

# The Lost Cause and Reunion in the Confederate Cemeteries of the North

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**ABSTRACT** The states that formed the Union during the American Civil War contain the remains of 26,000 Confederate prisoners of war. The United States neglected Confederate prisoners' graves after the war, but in the late nineteenth century the Lost Cause movement appropriated the cemeteries as repositories of Confederate symbolism and rituals. This was part of the broader Southern campaign to reconcile defeat, to reassert southern partisanship, and to normalize the Jim Crow South. The parallel reunion movement in the North valorized the South by elevating military duty to a moral imperative while sidestepping the conflict over slavery. The reunion sentiment inspired the work of the Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead, which resulted in systematic placement of monuments to Confederates in federal cemeteries. Confederate cemetery landscapes in the North represent changing interpretations of the meaning of the dead: a utilitarian burial process and War Department neglect of rebel graves, Lost Cause landscape production, assertions of the Americanism of Confederates, and expressions of reconciliation by the federal government. Encapsulated in these politicized landscapes are the white South's need for a narrative to support white supremacy and of the North's abandonment of racial justice as it sought reconciliation.

**KEYWORDS** Racism, cemeteries, war memorials, Lost Cause, Confederate monuments

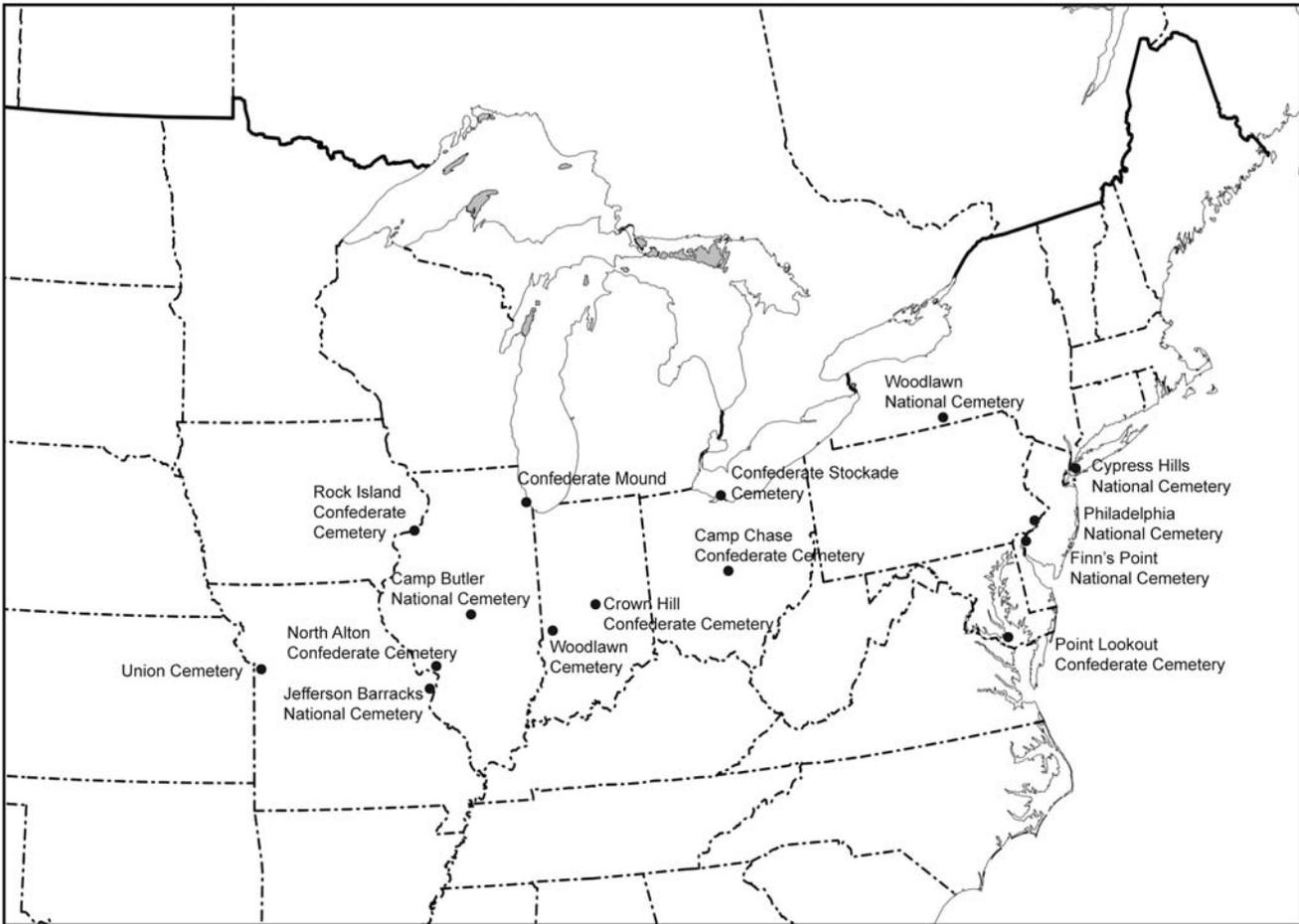
## INTRODUCTION

When nine African American members of a Bible study group were murdered in Charleston, S.C. in June 2015 by a white man who had displayed the Confederate battle flag in online posts, a tide of political opposition turned against the flag's display in public places. The public discussion about the battle flag then broadened to include memorials: monuments, the names of streets and public buildings, and civic landscapes that honored the Confederacy or its leaders.

Memorials represent their producers, not the events they commemorate. They remark on the past to make intentional claims on history and to mold the ideological future. Memorials are given birth by campaigns that also conceive political positions, educational efforts, and organized rituals. All of these work together to normalize ideas over a sustained period of time.

Flags possess more contemporary agency than do memorials. They are less physically durable and so are interpreted as a part of the present. As rallying symbols for loyalty and intention, they are understood to encapsulate the associated ideas of a cause and to call for action on its behalf. This symbolic immediacy of flags made the argument to remove the Confederate battle flag from government facilities relatively easy to accomplish. It was understood as the rallying symbol for Confederates in battle. It was one of the core symbols of the Lost Cause movement that re-established white supremacist order (sans slavery) in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It acquired modern notoriety when flown from state institutions in the South as government-sanctioned protest against federal actions on behalf of civil rights for African Americans.

Confederate monuments are more troublesome. The language of monuments is a code referencing ideas that seem universally appealing like honor, duty, and



**Figure 1**

Fifteen federal cemeteries or federally-owned portions of larger cemeteries contain the remains of Confederate prisoners of war. Twelve are prison cemeteries and three cemeteries are associated with private or city hospitals in which Confederate prisoners of war died while receiving medical treatment: Philadelphia National Cemetery, Cypress Hills National Cemetery, and Union Cemetery in Kansas City.

loyalty. Monuments lack the direct agency possessed by flags and appear to refer to events of the past, not of the present. They often memorialize the death of individuals or groups and so mingle the memory of the dead, the causes for which they fought, and the causes of those who erected the monuments. They may be complicated, but Confederate monuments and the landscapes that contain them are not innocent.

Contemporary discussion surrounding Confederate memorials centers on the claim that they represent history, which cannot be erased, and the counterclaim that Confederate memorials were made to advance an ideology bound up in white supremacy. A solution proposed for sorting through memorials is to treat those that honor common soldiers and those that honor Confederate leaders differently

(Brooks 2015). Another is to contextualize individual memorials with additional information about their subject and the memorial producers. A third considers relocation from state institutions or other civic spaces where they have the imprimatur of government to museums or other venues that may present multiple viewpoints (Kytle and Roberts 2015). These ideas can seem terribly cautious when considered against the legacy of white oppression of African Americans in the United States.

Answers to the dilemmas of Confederate memorials in the United States will not come easily, if by easily one means a quickly developed consensus—without requirement of nuance—which can be broadly applied without significant controversy. A good starting point is a greater understanding of Confederate memorials,

the groups who produced them, and the codes embedded in their visual and literary statements.

Because of their regional context, the Confederate prison cemeteries of the North express the political transition from war, to reconstruction, to full adoption of the Lost Cause narrative that accompanied Jim Crow in an especially thought-provoking way. This set of memorial landscapes is small compared to the vast number of Confederate cemeteries and memorials in the states of the former Confederacy, but it vividly illustrates that Jim Crow and the Lost Cause myth that helped justify it was not a Southern property; “white Americans, North and South, joined hands to restrict black civil and economic rights” in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries (Loewen 2008, 161). The federal government neglected Confederate prisoners’ graves in the decades following the war, but they were not forgotten by families and comrades. Confederate prisoners’ graves were also valued by political and social movements in the South that used cemetery landscapes to recast the meaning and memory of the Civil War and to remake “military defeat into a political, social, and cultural victory for the white South” (Janney 2008, 3). These northern cemeteries were developed into narrative landscapes that asserted Southern honor with literary and visual symbols that were well understood at the time (Figure 1). Encapsulated in them is the white South’s new narrative and the North’s complicity in abandoning racial justice as it sought reconciliation. This is what David Blight calls “the tragedy lingering on the margins and infesting the heart of American history from Appomattox to World War I” (2001, 3).

### **UNION PRISON CAMPS AND BURIALS**

Soon after the Civil War started, the federal government prepared for the receipt of prisoners of war. Lieutenant Colonel William Hoffman, commissary-general for prisoners, was sure that a new prison at Johnson’s Island on Lake Erie and one or two existing forts would sufficiently house prisoners over the course of the war. He never imagined that tens of thousands of soldiers would be captured at any one time (Hesseltine 1972, 98–100; Thompson n.d., 64).

By the end of the war the Confederacy had held 193,743 Union prisoners and 214,865 Confederate soldiers were confined in Union prison camps. Over 30,000 Union soldiers and 26,000 Confederate soldiers

died in captivity—12 percent of those held in northern prisons and 15.5 percent of those held in Confederate prisons (Hesseltine 1972, 6).

J. Cooper McGee, an Assistant Surgeon sent to Camp Butler in Springfield, Illinois found appalling conditions. He wrote that the six hospitals there were “in miserable sanitary condition. . . . The stench from the wards was horrid and sickening.” The sick were crowded in wooden bunks or on the floor. Many had no blankets and medicines were deficient. McGee found the nurses and attendants negligent (Shepply 1932–1933, 298–299). McGee arrived in the spring of 1862, and under his medical leadership deaths fell from 123 in May to 30 in June.

The same conditions, dominated by poor shelter and chronic diarrhea, killed prisoners at all Union camps. More than 26,000 Confederate prisoners of war passed through Camp Douglas in Chicago, and more than 4,000 died there (Long 1970, 83–94). Over 12,000 Confederates entered Rock Island prison and many never left the island. Small pox killed 539; diarrhea and dysentery took 456; tuberculosis, pneumonia, and bronchitis killed another 439. Almost 2,000 men died at Rock Island, 16 percent of those held in the compound (McAdams 2000, 205–206). The prison in Elmira, New York had the highest mortality rate of all Union military prisons at 24 percent. The prison was open from July 1864 to July 1865. In that time 2,961 of its 12,147 prisoners died, and most of them are buried at Woodlawn National Cemetery (Holmes 1912, 130; Gray 2001, 103, 153; U.S. War Department, 8:997–1002).

### **Prison Burials and Records**

Burial records associated with the prison camps are incomplete at best. Prior to 1864, when a prisoner of war died, the surgeon in charge of a prison hospital was required only to record the individual’s name, rank, regiment and company, date and place of capture, and date and cause of death. It was not until April 20, 1864 that the place of interment and the number of the grave was recorded (U.S. War Department, 4:152; 7:72–75).

Locating graves later was complicated because there was no mandated procedure for burying prisoners. Records of the various camps show that the bodies of Confederate soldiers were often buried in trenches in individual coffins, but not in mass graves.



**Figure 2**  
Grave markers placed near the times of burial were typically wooden boards (Photograph Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration).

The wooden grave markers of prisoners were generally marked only with a number that correlated to the number in the record of deaths maintained by the surgeon in charge (Figure 2). Only some of those responsible for keeping records of prison deaths drew cemetery maps showing the location of the trenches, the location of each coffin, and the burial number assigned to each (Knauss 1906, 11; Winslow and Moore 1995, 77). Many Confederate remains were moved from their original place of interment; some more than once.

After the Civil War, most Confederate burial grounds were forgotten and neglected. In the years between the end of the war and the 1906 passage of the act authorizing marking the graves of Confederate prisoners of war, headboards had rotted, were destroyed, or were dislodged (“Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery” n.d., 3–4; Knauss 1906, xii–xiii, 11, 70; Pickenpough 2007, 146).

### Union Re-interments

At war’s end, Union graves in the South were located, exhumed, and moved to new national cemeteries near battlefields or to the North by the federal government as directed by the legislation passed in 1867 that established national cemeteries (Sanger 1868, 14:399). Legislation in 1873 specified the character of national cemeteries and their grave markers (Sanger 1873, 17:202, 605). An additional program extended the marking of soldiers’ graves to those interred in private cemeteries in 1879 (Streere 1953, 125). All of these measures applied to “soldiers of the United

States” (Sanger 1868, 14:353). The graves of Confederates, whether in the North or the South, were officially neglected.

In places like Virginia and Tennessee, where burial details on battlefields exhumed Union graves for relocation while ignoring or disturbing Confederate graves, resentment ran high over these policies. Along with the immediate perception of the “atrocities they believed were being committed by the Union burial crews,” there was the symbolism of the national cemeteries that excluded Confederates. It appeared to Southerners that the message from the United States was that Southern soldiers “had died in vain” (Janney 2008, 46).

The location of prisoners’ remains created additional hardships for families in the South because they were further from families’ homes than battlefield burials. The victorious North had the political capacity and the resources to re-inter deceased Union prisoners in national cemeteries. The people of the former Confederacy, however, had no such ability to reclaim their dead prisoners of war. In the years immediately following the Civil War, Southerners were largely dependent on the United States to preserve records of burials, to properly mark graves, and to re-inter—or at least re-mark—Confederate prisoners’ graves in an orderly fashion when they had not been buried in suitable locations. Confederate prisoners, as described by an editor of the *Richmond Daily Examiner*, remained far from their homeland “in deserted places to rot into oblivion” (Blair 2003, 53).

Proper reburial and commemoration of Confederate dead on battlefields and in prison cemeteries provided a focus for the post-war South as it grappled with the social and moral consequences of defeat and as it began to formulate a new narrative centered on the virtues of soldierly duty while ignoring slavery as a genesis for the war. By the time the South's monument building campaign was complete, attitudes by whites in the North and the South were so completely aligned with the South's narrative of sovereignty and honor that military defeat had been turned to social victory (Savage 1997, 207).

### **The Lost Cause and the Reunion Sentiment**

The Lost Cause provided a way for Southerners to cope with defeat in the Civil War, to mitigate the radical shifts in their economic and social order, and to justify continuing white supremacy. Edward Pollard articulated a political rationalization for the Lost Cause in his 1866 book, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the Confederates*. He and other authors developed a set of tenets that turned "the Southerners' tragic and self-destructive mistake" (Nolan 2000, 14) into a doomed, but honorable fight for the "Immortal Confederacy" (Hunter 2000, 187).

The credo of the Lost Cause was that . . .

. . . the war was fought to defend states' rights and to protect a chivalrous antebellum way of life from northern aggression. It pictured an Old South . . . fighting with dignity and pride. Slavery . . . had been a benevolent institution. Slavery was not the main reason for the war. The war was lost only because of the industrial might and overwhelming numbers of the North. Above all, the Lost Cause sought a restoration of respect (Mills and Simpson 2003, xvii-xviii).

To transform this ideology into a "culture religion" required symbols, rituals, and groups to perpetuate them (Hunter 2000, 186). Clement Evans, a Methodist minister and former Confederate Brigadier General, described the core symbols in a speech he gave in a Confederate Memorial Day address in 1896, which was subsequently published in *Confederate Veteran*. These symbols were "a battle melody [Dixie]," "the old battle flag," and "the jacket of gray which uniformed our army" (Evans 1896, 228).

### **Lost Cause Rituals**

Charles Reagan Wilson (1980) identifies four dominant rituals that encapsulated the messages of the Lost Cause and associated its symbols with those messages: modification of religious traditions, Confederate Memorial Day, burial of Confederates, and construction of memorials.

Christian religious practice by whites in the South began to mix the imagery of the Lost Cause and religious tradition, especially at Easter and other important days. The "application of biblical archetypes to the Confederacy" included especially the comparison of Confederate heroes with biblical martyrs (Wilson 1980, 221). The near-religious lionization of Robert E. Lee led Frederick Douglass to comment on the "nauseating flatteries" of the "rebel chief" (Blight 2001, 270).

Confederate Memorial Day—"the Sabbath of the South" (Hunter 2000, 201)—began the spring after the Civil War ended in multiple places in the South. Major Ureil Wright proclaimed in his speech at the Confederate memorial service in Winchester, Virginia in June 1866 that "The mothers and daughters of Virginia are the chief mourners and actors in these touching obsequies," (Janney 2008, 64) and all over the old Confederacy, Ladies Memorial Associations and other women's groups organized local Memorial Day observances. In the process, they extended their traditional domestic role into the political sphere and avoided the appearance of treasonous activity that would have resulted if the observances were organized by former Confederate men (Janney 2008, 65). Confederate Memorial Day grew from individualized local practices in the 1860s into an event widely observed in the South by the 1880s. In 1900, the Confederated Southern Memorial Association was formed and it established June 3rd, Jefferson Davis's birthday, as Confederate Memorial Day, although other dates are used in individual state observances (Hunter 2000, 190).

The burial of Confederate veterans and heroes brought forth the symbols of the Lost Cause and religious traditions in a ritual with maximum potential for emotional impact. Dixie was sung, veterans attending the service wore the old gray jacket, and the Confederate battle flag was displayed. The burial of a veteran was codified in the "Confederate Veteran's Burial Ritual" (Wilson 1980, 227). One of the first of these burials of Confederate heroes was the re-interment of Turner and Richard Ashby in Winchester, Virginia in

1866, said to be attended by 10,000 people (Janney 2008, 65). The occasion was used to hold something very much like a political rally during which Reconstruction was protested by former Virginia Governor Henry Wise (Janney 2008, 67). Later ceremonies were much less about present conditions than they were about memory and a reminder of a core belief that “despite defeat, the Confederate experience proved that they [white Southerners] were a noble, virtuous people” (Wilson 1980, 227).

The construction of monuments was the most physically tangible and enduring Lost Cause ritual. *Confederate Veteran* claimed that in the South there were more than a thousand monuments to the Confederacy by 1914 (“The Monumental Spirit” 1914, 344). The other rituals often intertwined with monument building. Confederate Memorial Day was an appropriate time to dedicate a monument that could then serve as the focal point and the embodiment of memory for subsequent Memorial Day commemorations. As Southerners established military cemeteries or sections of existing cemeteries, monuments and the burial ritual intertwined in them as well. Religious imagery and language mixed freely with many monuments, transforming them into “religious objects, almost idols” (Wilson 1980, 227).

The Confederate monument in Oakland Fraternal Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas is a good example. It marks the burial place of 900 Confederate soldiers who died in hospitals in Little Rock. On it are inscribed parts of two poems by Father Abram Joseph Ryan, known as the poet-priest of the South, that are typical of the religious imagery of monument inscriptions and that “make the soldier’s sacrifice for the nation paramount; only secondarily do they speak to the justice of the nation’s cause, if they speak of it at all” (Savage 1997, 178).

All lost! But by the grave  
where martyred heroes rest  
he wins the most who honor saves  
success is not the test.  
—*Sentinel Songs*, Father Ryan (Ryan 1879, 113).

### Northern Reunion Sentiment

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a companion “culture of conciliation” in the North celebrated the South and “offered a soothing alternative

to . . . moral dislocation” caused by a perceived shift in the North from agrarian values to the concentration of power resulting from industrial capitalism. In this view, the agrarian image of the South provided an antidote and a touchstone to the old values of “personal dignity, familial integrity, or pure and simple romance,” (Silber 1993, 95–96) while glossing over the racial oppression that made this idealized society possible.

In addition, there was a practical concern as the North regarded the potential markets in the South and the economic advantages of greater regional reconciliation. Reunion was exemplified by Louisville’s increasing identification with the South. The city that had been predominantly Union in sympathy during the war and that served as a Union supply depot made an effort to become the primary industrial and shipping hub for the South in the late nineteenth century. In competition with St. Louis and Cincinnati for Southern trade, Louisville “became more lavish than ever in her hospitality to southern merchants” (Coulter 1922, 63). Louisville’s efforts had enough success that former Confederate general and Southern historian/apologist Basil Duke proclaimed it the “greatest commercial city in the South” in making his plea to the United Confederate Veterans to hold its 1900 convention in the city (Marshall 2010, 158).

Financial concerns were blended with patriotic sentimentality and “the literature of reunion fulfilled the New South promise of bringing North and South together through financial cooperation . . .” (Silber 1993, 107). Ferdinand Peck, of the Chicago Citizens Committee, linked sentiment and commerce in his speech welcoming Confederates to the dedication of the monument at the Confederate Mound in Chicago when he spoke of “fraternal feeling” and “investment of the capital of this section in developing the vast resources of the southern states” (Blight 2001, 204). Sentiment and financial opportunity combined to lead to a softening of sectional attitudes and receptiveness to the concerns of white Southerners. William McKinley, in his remarks to a delegation of Confederate veterans from Virginia visiting him at his home in Canton, Ohio during the presidential campaign of 1896, asserted that “. . . we are Americans and what is good for Ohio is good for Virginia” (“Union and Honor” 1896). It was during the 1896 campaign that, for the first time since the Civil War, the Republican

**Figure 3**

The United Daughters of the Confederacy engraved four lines from Scott's *Lady of the Lake* on the right gatepost outside North Alton Confederate Cemetery in 1910. The entry gate directs the view to the federal monument and effectively connects the inscription to it.



Party removed any reference to voting rights for African Americans (Kelly 2004, 181).

The Lost Cause and Reunion movements spurred the interest of local and national groups in making Northern Confederate cemeteries into landscapes that were marked and memorialized. The interplay between these groups and the federal government led to different methods of memorialization and, depending on the balance of decision-making power, the political statements made by memorials. Southern groups who made literary and artistic references to the Lost Cause organized the earlier development of the cemeteries beginning in the 1880s. Northerners and Southern transplants to the North joined with these groups in the continuation of their work and the development of themes of reconciliation. This effort at reconciliation culminated in the work of the federal government in the early twentieth century, which adopted an official policy of neutrality, but created monuments in cemetery landscapes whose visual symbolism speaks of valor, sacrifice, and honor. These federal monuments left out all references to justice or to slavery as a cause of the war, thus aiding the South in making slavery “everyone’s and no one’s responsibility” (Blight 2001, 205).

### LOST CAUSE LITERARY AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN CEMETERIES

Romantic literature, especially the books of Sir Walter Scott, created a foundation for the chivalric image that the South intertwined into its own description of its agrarian slaveholding social system. Scott was popular

in the North and the South in the decades before the war, but the medieval images he developed in books like *Ivanhoe* continued to resonate in the South during and after the war as it mythologized its sense of moral and social superiority (Wachtell 2010, 32–40). Mark Twain said in *Life on the Mississippi* that the South had “Sir Walter Disease” and went on to make the exaggerated speculation that there may have been no Civil War if not for the South’s love of Scott (1901, 328).

#### North Alton

The literary foundations for the claim to a chivalrous struggle found its way into memorials for Confederate prisoners-of-war. At North Alton Confederate Cemetery, one of the gateposts is inscribed “*Soldier rest! Thy warfare o’er. Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking! Dream of battlefields no more. Days of danger, nights of waking.*” The passage, from Scott’s *Lady of the Lake* (1810, 38), is part of a song sung by Ellen, who is a member of a Highland clan. The rebellion of the rural Highlanders against the more economically powerful Lowlanders is an easy allegory for the Lost Cause construct. Scott’s epic poem also includes a description of a *Crann Tara*, the burning cross that the twentieth-century incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan adopted as their brutal icon of racial oppression (Wade 1998, 146).

The gatepost containing the inscription from *Lady of the Lake* is a modest limestone pillar that contrasts with the monumental scale of the federal memorial, which is on the cemetery’s high point (Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 4 (Top Left)**

The federal monument at North Alton Confederate Cemetery includes the names of all known burials in the cemetery on the angled sides of its plinth.

**Figure 5 (Top Right)**

The privately funded Sentry monument at the Confederate Stockade looks away from the cemetery's graves to Sandusky Bay and is inscribed with a passage from Byron's *Manfred*, "C.S.A. 1861-1865," "Southern," and "They Were Masons."

**Figure 6 (Bottom Left)**

Frederick William Sievers' 1937 bas-relief sculpture in the Confederate Section of Woodlawn National Cemetery represents a far more neutral pose than his sculptures executed for various towns in Virginia and for the Virginia Memorial at Gettysburg.

The Sam Davis Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), which was given custody of the cemetery by the federal government in 1905 (“D.O.C. Chapter Gets Custody” 1905), repeatedly lobbied for a monument design that included a sculpture of a Confederate soldier, a medallion of Sam Davis who was a Confederate army courier executed for espionage by the Union army, and the letters C.S.A. None of these requests were granted, but they were allowed the verse on the gate for which they paid, along with the fence enclosing the cemetery.

### Johnson’s Island

At Confederate Stockade on Johnson’s Island, the Cincinnati-based Robert Patton Chapter of the UDC turned to another British romantic for literary inspiration. A slightly altered passage from Lord Byron’s poem *Manfred* is inscribed on the memorial erected by the UDC: “*Dead, but Sceptered Sovereigns who still rule us from the dust.*” *Manfred* tells the story of a “. . . superhuman character fated . . . to be destroyed but not defeated,” (Twitchell 1975, 614) whose final words are “. . . ’tis not so difficult to die,” (Byron 1817, 69) and is an appropriate metaphor for the Lost Cause conception of the Confederacy. The passage is inscribed on a granite base that provides a pedestal for a Confederate soldier described as “The Sentry” (Figure 5). The base of the sentry contains two other inscriptions that alternate on its four sides. One is the statement “They Were Masons,” and the other is simply “C.S.A.” Many of the officers buried at the Confederate Stockade were indeed Masons, and the combination of the alternating inscriptions asserts their universal Americanism.

The sentry and other sculptures are the visual parallel to literary symbolism in the cemeteries and, like the literary passages, their meaning is connected to external references understood by their producers. The sentry seems (other than the irony of his modern day surroundings which cause him to be steadfastly gazing at a roller coaster in the Cedar Point amusement park) like fairly standard fare for a Civil War monument; many on both sides of the conflict used a common soldier as their visual focus. This soldier, though, was sculpted in 1910 by Moses Ezekiel, a Confederate veteran who was already well known for the sculpture *Virginia Mourning Her Dead* and was later acclaimed for the *Confederate Memorial* at Arlington National

Cemetery. Ezekiel himself spoke at the unveiling of the monument along with members of the Ohio UDC (“To Unveil Monument” 1910).

### Woodlawn

The UDC in 1937 chose Frederick William Sievers to sculpt a bas-relief of a Confederate soldier for the Confederate Section of Woodlawn National Cemetery in Elmira, New York. From his studio in Richmond, Virginia, Sievers sculpted the *Virginia Memorial* at Gettysburg, along with many other Confederate memorials (“Confederate Monument at Woodlawn” 1994, 87). Sievers’ other anonymous soldier representations, including those in the Virginia towns of Leesburg and Abingdon, carry rifles at the ready (Sievers 1907a, 1907b). His relief figure in Elmira is unarmed, with hat in hand, and is slightly stylized (Figure 6). The effect is far from the battle-ready soldiers of his other monuments or of the battle-weary soldier of John Adams Elder’s monument at the Confederate Mound in Chicago. The bronze figure is set in a niche-like granite monument approximately 10 feet tall. A plaque on the face of the monument reads simply: *In memory of the Confederate soldiers in the War Between the States who died at Elmira prison and lie buried here erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy November 6, 1937.* “War Between the States” is the term for the Civil War promoted by the UDC in their textbook campaigns of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that is still promoted on their website as the appropriate term for a conflict between “two separate nations” (Let’s Say . . . 2014).

### Rock Island

Literary and visual images at Rock Island Confederate Cemetery more directly link to the war itself and not just the broader Southern cause. One of the earliest available photographs of the Rock Island Confederate Cemetery was taken in 1919 (Figure 7). In it, two columns, each with a cannon in front and flanked by two piles of artillery shot, form a gateway. Two more cannons are planted at the end of the entry walk and are used as posts from which to hang an iron chain. Bronze plaques affixed to the columns identify the cemetery and include the following inscription: “*Let us cross the river and rest in the shade of the trees.*” *General T. J. Jackson, C. S. A.* Hunter McGuire, the physician attending Jackson at his death, said these



**Figure 7**  
The entry at Rock Island Confederate Cemetery includes four Confederate field pieces and a quote attributed to Stonewall Jackson (Courtesy Rock Island Arsenal Museum).



**Figure 8**  
The elaborate mix of imagery at Confederate Mound in Chicago includes allegorical bas-relief sculptures, artillery pieces, trees provided by southern governors, and a central obelisk.

were Jackson’s last words. The phrase entered southern lore, appeared on monuments, and was enshrined in the hymn “*Let Us Pass Over the River, and Rest Under the Shade of the Trees,*” adopted into the hymnal of the Southern Methodist Church (Wilson 1980, 225).

Today, the panels are affixed to concrete slabs and the four cannons are mounted in a firing position. The cannons were captured from the Confederate States and stored at the Rock Island Arsenal until they were installed in the cemetery in 1871. (Snyder 1967, 6; “Confederate Cemetery is One” 1951; “Re: Confederate Cemetery at Rock Island, Ill.” 1895). No other Confederate cemetery in the North includes Confederate field pieces, and their presence in a

position of honor on a United States military facility is remarkable.

## REUNION IMAGERY IN CEMETERIES

### Confederate Mound

Northern reconciliation with the South is vividly communicated at the Confederate Mound, a government lot in Chicago’s Oak Woods Cemetery. After moving over 4,000 prisoners’ remains to a lot in Oak Woods in 1867, the government did little to maintain the burial site and placed no marker or memorial on the lot. In 1887, the Ex-Confederate Association of Chicago received permission from the quartermaster to erect a



**Figure 9**  
The obelisk at Confederate Mound supports a statue based on a figure in John Adams Elder's painting *Appomattox*.

memorial in the government lot in Oak Woods Cemetery (Underwood 1896, 232; "Confederate 'Mound'" 1902, 319). This was not to be a simple shaft over a large grave site, but an elaborate memorial with all of the trappings of the military, with fundraising organized by the Chicago United Confederate Veterans Camp No. 8 and their commander John Underwood (Underwood 1896, 254).

The monument was dedicated on May 30, 1895. The *Confederate Veteran* praised Underwood's work, proclaiming that he ". . . deserves recognition and expressions of gratitude from every Confederate organization in existence" ("Dedication of the Monument" 1895, 145). The unveiling was a lavish spectacle that included a procession by train and carriage from the

city to the cemetery, a crowd of 100,000 in attendance, speeches by former Confederates, and a reception at Chicago's National Guard Armory (Underwood 1896, 101, 109–113). These speeches included Wade Hampton's, in which he proclaimed that one could "Say if you please that they were mistaken, that they were wrong, no brave man on earth can fail to do honor to their courage" (Blight 2001, 204).

Confederate Mound is elliptically shaped, 275 feet by 475 feet, and rises gently to its central point. At its center is the monument, a granite shaft set on a large plinth and topped with a sculpture of a Confederate soldier (Figures 8 and 9). The soldier is depicted unarmed, as after surrender, and looking down in sorrow on the graves below. The motif is based on John



**Figure 10**

The original monument at Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery was the boulder placed in 1893, followed by the 1902 statue and arch inscribed with the word “Americans,” and the grave markers, which were placed in 1908.

Adams Elder’s painting *Appomattox* and is similar, but not identical, to the Confederate Statue in Alexandria, Virginia that was designed by Elder and executed by the sculptor M. Casper Buberl in 1889 (Buberl 1889). Elder, a painter from Fredericksburg, Virginia and a Confederate veteran, was well-known in the late nineteenth century for his paintings of Robert E. Lee and his pastoral genre paintings. These glorified rural life in the post-war South and contributed images to the narrative that happy, submissive African Americans had blossomed under the benevolent conditions of slavery.

A tableau depicting the war in the South rings the base of the shaft with allegorical images of the patriotic rush to enlist in the Confederate army, the destruction of battle, and finally the homecoming to a devastated landscape. These are described in a nearby

plaque installed when the monument was dedicated as *The Call to Arms, A Soldier’s Death Dream, and A Veteran’s Return Home*.

Four field pieces donated by the War Department of the United States to the United Confederate Veterans surround the monument along with a single stack of artillery shot (at the time of the dedication there were six of these shot stacks) (Ex-Confederate Association of Chicago 1892, 3–7; Levy 1999, 361). The entire lot is well planted with shade and ornamental trees that were supplied in 1953, on the one-hundredth anniversary of Oak Woods Cemetery, by Louisiana Governor Robert Kennon and Mississippi Governor Hugh White (Taussig 1991, 3; Robertson 1995, 26; Crawford 2010).

## Camp Chase

Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio makes the reunion statement most simply. William Knauss, a Union veteran and citizen of Columbus, resurrected the cemetery between the years 1893 and 1902. Knauss had made a personal pledge to help his former foes when they were in need, and when he moved to Columbus he found the Confederate Cemetery in a poor state of repair. He made arrangements with Henry Briggs, the former caretaker, to clean up the cemetery. On his own initiative, Mr. Briggs placed a large boulder in the cemetery on which he had inscribed "2,260 Confederate soldiers of the war 1861–1865 are buried in this enclosure." Flowers were planted and then Knauss and the Camp Chase Memorial Association set out to find a more permanent solution (Knauss 1906, xii–xiii, 11).

Three years later the Camp Chase Memorial Association achieved its goal. On June 7, 1902, a monument was unveiled: a rusticated limestone arch topped with a zinc casting of a figure of a Confederate soldier and with the word "AMERICANS" inscribed on the keystone (Figure 10). The arch was erected over the inscribed boulder and was perhaps an echo of William McKinley's speech to the Confederate veterans of Virginia in 1896 (Knauss 1906, 62; "Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery" n.d., 3–4; Pickenpaugh 2007, 146).

### **"... WITHOUT PRAISE AND WITHOUT CENSURE."**

The federal government's treatment of Confederate graves transitioned from intentional neglect after the Civil War to sculptural reverence in the early twentieth century. The legislation enabling the marking of battle lines at Gettysburg, approved March 3, 1893, was the first to consider marking anything related to the Confederate military. It provided funding to mark "... the positions occupied by the various commands of the armies of the Potomac and of Northern Virginia on that field . . . each bearing a brief historical legend, compiled without praise and without censure" ("Monuments and Tablets" 1893, 600). Legislation in 1895 did the same at Antietam Battlefield ("Battlefield of Antietam" 1895, 950).

President McKinley spoke before the Georgia legislature on December 14, 1898. McKinley wanted to recognize the role of Southerners in winning the Spanish-American War. He praised the beauty of the national cemeteries, and offered them as proof that

the dead had shared a love of the nation with the living (Neff 2005, 22). Then the President offered an olive branch to the South: "... the time has now come in the evolution of sentiment and feeling, under the providence of God, when in the spirit of fraternity we should share with you in the care of the graves of the Confederate soldiers" ("Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia" 1899, 290).

In 1900, Congress agreed to re-inter 128 Confederate soldiers buried at the National Soldiers Home in Washington and 136 buried at Arlington in a special Confederate Section in Arlington National Cemetery. At this time, the War Department chose to mark Confederate graves with a distinctive headstone whose pointed top would be easily distinguished from the rounded headstone used for United States military graves ("Arlington, Va. Reburial" 1901, 630).

### **Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead**

The Arlington re-burials set the precedent for the 1906 law making the government of the United States responsible for the graves of all Confederates "... who died in federal prisons and military hospitals in the North and who were buried near their places of confinement . . ." and "... to cause to be erected over said graves white marble headstones similar to those recently placed over the graves in the 'Confederate section' in the National Cemetery at Arlington, Virginia, similarly inscribed" ("Foraker Bill" 1907, 56). The legislation directed the Secretary of War to create a Commission for Marking Graves of Confederate Dead. President Theodore Roosevelt appointed William Elliott of South Carolina to head the Commission. Elliot was the first of four commissioners, all Southerners and Confederate veterans (Berry 1912).

The Commission pieced together enough information to mark individual graves at six cemeteries: Camp Butler National Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois; Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery, Columbus, Ohio; Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York; Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri; Rock Island Confederate Cemetery, Rock Island, Illinois; and Woodlawn National Cemetery, Elmira, New York. In all six cemeteries the Commission used the Confederate headstone design first created for Arlington National Cemetery.

In Elmira, the graves had been continuously marked, and so the new gravestones were placed on



**Figure 11**  
The arrangement of grave markers in the Confederate Section of Camp Butler National Cemetery convey the haphazard pattern in which graves were dug.

known and marked graves. The Confederate graves were in a distinct section of Woodlawn National Cemetery that had originally been a section of the adjacent city cemetery.

Graves at Camp Chase and Rock Island Confederate Cemeteries were marked after reconciling records of burials and existing grave markers. Both of these are discrete cemeteries unconnected to any larger cemetery.

Confederate graves at Camp Butler, Cypress Hills, and Jefferson Barracks are within the context of larger national cemeteries. Camp Butler National Cemetery's Confederate Section is unique, with a physical layout that manifests the haphazard process of burying the prisoners (Figure 11). Uneven rows in multiple directions indicate that there was no plan for the pattern of the cemetery. The War Department inspector who examined the cemetery in 1870 wrote that "The burials were made from the hospitals at Camp Butler as the deaths occurred, and do not seem to have been made according to any regular plan or order; but the graves

were dug as most convenient" (U.S. Congress 1872, 87). The commission marked these graves as originally placed.

Cypress Hills National Cemetery is arranged in an elegant arc that corresponds to its bowl-shaped terrain (Figure 12). Confederate graves are intermixed with Union graves and are distinguishable only by the shape of the grave markers. The national cemetery flows into the larger romantically designed landscape of Cypress Hills Cemetery, including two circularly arranged landscapes at the east and west ends of the military section: a memorial to President James Garfield, and the Mount of Victory, which includes the burials of veterans of the War of 1812.

At Jefferson Barracks, Confederate graves occupy four complete sections and most of two additional sections of the vast national cemetery.

The government could not arrive at an arrangement to purchase the cemetery on Johnson's Island in Ohio until 1931 ("Island Cemetery Belongs to U.S." 1932; "Island Burial Ground Service" 1932; "Johnson's



**Figure 12**  
Union Grounds at Cypress Hills National Cemetery, which includes mixed Union and Confederate graves is arranged in an arc set into a hillside.

Island Rites” 1932; Wilson 1974) and those graves retained the 206 markers that had been placed on them by private citizens from Georgia and South Carolina in 1890 along with the 1912 monument (Owen 1887; “Confederate Dead at Johnson’s Island” October 19, 1889; February 22, 1890; “Confederate Dead at Johnson’s Island” May 16, 1890).

### **Collective Monuments**

At eight of the fifteen prisoner-of-war cemeteries, grave records were insufficient for the placement of individual markers. Two years of diligent research by the Commission could not overcome this obstacle and the Secretary of War gave the Commission permission to proceed with placing large monuments at places where individual graves could not be identified (Oliver 1908). Congress passed new legislation in 1910 that codified this decision and “. . . authorized to cause to be erected central masonry constructions, or monuments, upon which bronze tablets shall be placed containing the names of the deceased prisoners of war who are buried

in the immediate vicinity” (U.S. Treasury Department 1911, 315).

Greenlawn, in Indianapolis, was the first cemetery to receive a collective marker—a broad granite monument to which were affixed bronze tablets with the names of 1,616 deceased prisoners (Oates 1908). On the question of an inscription, Secretary of War Davis cited the 1893 legislation which stated that a tablet could “have a brief historical legend, compiled without praise and without censure.” He also pointed out that the word “valorous” was stricken from a Union monument at Gettysburg (Davis 1908). The inscription developed in response, “*Erected by the United States to mark the burial place of 1616 Confederate soldiers who died here while prisoners of war and whose graves cannot now be individually identified,*” became standardized for monuments at other Confederate cemeteries.

Collective monuments at Finn’s Point National Cemetery, New Jersey; Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery, Maryland; and North Alton Confederate



**Figure 13**  
Large obelisks mark the collective graves at three sites including the Confederate portion of Finn’s Point National Cemetery in New Jersey.

**Figure 14**  
The collective monuments include lists of names of known burials. These tablets are at the base of the monument at Point Lookout Confederate Cemetery in Maryland.

Cemetery, Illinois quickly followed. William C. Oates—the second of the four commissioners—and the Commission chose obelisks for the monuments at these three cemeteries (Figures 13 and 14). When considered from the “without praise” perspective, the obelisk was a contradictory choice. In the nineteenth century obelisks retained their Egyptian symbolism of immortality (Griswold and Griswold 1986, 688–719), but were used to mark military prowess and were dedicated to victories and heroes. In the United States, specifically, obelisks acquired associations with democracy, endurance and, when unornamented, with the anonymity of those whom they honored (Zukowski 1976, 574–581). Examples include the obelisks at Bunker Hill, the federal monument at Gettysburg (the

monument from which the word “valorous” had been stricken), and the country’s largest monument—the Washington Monument. Commissioner Oates specified the intended monuments in documents prepared to solicit bids. The standardized text for all three left overt praise out of the language affixed even as symbolic praise was inherent in the form and scale of the monuments, which exceeded 50 feet in height.

In 1911 and 1912, two city cemeteries, in Kansas City, Missouri and Terre Haute, Indiana, received small monuments in the form of obelisks to collectively mark 15 and 11 Confederate graves, respectively.

Oak Woods in Chicago, of course, already had a collective monument of extravagant design and with a strong message of reunion. The Commission had this



**Figure 15**  
The small Confederate Section at Philadelphia National Cemetery terminates on a collective monument.



**Figure 16**  
Philadelphia's Confederate Section is an empty field surrounded by the grave markers of adjacent sections.

monument raised and placed on a broad plinth with bronze panels listing the names of 4,275 Confederates interred in the mound.

### **CONCLUSION: PHILADELPHIA AND THE POWER OF EMPTINESS**

Among the final memorials constructed by the Commission at a Confederate cemetery in the North was the monument in Philadelphia, in 1911. The Confederate Section of Philadelphia National Cemetery is marked at its four corners with granite blocks inscribed with the letter C, which is typical of Confederate sections of national cemeteries. Adjacent sections filled with rows of white marble headstones enclose the plot on all four sides. A squat monument is positioned

on the high point at the East end of the section (Figure 15). It contains the same inscription found on all the other collective monuments—*Erected by the United States to mark . . .*—along with the names of 184 men. There are two trees within the section, both large sugar maples. Beneath one of them is a granite plaque set flush with the ground and about two feet by six feet in size. On it is engraved: *Two hundred and twenty four unknown Confederate dead, 1861–1865, Erected by the General Dabney H. Maury Chapter U.D.C.* Within the section there is nothing else but lawn (Figure 16). The effect of this rectangular space surrounded by fields of Union grave markers is striking. It allows consideration of the Confederate graves as they might have been in all the northern Confederate cemeteries

before their transformation into intentional political spaces. There remains an unsullied sense of tragedy in the Philadelphia section and it demonstrates something important in its nearly perfect emptiness. Life and loss of life can be memorialized and even the poignancy of death far away from loved ones—considered ever more tragic in the Victorian age (Faust 2008)—can be recognized with grace while declining endorsement of the dead’s cause.

These fifteen cemeteries are a small subset of Confederate memorials in the United States, but even this small group illustrates that there is a wide range of messages in Confederate commemoration in the landscape. If one learns anything from all of these memorial landscapes, it is that they complicate and conflate death and politics, honor and dishonor, racism and silence about racism, but never do they speak against racism. Some, like the disorganized daily burials at Camp Butler and the empty rectangle at Philadelphia, are at the far end of a spectrum where death alone is commemorated. Others, like Camp Chase in Columbus with its arch inscribed “Americans,” are clearly reunionist. Others were created to perpetuate the cause which was “not lost” and that “reverberated as the heartbeat of the Jim Crow South” (Blight 2001, 258). As the discussion about the enshrinement of racism in monuments and other memorials in the United States continues, we should debate Confederate memorials vigorously, understanding that they are not innocuous and that the patina of age does not obscure their intent.

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