civil War Era}, pg 35.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, pg 35.
\textsuperscript{41} Faust, Drew Gilpin. \textit{The Creation of Confederate Nationalism}, pg 67.
entertainers an escape from direct personal and psychological identification with the
performance.

The Englishman Charles Matthews is most noted for creating the caricatures of
black culture from his studies of slaves in 1822 which became the basis of the character Jim
Crow and the Zip Coon. Perhaps what is most notable about the song “The Zip Coon” is how
the character is portrayed as a “larned skolar [sic]” who goes on to become President of the
United States.\(^{42}\) However, even during the Civil War, minstrel music stuck rather close to the
perceived natures of blacks even as Northern composers like Stephen Foster wrote songs
for Colored Regiments.

By the nature of a war between the North and South, minstrelsy turned from a
Northern showcase into a Southern dominated performance.\(^{43}\) As minstrel shows usually
glorified the life of Southerners, it no longer became appropriate to depict the enemy in
such a way. What “Dixie” reveals is in the nature of what it does not reveal. The characters
who sing this song are not concerned with the political or sociological world in which they
live in. Instead Emmett’s song creates a false cultural identity for blacks in the South. A
sense of political and social standing that is discussed at length by Faust was integral for
whites in the formation of the Confederacy. Minstrelsy reconfirmed the place of slaves in
the nation, and formed the basis of how the Lost Cause myth became such an integral part
of the post-War South.

The song’s lyrics wish for a return to the old ways. It is this romantic belief that
makes the song such a strong emotional pull for the Confederate national anthem. Unlike

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\(^{42}\) Cornelius, Steven. Music of the Civil War Era, pg 139.

the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”, “Dixie” invokes memories of home. The overall song is easy enough for soldiers or civilian groups to sing without practice, unlike the more elaborate orchestration of the “Battle Hymn”. Instead, this song with its “land of cotton” reminds the listener and singer of the origins of the song and creates the picturesque language that would become the trademark of songs and other media interpretations of Southern living.

The most significant change to “Dixie” is how the song became less reliant on vernacular and replaced with standard American English. The original lyrics were sung as such:

I wish I was in de land ob cotton  
Old times dar am not forgotten  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land  
In Dixie land whar I was born in  
Early on one frosty mornin’  
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land

**Chorus**

Den I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray! Hooray!  
In Dixie Land I’ll take my stand,  
To lib and die in Dixie,  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.  
Away, away, away down south in Dixie.  

This is due, as Faust notes, in part by the Confederate States of America efforts to establish a national identity, and part of their attempt to create national consciousness was to get rid of “Yankee degeneracies [sic]” and “Africanisms” (i.e.: saying “and” instead of “an”, “morning” for “mornin’”, “object” for “objec’”, etc).  

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Dixon, “Dixie” and the Clansmen

“Dixie” played into the world of Southern cultural reclamation through the same lens that would define the post-war South. Almost half a century after the rise of “Dixie”, Thomas Dixon Jr.; a North Carolina politician, lawyer, minister, playwright and author, wrote The Clansmen in 1905. The book went on to become the movie Birth of a Nation but the circumstances of the book’s origins are important to the Lost Cause Myth. Dixon relied on the Southern myth for his book; he relied on a common understanding of history and the rearranging of facts to turn heroes into villains and vice versa. Dixon’s book, The Leopard’s Spots written 1902, works on this historical denial with the coup d’état in Wilmington, North Carolina. The story is based on the Wilmington race riots in which white supremacists forced blacks out of office by force (although called a race riot at the time, it is considered the only successful coup d’état in American municipal government history). Twisting the facts was standard practice for Dixon, as Glenda Gilmore comments on Dixon’s book The Leopard’s Spots. She writes, “Since many of the events actually occurred, readers could not separate fiction from fact and were unaware that Dixon had reversed the outcomes to make African Americans seem powerful and abusive”.46 In similar fashion The Clansmen rewrites Reconstruction history into an era in which black men robbed white men of their political power. When the book became a play it was immediately understood that the play was “duping” Southern non-aristocratic whites with the misportrayal of the Reconstruction era. Non-aristocrats understood the recent history of the South and firmly believed that the Southern plantation owners were, rightfully, more the cause of the Civil War than Northern aggression. To reestablish the film for white audiences, Dixon sought approval from

governors and other politicians to gain public support. In the same manner, Dixon called on his former classmate Woodrow Wilson to endorse the film adaptation *Birth of a Nation*.

“Dixie” becomes pertinent to Dixon’s attempts to reconfigure the Southern ideas of the war, in Dixon’s active attempt to recreate an innocent South, where the land of cotton was noble and chivalrous. More to the point, the song has become a relic of the antebellum South and works within the framework of the Lost Cause simply by playing within the lyrical world that is cohabitated by Dixon’s book *The Clansmen*. As “Dixie” first creates the imagined perfect South, Dixon’s work retells history to match reality with fiction. What the South wants is the white paternity not the federal government enforced black tyranny.

**Oh, I’m A Good Old Rebel**

Next we will look at a song that at first glance appears to be a part of the Lost Cause rhetoric. However, what we will see is a song that has the ability to blame the North for the loss of the war but does not reflect back on the noble qualities of the South. Without this aspect of the song, the narrator becomes unrecognizable as a Southern voice. Instead, his bitterness becomes an aberration that to listeners will sound odd because of how often we are used to hearing a different voice representing the South and the Lost Cause.

Written by Major Innes Randolph (C.S.A.), “Good Old Rebel” (Song 2) was written shortly after the end of the Civil War. To new listeners, the song may sound not only humorous through its perceived ignorance of understanding the Union, but it portrays an interesting element of the Lost Cause myth. The song typifies many of the tenets of the Lost Cause movement specifically through the narrator’s lack of apology or need for reconciliation. The narrator simply points to the new problems created by the Northern
invasion of the Southern land. This song reveals the supposed plight of the common Southern man but this adds to the erasure of the history of the war by focusing on the perceived Northern aggression. For example, the narrator holds contempt for the Freedman’s Bureau and ironically mentions the freedom he feels has been stolen.

Nolan asserts that part of the myth of the Lost Cause was the idealization of the Confederate soldier. That the confederate soldier “was invariably heroic, indefatigable, gallant and law-abiding”, 47 became the perception of the fighting force of the Confederacy. Nolan states that he is not trying to create a history that disparages the efforts of Confederate soldiers with most fighting specifically because the North was invading the South. However, in Innes Randolph’s song we have a narrator that finds grievance with the North. Such fault that fits within the Lost Cause myth is seen not only in the contempt for the North but specifically for whole heartedly ignoring the issue of slavery. While the Freedman’s Bureau is mentioned, it is mentioned in terms of the larger force of the United States and Reconstruction. In this Southern perspective it is focusing on what has been lost by being controlled by the Union, instead of what is lost from losing the war and former Southern glory.

Unlike “Dixie”, Randolph’s song removes the romanticism of the war; although it does use the rhetoric of the Lost Cause it removes the hagiography of Southern generals and refrains from any reflective thought about the South. As “Dixie” precedes the Civil War, it seems that the most important quality of music discussing the Lost Cause is the idea of the Antebellum South and not simply pointing blame at the current power of the North. The

unrepentant narrator makes the point that perhaps the South does not matter. As he draws all references to the North, he leaves the South behind.

What can be drawn from this narrative is that Randolph perhaps is “too close” to the war to provide the narrative that was in high demand after the war. As he had experienced the war first hand, his experience is more personal than the writers’ experience of the Lost Cause, making his story more personal than writers like Dixon would have wanted. As the Lost Cause may blame the North, it also finds fault with the larger idea of government authority, which after the Civil War was a theme that could be agreed upon by all but Radical Republicans. Those in the North also questioned why the North was using the war surplus and labor to rebuild the South, when the South should bear the burden for the war. This is another point missing from Randolph’s song, his inability to seek reconciliation. That he cannot differentiate the brutality of the war from the overall structure of the United States makes his song less marketable as it is a regional rally against Northern government.

**Hank William Jr.’s South**

Hank William Jr.’s 1988 song “If the South Woulda Won” proves to be an interesting case study considering the song was written a century after “I’m A Good Ol’ Rebel”. The song is steeped in two conflicting eras: one that wishes to return to a simpler time without, what Mark LaSalle sees as the issues of “immigration, industrialization and urbanization”48, and the modern era of Southern iconography. The musical form follows this conflict as it travels from playing “Dixie”, to Southern rock, to fiddle, to slide guitar, and finally to a New Orleans horn section.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable qualities of Hank Williams Jr.’s song is that the song only implicitly mentions the Civil War, without any of the clear bitterness expressed in “Good Old Rebel.” Williams instead follows the narrative of the Lost Cause straight to its 20th century conclusion. The narrative that Williams is working against is one that is created by the fact the North had defeated the South not only politically but also culturally. Within the lyrics, Williams goes beyond portraying many of the popular opinions of Reagan/Bush-era Republican conservatism (death penalty laws and the war on drugs in Miami) and goes into how the South has been unable to express itself within a cultural framework. This is all in spite of the fact that even though Hank Williams Sr. isn’t on the hundred dollar bill, two Virginians and a Carolinian do grace American currency (Washington, Jefferson and Jackson respectively). However, Williams resides in the current era where he feels the cultural significance of the South remains in the past. The recollection is a culturally nostalgic one, referring to 1950s era Southern culture, Patsy Cline, Elvis Presley, and Hank Williams.

The song itself is separated into two parts. The first verse focuses on elements that would make America better, at least a southern America; where “pushers” and killers are swiftly dealt with by quick Southern justice. Although there are other elements to this verse, the tone is centered on a more vigilant Southern justice. The second verse is a cultural study with references to the majority of the states that left the Union. Although the previous verse mentions three more states, this verse is a shift from the sociological to the cultural.

The song explores the issues of post Civil War imperialism that have led to a flooding of American markets instead of the exultation of American culture. With the end of sectional divide, the United States began to develop into the creator of mass culture and exported it in droves (before the beginning of World War II half the films in the Netherlands
were American⁴⁹. Hank Williams, Jr. however does not go beyond a cultural separation of North and South to the Lost Cause discourse. Although he does reference certain issues as being nationally motivated, he refrains from referring to a detailed racial dynamic between Americans and Chinese. The referencing of Chinese exports is part of the message of the 1980s economic landscape. As economic uncertainty affected the United States, more and more foreign automakers gained a foothold in the American auto making industry.

It is this mass industrialized culture that has allowed the Lost Cause to continue. It has also allowed different styles of music to exist in one song. As the music expresses various cultural backgrounds of southern America from Appalachian fiddle to Lynyrd Skynyrd guitar riffs, the vocal delivery is oddly un-Southern. Williams travels around the South, and he chooses a more Middle American accent. Similar to what Garth Brooks would do in the 90s, Williams’ vocal delivery goes for a greater appeal beyond a stylized Southern drawl. However in other songs, Williams used a stronger Southern accent, such as on the song “All My Rowdy Friends".⁵⁰ It would appear to go with the variety of music available to the Southern population; Williams chose a voice that would be widely accepted throughout not only the South but the North as well. Williams needed to create this song with a universal appeal. Although not a form of reconciliation for singing a pro-Confederate song, it certainly creates a narrative voice that calls out from a nobler angle than that associated with a Southerner with a stronger accent.

Perhaps the most telling part of Williams’ song is the last line of the song “might even be better off”. This line is not said with any sense of pride in Southern progress.

Instead it is intoned as a humorous lament for what has become of the South. Williams seems to be going back to the idea within the Lost Cause that the political power of the South was being taken away by the North. Indeed, in this song Williams is concerned with the power that the South is lacking from the implied power of the North (expressed through the federal government). This is best understood through the last line that if given the chance for self determination, the South would have been able to form its own more perfect union.

A Return to Cold Mountain and Southern Hospitality

By looking at the medium of film, we can obtain valuable insights into how Americans view their own history. Although there is a plethora of films that address the Civil War from several different perspectives, from Glory’s depiction of a black infantry unit to Gods and Generals that looks at the beginning of the Civil War, Cold Mountain by Anthony Minghella fits a specific criteria. First, the film is not a comprehensive narrative of the Civil War. Such a narrative would require an analysis of the political, economical and racial causes of the Civil War: for example slavery. Second, the film was highly acclaimed, garnering an Academy Award for supporting actress Renee Zellweger. Third, the music of the film is used as a presentation of authentic Civil War era music, as the Sacred Harp songs and fiddle tunes are chosen over a large orchestral score. Although this will not be an in-depth study of film music, the music adds an important amount of depth into the creation of the narrative. Finally the film is not only recent (thus should have the most up-to-date information on historical interpretations of the Civil War), but it was touted for its

authenticity of portraying civilian life during the Civil War. It is this point that will be addressed with how the movie addresses historicity with the Lost Cause.

Critics rarely mentioned the historicity of the film. Instead the film was compared to *Gone with the Wind*, specifically for the involved love story and the setting of the failing Confederacy.

*New York Times* critic A.O. Scott briefly delves into the issue of authenticity, although from an academic perspective he may have missed the point:

"Cold Mountain," which stars Jude Law and Nicole Kidman as would-be lovers separated by the cruelty and privation of the American Civil War, distinguishes itself from such middlebrow conversation-stoppers. Its sober good taste is enlivened by large doses of intelligence and humor, and even a touch of authentic cinematic grandeur.

By authentic I mean utterly artificial. Mr. Minghella, who can be overly solemn in pursuit of realism, is, thank goodness, also entranced by the beauty of exotic landscapes and the charisma of movie stars...And in nearly every particular -- including the soundtrack, which blends Gabriel Yared's lavish symphonic orchestration with Appalachian fiddle breakdowns and Deep-South Sacred Harp vocal harmonies -- the movie's elegant fakery improves on the book's stiff pretentiousness.

From the perspective of a movie critic, Scott briefly touches on an issue important to the academic study of a historical narrative, authenticity. What Scott points out that is problematic for academics is the need for a film to create an interesting narrative over any idea of historical accuracy. However, in this pursuit Minghella has created a movie that falls into the Lost Cause myth.

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Cold Mountain presents itself specifically as a Southern tale, taking place primarily in Virginia and North Carolina. The story is a dual narrative, focusing on the character Ada, a woman from prosperity who has to deal with the upkeep of her land at Cold Mountain after the death of her father. The other half of the narrative follows W.P. Inman, a native of Cold Mountain who volunteers for the Confederacy. The majority of the story follows Inman’s desertion as he tries to return to Cold Mountain and Ada. Throughout the film, Inman is confronted by numerous characters that become personifications of the authentic as well as the inauthentic.

The movie begins with the Union soldiers placing dynamite underground below Southern lines at the Siege of Petersburg in 1864. As the men place the explosives the camera slowly pans up through the dirt to the Southern line waiting in the trenches. In this opening shot, the film immediately portrays Union troops as deceitful and unfair as they decide to use a “dishonorable” tactic to beat the Confederacy. After the explosives detonate, the Union troops rush into the crater created by the blast, unwittingly trapping themselves as the Confederate have a “turkey shoot”. What this scene and others portray of Union soldiers, is that they are villainous and do not have the features common of Southern men. It should be noted that one reason the Union soldiers ran into the crater was due to the lead general switching out the original black soldiers that were trained to run around the crater to untrained white soldiers. The feeling that white soldiers would perform better follows into negating the very presence of blacks in the cause and conflict of the Civil War.

As the history-based events continue, the audience gets flashbacks to Inman first meeting Ada at Cold Mountain. Nicole Kidman narrates this section, explaining that Ada and her father moved to Cold Mountain to leave behind “slaves, corsets and cotton”. This
immediately adds sympathy to Ada’s character as she characterizes herself as someone opposed to racism and also sexism. However, Ada’s family does own slaves and she does wear corsets. Perhaps playing on the expected narrative of Ada’s Victorian sensibility as well as the quality of the South, these ideas are meant to portray her character into the perceived political views of the era.

As Inman, recovers from the explosion from the battle, he recalls singing Sacred Harp with Ada in church. The song is appropriate for the battle that Inman had been involved in. “Idumea” is a song of death and the scene of the Battle of the Crater, resembles the opening barrage of violence in Saving Private Ryan.

And am I born to die?
To lay this body down!
And must my trembling spirit fly
Into a world unknown?
A land of deepest shade,
Unpierced by human thought
The dreary regions of the dead,
Where all things are forgot.
Soon as from earth I go
What will become of me?
Eternal happiness or woe,
Must then my portion be!
Waked by the trumpet sound,
I from my grave shall rise;
And see the Judge with glory crowned,
And see the flaming skies!54

“Idumea” creates a stark comparison of the battle as the narrative still follows Inman through the battle.

Though this has primarily been an analysis of what is “wrong” with the narrative of Cold Mountain, the film does create certain historical accuracies that are important to this

study. Most notably mentioned in Nolan’s essay, one of the most severe issues facing the South was desertion. The character of Inman reveals that part of what compelled most men to desert was not cowardice, but the need to return home. With defeats at Antietam in 1862 and Gettysburg in 1863 desertion was extremely high. By the time the movie takes place (1864), the situation Inman found himself in would not have been uncommon. However, movie critic Mark LaSalle notes the actor who portrays Inman “remains every inch the collective dream of a Confederate soldier: young, stoic and feline, with something dark and awful behind the eyes.”

However, the film presents Jude Law’s character with various Odysseus-style challenges on his return home. Each one of these vignettes portrays the cowardice of those who did not fight: from Giovanni Ribisi’s character who traps deserters to Philip Seymour Hoffman’s character who tries to drown a black slave girl he impregnated. Inman’s character encounters these men and more, and is faced with the tragedy of what has become of the South when the “good men” have all gone off to fight the war. As Inman makes his way home, Ada is continually confronted by a member of the Home Guard named Teague. His only aspirations are to own Cold Mountain and to win over Ada. However, his methods of dealing with deserters and their families are too cruel for Ada to love Teague as she would love Inman. At the climax of the film Inman and Teague square off, and Inman successfully kills Teague but is mortally wounded in the process, dying in Ada’s arms. At the close of the film we see Ada with a child that was conceived from Inman and Ada’s one night together.

LaSalle, Mark. “War is Hell in the grueling, thrilling ‘Cold Mountain,’ and only his fierce longing for the woman he loves keeps Jude Law, as a Confederate deserter, alive and on the run.” *San Francisco Chronicle*. December 25, 2003.
What Inman’s odyssey teaches the viewer is that while noble Southern men were off fighting for their country, less noble creatures infiltrated the South corrupting the land of Dixie. And although men like Inman were deserters, they returned home to correct the wrongs of those who had entered into the tranquil life of the South. However, as analogous through Inman’s actions in the movie, by leaving the war behind to return and take care of the “home”, these men had to sacrifice the noble parts of themselves to regain the South.

The Myth and the Oral Tradition

Perhaps the best way to understand how these songs through the modern era have continued to share the same thematic concerns can be explained by the economic status of the Confederacy. The South had its share of music publishers, from the oldest music publisher in the United States, the Siegling Music company (founded in 1819) to the New Orleans-based E. Johns & Co. that would be the first Southern firm to, publish an unauthorized arrangement of “I Wish I Was in Dixie’s Land”. But by 1862 most of these industries were forced to close by advancing Union Armies. However, before publishers were forced to close, hundreds of published songs made their way into distribution through the South. These songs became the basis for what Faust believes would create Confederate nationality and by extension feed into the collective experience that created the Lost Cause. Bill C. Malone writes in his introduction Southern Music, American Music: “Music has been one of the great natural resources of the South...The South has exerted a

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powerful influence on the whole of American music...passively it has provided a source of images or symbols...which have fueled the imagination of musicians and songwriters.”

Truth and Romance

For this reason perhaps we can see that songs like “Dixie” helped infuse a generation of Southerners with specific ideas and views of what it meant to be Southern. The literature and films of the Lost Cause only furthered the ideas that were first created in such forms as published music. By creating a specific cultural history that rivals “real history” musicians and other artists have a medium in which to work with a much problematic narrative. Instead of having to confront past generations involvement with the Civil War or even 20th century civil rights, musicians can portray a history that is unashamed or unconcerned with the morally ambiguous. Instead music can reframe Robert E. Lee and others as noble saints fighting against the oppressive North, instead of depicting Lee as a Virginian slave owner, who, despite popular history, made several tactical mistakes during the war. However, history is important for showing the evolution of people, ideas, and cultures. The fate of popular music and other similar arts is more focused on depicting the mood of the time or times past. They can create a sense of stasis in history, but often lack the ability to present a larger narrative that moves history beyond a snapshot.

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Gender

To understand gender in the Civil War song, we must explore how gender was expressed during the Civil War era. One of the filters that will be used to understand the songs will be Amy Greenberg’s *Manifest Manhood*. Through this lens I will explore the concepts of the restrained and martial manhood.

One quality of the era’s songs that has not permeated the 20th century is the treatment of the maternal figures. Although this will be discussed later we will look at how the songs of the era reflect not only the “everyman” quality of journals and letters but also the way in which soldiers reacted to the notion of home.

Songs function in mainstream society to either reinforce or weaken social norms. By looking at not only the history of the Civil War but at the sociological importance of music, we will understand how music of the Civil War interprets the specific roles women and men were expected to enact in the public sphere.

During the Civil War period, the dynamics of gender role changed with how Americans viewed their regional identity and concept of life and death. By examining how men and women defined their separate spheres and how the Civil War disrupted the conventions of the era, we will find that before the 20th century, women were slowly redefining how they could influence the public sphere of American society. As the roles of women reshaped cultural standards, various songs, plays, poems and official pronouncements used women as tools for the war effort. One popular theme was to urge young women to favor only men in uniform. In one song, a female character is searching for a husband,
But he must be a solider
A veteran from the Wars
One who has fought for “Southern Rights”
Beneath the Bars and Stars.\textsuperscript{58}

music becomes an important factor during this period.

This chapter will show how songs of the Civil War differ from contemporary songs in exploring gender. Do either songs of the period reflect the reality of the lives of men and women? I will delve into the issues of martial and restrained manhood, women’s pursuit for active roles in the absence of men, and finishing with how these roles led to modern song interpreting the national dynamic through the understanding of gender roles.

Manhood

In this section, I will discuss what Amy Greenberg calls martial and restrained manhood. In her book \textit{Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire}, Greenberg investigates the meaning of Manifest Destiny for American men and women in the years between the U.S.-Mexico and Civil wars. \textsuperscript{59} According to Greenberg:

restrained manhood was practiced by men in the North and South who grounded their identities in their families, in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith, and in success in the business world. Their masculine practices valued expertise. Restrained men were strong proponents of domesticity or ‘true womanhood.’ The belief that the domestic household was the moral center of the world, and the wife and mother its moral compass...They were generally repulsed by the violent blood sports that captivated many urban working men.\textsuperscript{59}

In contrast to that, there is martial manhood where men


rejected the moral standards that guided restrained men; they often drank to excess with pride, and they reveled in their physical strength and ability to dominate both men and women...they were not, in general, supporters of the moral superiority of women and the values of domesticity. Martial men believed that the masculine qualities of strength, aggression, and even violence, better defined true man than did the firm and upright manliness of restrained men.⁶⁰

In Civil War era songs, there is an emphasis on men wanting to return to the domesticity of their home lives. They return to a wife who has waited and managed the home while the men return to their normal tasks.⁶¹

These songs reflect a desire for antebellum ideals, women dealt with similar hardships. As Confederate soldiers moved from state to state, displaced women took inverse trips around the South moving away from the battlefield. These trips created a new social dynamic as elite women and men interacted with people of lower social spheres. In these lower class environments elite women became aware of the disparity between the classes. However this was not a way in which solidarity was formed, instead, women clung more to their social status. To women of lower classes, the movement of elite women was seen as cowardly, as elite women could afford to move from city to city away from the conflict that would engulf parts of the South. To people of the low country, elites were “refugees”, women unwilling to take a stand at their home. Instead the elite women moved and took advantage of hard pressed individuals for hospitality during a time when the price of home goods had risen uncontrollably.⁶²

**Womanhood**

⁶⁰ Greenberg, Amy. *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, pg 11
⁶¹ Faust, Drew Gilpin. *Mothers of Invention*, pg 5.
⁶² ibid, pg 32.
Prior to the Civil War, women were not active outside the domestic sphere, however, mobilization of men during the Civil War, women began to take on larger roles in society. In this section I examine how women pursued a more active social role; conversely men's narration in song sought to idealize antebellum conceptions of gender roles.

As expounded in Faust’s book *Mothers of Invention*, the elite women in the South during the Civil War took a larger role in political and social spheres. She write: “War necessitated significant alterations—even perversions—of this ideology of behavior and identity.” Women of the North had been working in different benefit societies since the founding of the nation. For example, the Southern caste system did not present opportunities for women to work in urban aid foundations. In Philadelphia, women worked not only for churches but also operated their own societies to deal with issues of slavery, alcoholism, immigration and slavery. The abolition of slavery was not on the table of issues discussed in these circles. However, with the number of men dwindling as the war progressed women took up roles in voluntary associations that had previously been held by men.

As most Civil War songs were written by men, although not necessarily men on the field of battle, these songs would deal with not only fighting the enemy but with hopes of returning to an unchanged home front. In the songs, women were ready to take up the domestic roles that they fulfilled before the war, but the war pushed women into the war as much as men.

As Drew Faust writes in *Mothers of Invention*

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63 Faust, Drew. *Mothers of Invention*, pg 17.
The North...had inaugurated its reexamination of gender assumptions more than a generation earlier, as women’s rights advocates began to destabilize traditional understandings of men’s and women’s roles. In the south, by contrast, emergent nineteenth-century feminism had by 1861 exerted almost no impact, and understandings of womanhood had remained rigidly biological and therefore seemingly natural and immutable. In the eyes of many of the South’s defenders, this contrast was in itself evidence of the superiority of southern civilization and of the dangerous tendencies inherent in the northern way of life.65

In the South, women were to play the role of morale boosters, who not only shown favor on uniformed men, but were, reminded that they were to hide their doubt and their fear and instead give complete support to the war effort. Modern demonstrate a similar point of view in their lyrics as they illustrate women’s roles would change when men returned from war. A new metaphor has come into the Civil War song. Where songs that focused on gender had previously dealt with the returning male figure or how a woman would have to strive without him there, the modern song instead focus on the death of a male character and the female character’s response.

In “Yankee Bayonet”, the lead male dies while his wife is pregnant. In this song we see that with the death of the male and birth of a child, the nation is represented as going through a death and rebirth.

For Duty Calls Your Sweetheart’s Name Again

In *Manifest Manhood* Amy Greenberg asserts that the Antebellum Man being split between the “martial” and the “restrained”.

In the previous chapter I made reference to the importance of *Cold Mountain* to constructing the narrative of the Civil War related to music and themes of the Lost Cause. But more can be gleamed from the movie as well as from the book. That women had created a struggle for power with the Confederacy over the control of women. With the struggle for secession becoming a harder struggle on the frontlines, women used the occasion to write songs and poetry asking for their men to be recalled back to the home front. It is in this cause that we find the fight for domesticity takes its place in several Civil War songs.

**The Home front and the Battle Front**

The Civil War was last war to be fought exclusively on American soil. The war provided an interesting social dynamic between those on the home front and those on the frontlines. It was possible and common for those at home to share letters with soldiers in a close proximity to home, the proliferation between correspondents becomes an important way for historians to explore how the Civil War affected the relationships between the men in the front and the women at home. Faust’s findings exemplify that in their separation men and women developed a new understanding of gendered spheres. The distance at which men found themselves from daughters, wives, and lovers manifested itself through their texts as a longing for the old order. In the letters from men of elite households, this longing was presented as a direction to white women maintaining order in the house hold. In the South, this specifically meant watching over the duties of domestic servants and slaves.

Women worked to keep the household the way their husbands remembered it. But as the war deteriorated the South, so did the elite lifestyle. Elite women had to take up roles
they were unfamiliar with, from doing the laborious work of doing laundry to maintaining order in a slave-owning household. As women took up more masculine roles in their home life, some began to express themselves in there writing for newspapers and publishing fiction.

**Women Kept Apart**

In the absence of patriarchal order women grew accustomed to roles that they never occupied before. This had the greatest affect before the war in the South, where elite women for the first time did domestic chores that had been previously left for slaves and servants. At a time when these women had been only subservient to their husbands, the lack of control they were used to wielding over the home demonstrates a different understanding of what domesticity meant during the war period.

For example, Southern Elite women took on responsibilities previously deemed servant work but also the work of men and “Yankee women”. For many women this shift in responsibility was distressing in themselves and wrote to their husbands on the front to ask advice on what to do. In response to these letters, many men made an attempt to deter such work in the South as many men wanted their wives and daughters to keep within the same social sphere even in their absence.

Still the songs of this time period rarely focused on the plight women experienced at home without the presence of men. One reason for the lack of songs is the domination of song as a male vocation, while several songs did take on the female persona, these songs did not give voice to the concerns actually felt by the elite white women on the home front.
In modern popular songs the narratives remain in the perspective of the male sphere. Even though “Yankee Bayonet” is a dialogue between the two spheres, it is showing each figure in their respective natural environments: a man on the frontlines and a woman at the home front inside the domestic sphere. Where women had to show their own courage in keeping up homes without male support, songs show the believed unchanged face of domesticity.

In the Decembrist contemporary song “Yankee Bayonet”, the female protagonist describes the allure of home against the brutality of home. While her man fights amongst the “bones” and the “bile” she sits on the Carolina coast. Furthermore, in the narrative of the song, she sits at home pregnant and lacks the male figure that would be necessary to raise a child. The song brings into question if there is a larger metaphor to be seen in this narrative. Is this more than a Civil War ballad?

In representations of manhood and womanhood, men represent the ideas of independent living and being able to forge one’s own destiny, while at the same time women represent

The song “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” by the Band portrays a similar scene to “Yankee Bayonet”. The song tells a story which follows that of Virgil Cane in a historically based fictional narrative. Virgil is a man who served on a Confederate train line until Union soldiers destroyed the rails. In the song, he comes home to his wife and farm, only to watch the further defeat of Robert E. Lee at Richmond, Virginia. Each figure of the story stays in the sphere that they have been assigned to. In this fictional narrative, Virgil’s
wife speaks a single line about witnessing the march of Lee’s men, while Virgil’s father and
fallen brother are given a verse each.

The contributions women did make were turned into songs, as was the case with
the song “The Homespun Dress”.

Three cheers for the homespun dress
The Southern ladies wear.
Now Northern goods are out of date,
And since old Abe’s blockade
We Southern girls can be content With goods that’s Southern made
We scorn to wear a bit of silk
A bit of Northern lace,
But make our homespun dresses up
And wear them with a grace.66

The song focuses on the tasks of using available fabrics at home instead of rely on imports
that were stopped by the Union naval blockade. This song specifically calls on women to not
only make a sacrifice of the luxuries they were used to but also to perform a task that called
on them to act independently.

These roles show women taking on common domestic roles in support of the
Confederate cause. This is the way Southern elites preferred women involved themselves in
the war, by portraying themselves as those who held onto the virtuous side of the nation
who would not be a part of a society that did not condone the actions of the government.
By getting involved in the war through their own available sphere, women were able to
contribute moral support for the Confederacy and possibly convince men to support their
possible spouses. As in the song “I Would Like To Change My Name”, the female narrator is
searching for a husband, she sings:

66 Hudson, Arthur Palmer. *Folksongs of Mississippi and their Background*. Chapel Hill; University of
But he must be a soldier
A veteran from the wars,
One who has fought for “Southern Rights”
Beneath the Bars and Stars.\(^{67}\)

### Experiencing Manhood

The song “Aura Lee, the Maid with the Golden Hair”\(^{68}\) (1861) was central to the novel *Cold Mountain*. As it reminds Inman of the woman he left behind. Songs such as Aura Lee were commonly sung by soldiers during the Civil War. They provided a sense of nostalgia for men at the front. For some, the song would serve as a reminder of what they were fighting for, but for the majority of soldiers it became a reminder of what was awaiting them: a desirable woman and a chance to be away from the battlefront.

In the song, the narrator experiences birds, flowers, and other parts of nature singing of the woman, Aura Lee to him. The song starts with a bird singing of Aura Lee, then the rose reminds the narrator of her blush, followed by the willows long branches representing her hair, further in the song the stars are her eyes, and sunshine is her face. For the narrator, the very land/nation he walks upon is reminding him of the woman. Beyond the personification of nature, the soldier narrator can see the longing not only for the woman he loves but for the land that he fights for.

Men craved a sense of what was awaiting them at home. Men used songs to take their minds off of fighting. A song commonly sung before battle, “Rock Me to Sleep, Mother,” pleads for escape from war and to go back into childhood and a mother’s protecting arms:

\(^{67}\) Theodore von La Hache, “I Would Like to Change My Name: A Favorite Encore Song”. Augusta, Blackmar & Bro., 1863.
\(^{68}\) W.W. Fosdick. “Aura Lee”. 1861.
Backward turn backward, oh! Time in your flight
Make me a child again, just for tonight:
Mother, come back from the echoless shore
Take me again to your heart, as of yore.

And perhaps this is the kind of song that can lend understanding into the way modern songs depict the Civil War. Although it would be a peculiar instance, the Band, the Decemberists, Wilco’s cover, and Justin Townes Earl all recorded and released their songs during a time of conflict. The reflections of the narrators in these songs speak of valor and honor. They reflect an important concept during times of war, the idea of male bravery. Although these songs are far from critiques of the war and may not be the most appropriate music sung at a USO show.

In Justin Townes Earl’s song “Lone Pine Hill”, the narrator has lost his bravery and wishes to return to his lover. The narrator has been fighting since 1861 and is waiting for “Sheridan to bring us to our knees.” Out of fear of death and wanting to return home, he begs for God’s forgiveness as he runs away to return home. He reasons that since he had never owned a slave the Civil War isn’t his fight. This demonstrates a change from the reason he gives earlier for why he enlisted, which was to fight for his homeland. For Earl’s narrator, the valor of war is gone since, from his point of view the battles have become senseless slaughters. He recounts the battles he has fought in, and after fighting for four years, hope is lost since Richmond under siege. He is stationed at Five Forks, the “Waterloo of the Confederacy”. For the narrator, what is there left to fight for? Earlier in the song Earl’s narrator talks about the mines destroying his homeland, this goes in contrast with his remarks concerning slavery. Concerning both parts of his narration, forces larger than him are controlling his fate and his ability to return to the home he remembers. Both forces,
government and industry, have made the purpose of his valor meaningless. With a loss of meaning in the war, male bravery no longer proves to an issue for a soldier. With disillusion in the cause, bravery is removed from importance.

In his autobiography on the Band Levon Helm said:

We did a few press conferences, which got a little embarrassing in Sweden because we were apolitical...the Stockholm press is peppering us with questions...and what could we say except that we hated war as much as anyone...none of us ever thought to write a song about all the shit that was going on back then: war, revolution, civil war, turmoil. Our songs were trying to take you someplace else.69

And although the Band did write a song explicitly about the Civil War, it is a personal narrative that is not going for a grandiose statement about the times, either the 1860s or the 1960s. Although the song does create sympathy for the South, Robbie Robertson was persuaded by Levon Helm to leave out any reference to Abraham Lincoln. Instead, like most songs by the Band, the songs are about taking someone away from the prospects of the future or the immediacy of the present but look to the past as a place to escape.70 On the covers of early Band album covers, there is art work depicting a surreal painting of a house by Bob Dylan, the next showing the Band in the forest, a colorful spectrum of colors depicting the plains, and the next a painting of the band eating outside. Each album was made with the purpose of depicting themes of American history. Songs such as “Acadian Driftwood”, detail the exile of Acadians to Louisiana or the song “King Harvest (Has Surely Come)”, a narrative of union labors in the rural south. These songs, despite their interest in history are vignettes of the events. The songs may tell stories of displacement, labor

69 Helm, Levon. This Wheel’s On Fire. Chicago Review Press pg 165.
70 Hoskyns, Barney. Across The Great Divide, pg 194.
problems, and of war but they’re not meant as social critique, but as expression of mood instead of period.

The Importance of Male Sacrifice

We can partially attribute the importance and pervasiveness of the male narrative to the concept of the Good Death became routed in the psyche of people of the North and the South and this could be seen as a reason why the male narrative has become so important and pervasive. As only men were soldiers, and so the ones to give the ultimate sacrifice to their nation, the importance of that sacrifice overshadowed the responsibilities and life of women and children on the home front.

With “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down”, the concept of male sacrifice is intertwined with this gender distinction. The music of the song starts off with a slow descent on the piano followed by lopsided march on the snare drum. The singer introduces himself as Cane and his role in the larger context of the Civil War, detailing his military career, whom he fought for, and how it ended. The chorus enters with a roll on the drums as all male harmony sings the tag of the song. In the second verse, Virgil describes his life at home. After his return home, he sees Robert E. Lee pass his farm. At this point, Virgil goes into a metaphor as how even doing the lowest job (either a dirt farmer or a Confederate rail worker) is worth doing as long as you give your best in the line of service. Beginning in the second chorus, there enters the sound of a sorrowful horn continues through into the next verse. Finally, in the third verse, Virgil describes how his father had been a farmer and his brother a “proud and brave” soldier “who took a rebel stand.” This both establishes a heritage of honor and valor and also employs that his brother’s death to a metaphor for the
South. As Cane becomes Southern sugar cane, an important crop of the South. Virgil explains that “you can’t raise a Cane back up, when he’s in defeat.” For Virgil, once his own family had suffered loss, the Civil War was loss for the family.

**Motherhood**

While women were kept out of the discourse of song narratives, they nevertheless played an important part in crafting the idea of the Confederate nation. Specifically, educating the youth and guiding the growth of the Southern national identity. By the end of the Civil War, over half of all teachers were women in the South, when previously they accounted for less than eight percent.

The ascendency in educational power corresponds to the idea of republican motherhood at the beginning of the American democracy. Southern women mid-century would pass on the values to their sons who would be active citizens in the new Southern nation. At the turn of the 19th century where women passed on the idea of citizenship to their children.

In “Yankee Bayonet,” the woman is left to tend for the unborn child on her own. And in an environment that looked to mothers as a source of education, it would fall on the unnamed mother to bring up the child in the ideals of Southern society and culture. At the end of the song the dead soldier and his wife sing a duet. The soldier explains that he will return to her “on the breath of the wind.” Most likely this suggests that he will return to her as a memory and that through her unborn child, there is a chance for him to be
remembered. And possibly the war can be remembered through their child. As it falls upon
the mother for the child’s education, her memory will become his.

**Conclusion**

Women were in search for a way to be of use in an event that called almost
exclusively for violent action from men. In a confrontation that was decided through military
victory on the battlefield, women felt excluded from active roles. The construction of gender
in the South caused Southern men to not look favorably on involving women in the
difficulties of war and so actively tried to keep the woman’s sphere separate. At the same
time women’s opportunity for involvement in public works grew. With men away from
home, these elite white women had a chance to explore a new realm of possible
independence, from management of household affairs to doing laundry (a day long task that
took several individual to complete).

In a novel called *Maccaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice* Written by Augusta Jane Evans
during the Civil War, published in 1864. The protagonist of the novel Irene must choose
between a life that is chosen for her or a life that she can choose to lead her own life.
“Sacrifice” refers to Irene’s duty to sacrifice her own desires for those around her. However
as she must “sacrifice”, Irene, a young Southern heiress, lets her true love go off to battle
while she stays behind to marry someone her father has chosen for her. Before the war,
there is a specific episode where Irene doesn’t allow a slave to carry her books for her and
instead takes it upon herself to be as independent as she can be in the South.
According to Faust, is the quest that the male protagonist goes on in search of self identification what usually typifies a novel of the period. At that time the female lead searches only for romantic fulfillment. Evans’ novel breaks away from this model by presenting Irene the opportunity and chance to explore her place in the world. Both her true love who goes off to war and her husband dies, Irene is able to explore several of the necessary tasks of women in the Confederacy. She starts a school and an orphanage. In her roles, Irene undertakes several of the goals established first in the Northern United States in the antebellum period. Women in places such as Philadelphia and New York had been involved with benefit societies for the poor and homeless long before the war, it was only a result of male absence that Southern women for the first time were become public figures. Prior to the war, people of the South believed that a woman during certain kinds of labor was a Northerner, that she had “Yankee” attributes, but with the sudden lack of men in the South, women’s labor became something useful.

In contemporary song women are still portrayed as if they were not major figures in the Civil War. However, by the end of the war women both north and south of the Mason-Dixon line were experiencing a high level of interest and access to public life. In modern songs such as “Yankee Bayonet” and “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down”, the role of women is only the observational role of a mother in charge of the home. Although both songs do not explicitly take on the point of view of the elite South, they preserve hierarchy that is stressed by men of the 1860. Perhaps the lack of strong women in the Civil War song narrative is that the roles women took up during the war lack the same relevance. For example, in contemporary American society, no longer do we view women doing menial house chores as culturally significant, as a sign of the progressive changing times. As, we
have a tendency to conceive of history progressing, standards are adopted and become the norm. And for a band like the Band, known for their Wildman in the woods appearance, the old standards that they appeared to typify may be what leaked into their song that tries to establish what was common in Civil War songs.\textsuperscript{71}

\footnotesize
Conclusion: Connecting with the Present

Music is both deeply rooted and transient. It dissolves into space while simultaneously settling into individual and collective memory. Yesterday’s songs trigger today’s tears. Music harbors the habitual, but also acts as a herald of change. It helps to orchestrate personal, local, regional, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and national identity. Stable yet constantly in flux, music offers both striking metaphors and tangible data for understanding societies at moments of transition.\textsuperscript{72}

Mark Slobin’s opening introduction to the book of essays called \textit{Retuning Culture} is exactly why studying the historical trends of music is a field of interest for me. Although specific note selection, motifs, and sequences can be important to a song’s meaning, there is a large variance as to how the creator, performer, and audience member takes in any piece of music.

Music can be a troublesome way of exploring history. A song can start off with clear intentions and in a few years time an anthem for the opposing cause. “Dixie” has proven to be a most troublesome song in American history. Soon after the capture of Ft. Sumter, “Dixie” could be heard throughout the capitol as a sign of support for Southern secession.\textsuperscript{73} And yet, by the end of the war Abraham Lincoln, a fan of the song, requested to hear “Dixie” at a shipboard party. He reportedly stated “that tune is now Federal property.” \textsuperscript{74} Although what Lincoln did was only a symbolic act of unifying the country, it was also admittance to how the song became part of the construction of the Confederate nation and like the South had to be reclaimed.

Although popular music has found its place in academic study over the years, the best way to delve into the subject has remained an elusive journey. In my thesis, I have worked to explore how three themes of the Civil War have permeated their way into the 20th century and have returned in song as a way of. As stated by Bill Stewart in a popular album review:

There are still people out there who don’t take popular music seriously. To them, it’s something frivolous and simplistic, pleasant in the same crude and mindless way as scratching a mosquito bite, an underdeveloped form of “art” that deserves no more serious inspection than an eight-year-old’s drawing of a zombie fighting a robot.75

I believe that music can be more than “frivolous and simplistic. Music can magnify the beliefs of a people, to find out how people relate to one another and to society. The purpose of this work was to explore how in 150 years, a series of events in American history has had far reaching consequences in how Americans experience the trauma of war as well as how they remember the historical event. Music has been a way of remembering history since the birth of the ballad form. Popular musicians have never backed away from songs about history or myths. Prior to creating the song “Yankee Bayonet”, The Decemberists created a 20-minute song cycle called “The Tain” based off of the Irish tale Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle Raid of Cooley). But the times at which modern songs have chosen to look back into history have often been periods of upheaval, to look at a different era as a place of higher ideals that have not been muddied by the complexities of modern life. “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” came out during the Vietnam War and “If The South Woulda Won” came out after the Iran-Contra affair and the beginning of War on Drugs. Despite war

being a topic that can bring sorrow, these songs look at the romantic past and look not only at the need for sacrifice but at the possibilities of a better tomorrow.

Each chapter has explored a specific social change that had occurred during the Civil War, looking at how the event was transformed into a song and from there how that significance transcended the time period to become the artifact of a modern song. Songs of the time period openly related events of longing between soldiers and their lovers but also openly mocked leaders on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. It is understandable that songs of longing would outlast songs that would mock figures such as Abraham Lincoln or Robert E. Lee, both seen as national heroes. But the fact that Justin Townes Earl puts the Battle of Five Forks in a song or that Robbie Robertson of the Band can relate Stoneman’s cavalry to total war tactics on train tracks is quite a feat.

History has a way of being forgotten, but these songwriters have been able to take historical fact and use fictional narrative to turn the Civil War into a source of multiple meaning in the American songbook. Where the Civil War had been a specific event in American history with reasons for the upheaval and resolution, songwriters have built upon the events to create a reinterpreted war that stands in for trying to understand personal, regional and national history. But beyond that, the
Song Appendix\textsuperscript{76}

“I Wish I Was in Dixie”\textsuperscript{77}

Oh, I wish I was in the land of cotton, Old times there are not forgotten, Look away, look away, look away Dixie Land.

In Dixie Land, where I was born in, early on one frosty mornin’, Look away, look away, look away Dixie Land.

I wish I was in Dixie, Hooray! Hooray! In Dixie Land I’ll take my stand to live and die in Dixie. Away, away, away down south in Dixie. Away, away, away down south in Dixie.

Optional Verses

Ole Missus marry "Will the weaver" Willum was a gay deceiver Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

But when he put his arm around ‘er, He smiled fierce as a forty pounder, Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

His face was sharp as a butcher’s cleaver But that did not seem to grieve ‘er Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

Ole Missus acted the foolish part And died for a man that broke her heart Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

Now here’s a health to the next ole Missus An' all the gals that want to kiss us; Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

But if you want to drive 'way sorrow Come and hear this song tomorrow Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

There’s buckwheat cakes and Injun batter, Makes you fat or a little fatter Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

Then hoe it down and scratch your gravel, To Dixie’s Land I’m bound to travel, Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land

\textsuperscript{76} The song appendix is a companion to the thesis and contains only the complete text of the contemporary songs and a few of the songs mentioned at length in the thesis.

\textsuperscript{77} Daniel Decatur Emmett. “I Wish I Was in Dixie’s Land”. 1859.
Oh I’m A Good Old Rebel \(^78\)

Oh, I’m a good old rebel!

Now that’s just what I am;
For this “Fair Land of Freedom”
I do not care a damn
I’m glad I fit against it,
I only wish we’d won,
And I don’t want no pardon
For anything I’ve done.

I hate the Constitution,
This great Republic, too,
I hate the Freedman’s Bureau,
In uniforms of blue;
I hate the nasty eagle,
With all his brag and fuss,
The lying, thieving Yankees,
I hate them wuss and wuss.

I hate the Yankee Nation
And everything they do;
I hate the Declaration
Of Independence, too;
I hate the glorious Union
’Tis dripping with our blood;
I hate the striped banner,
I fit it all I could.

I followed old Marse Robert
For four years, near about,
Got wounded in three places,
And starved at P’int Lookout
I cotched the roomatism
A-camping in the snow
But I killed a chance of Yankees
I’d like to kill some mo’.

Three hundred thousand Yankees
Lie stiff in Southern dust;
We got three hundred thousand
Before they conquered us;
They died of Southern fever
And Southern steel and shot;
I wish it was three millions;
Instead of what we got.

I can’t take up my musket
And fight’em now no more;
But I ain’t a-going to love ’em
Now that is sartain sure;
And I don’t want no pardon,
For what I was and am;
I won’t be reconstructed,
And I don’t care a damn.

\(^78\) Performed by Hermes Nye. Written by Major Innes Randolph, C.S.A. *Song of the Civil War*. CD. Folkways Records, 1960
If the South Woulda Won

If the south woulda won we woulda had it made.  
I'd probably run for president of the southern states.  
The day Elvis passed away would be our national holiday.  
If the south woulda won we woulda had it made.  
I'd make my supreme court down in Texas and we wouldn't have no killers getting off free.  
If they were proven guilty then they would swing quickly,  
instead of writin' books and smilin' on T.V.  
We'd all learn cajun cookin' in Luiousiana  
and I'd put that capital back in Alabama.  
We'd put Florida on the right track, 'cause we'd take Miami back  
and throw all them pushers in the slammer.  

Oh if the south woulda won we woulda had it made.  
I'd probably run for president of the southern states.  
The day young Skynyrd died, we'd show our southern pride.  
If the south woulda won we woulda had it made.  

(Fiddle Solo)  
"Play a little dixieland boys. Ah yes!"  

I'd have all the whiskey made in Tennessee  
and all the horses raised in those Kentuckey hills.  
The national treasury would be in Tupilo, Mississippi  
and I'd put Hank Williams picture on one hundred dollar bill.  
I'd have all the cars made in the Carolina's  
and I'd ban all the ones made in China.  
I'd have every girl child sent to Georgia to learn to smile  
and talk with that southern accent that drives men wild.  
I'd have all the fiddles made in Virginia, 'cause they sure can make 'em sound so fine.  
I'm going up on Wolverton Mountain and see ole Cliften Clowers and have a sip of his good ole Arkansas wine.  

Hey if the south woulda won we'd a had it made.  
I'd probably run for president of the southern states.  
When Patsy Cline passed away that would be our national holiday.  
If the south woulda won we'd a had it made.  
Olay he hee hee . I said if the south wouda won we would a had it made!  

Might even be better off!

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Be My Mother Till I Die

Verse

Ladies, some one be my mother;
Then 'twill seem that I am home;
I'll imagine I'm a brother,
Hearing each familiar home;
But I want a mother near me,
With that heaven in her eye;
Ladies, some one be my mother,
Be my mother till I die.

Chorus

Now I feel my wound is mortal,
Soon I'll breath my parting sigh,
Ladies, some one be my mother,
Be my mother till I die.

Verse

Long before I was a soldier,
Long before I fought and bled,
In our cottage all the dear ones
Thus would gather round my bed.
Do not treat me as a stranger;
Let me feel a brother's tie;
One of you I want as mother,
Be my mother till I die.

Chorus

Soon no wicked war will harm me;
Angels bringing peace are nigh;
Ladies, some one be my mother,
Be my mother till I die.

---

Yankee Bayonet (I Will Be Home Then)\textsuperscript{81}

**Soldier**: Heart carved tree trunk, Yankee bayonet
A sweetheart left behind

**Girl**: Far from the hills of the sea-swaled Carolinas
That's where my true love lies

**Soldier**: Look for me when the sun-bright swallow
Sings upon the birch bow high

**Girl**: But you are in the ground with the wolves and the weevils
All a-chew on your bones so dry

**Chorus**
But when the sun breaks to no more bullets in Battlecreek
Then will you make a grave? For I will be home then
I will be home then
I will be home then
I will be home then

**Soldier**: And stems and bones and stone walls too
Could keep me from you
This skein of skin is all too few
To keep me from you

**Soldier and Girl**: But O my love though our bodies may be parted
Though our skin may not touch skin
Look for me with the sun-bright sparrow
I will come on the breath of the wind

**When the Roses Bloom Again**

They were strolling in the gloaming
Where the roses were in bloom
A soldier and his sweetheart brave and true
And their hearts were filled with sorrow
For their thoughts were of tomorrow
As she pinned a rose upon his coat of blue

Do not ask me love to linger
When you know not what to say
For duty calls your sweetheart's name again
And your heart need not be sighing
If I be among the dying
I'll be with you when the roses bloom again

When the roses bloom again
Beside the river
And the mockingbird has sung his sweet refrain
In the days of auld lang syne
I'll be with you sweetheart mine
I'll be with you when the roses bloom again

Mid the rattle of the battle
Came a whisper soft and low
A soldier who had fallen in the fray
I am dying, I am dying
And I know I'll have to go
But I want to tell you
Before I pass away

There's a far and distant river
Where the roses are in bloom
A sweetheart who is waiting there for me
And it's there I pray you take me
I've been faithful, don't forsake me
I'll be with her when the roses bloom again

---

The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down

By the Band

Virgil Caine is the name and I served on the Denver train
Stoneman's cavalry came and tore up the tracks again
In the winter of '65 we was hungry, just barely alive
By May 10, Richmond had fell, it was a time I remember,
Oh so well

The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the bells were ringing
The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the people were singing

Back with my wife in Tennessee one day she called for me
Virgil quick come see there goes the "Robert E. Lee"
I don't mind chopping wood and I don't care
If the money's no good
Take what you need and leave the rest
They should never have taken the very best

The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the bells were ringing
The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the people were singing

Like my father before me, I'm a peaceful man
Like my brother before me, I took a rebel stand
Just 18, proud and brave, but a Yankee laid him in his grave
I swear by the blood below my feet
You can't raise a Caine back up when he's in defeat

The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the bells were ringing
The night they drove ole Dixie down, all the people were singing

---

Lone Pine Hill

I swear I see her in my dreams sometimes
Held up in the middle of the night
Shakin like a pistol in a young mans hand
There in the pale moonlight

Standin up the top of that lonely hill
Spared by the company mines
Is my blue eyed baby with her best dress on
In the shadow of a lonely pine

It was back before the war
When the company came
These hills grew wild and free
Me and baby we'd hide in the hollers low
Away from the cruel sun's heat
But then they knocked down the timber
And burned off the brush
To get to the riches below
And when they pulled out
They left a cold black ground
And one pine standing lone

So take me home...
Lone pine hill

I signed up back in '61
I'm an army of Virginia man
I've been from Mannasas to Mackonackey
All the way to Sailors Creek fighting
For my home land

After 4 years gone and all hope lost
And Richmond under seige
And we're diggin out Five Forks
And waitin in the rain
For Sheridan to bring us to our knees

So take me home...
Lone pine hill

There's a strange moon hangin' overhead tonight
And if the rain keeps comin then the creek's gonna rise
With the good lord's grace
I'll make it outta this place
I'll be in her arms come the morning light
I swear...

So god grant me speed and grant me forgiveness
And carry me on through the night
Take me through the hills and over your rivers
Away from this awful fight

Cause I ain't never known a man that's ever owned another
Ain't never owned nothin' of my own
And after 4 long years I just can't tell you
What the hell I've been fighting for...

So take me home...
Lone pine hill
Take me home...
Lone pine hill

84 Justin Townes Earl. The Good Life. CD.
Bloodshot Records, 2008
Aura Lee

When the blackbird in the Spring,
'Neath the willow tree,
Sat and rock'd, I heard him sing,
Singing Aura Lea.
Aura Lea, Aura Lea,
Maid with golden hair;
Sunshine came along with thee,
And swallows in the air.
Chorus:
Aura Lea, Aura Lea,
Maid with golden hair;
Sunshine came along with thee,
And swallows in the air.
In thy blush the rose was born,
Music, when you spake,
Through thine azure eye the morn,
Sparkling seemed to break.
Aura Lea, Aura Lea,
Birds of crimson wing,
Never song have sung to me,
As in that sweet spring.
(Chorus)
Aura Lea! the bird may flee,
The willow's golden hair
Swing through winter fitfully,
On the stormy air.
Yet if thy blue eyes I see,
Gloom will soon depart;
For to me, sweet Aura Lea
Is sunshine through the heart.
(Chorus)
When the mistletoe was green,
Midst the winter's snows,
Sunshine in thy face was seen,
Kissing lips of rose.
Aura Lea, Aura Lea,
Take my golden ring;
Love and light return with thee,
And swallows with the spring.

85 W.W. Fosdick. “Aura Lee”. 1861
Notes

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**Discography**


**Videography**


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