DEAD BUT SCEPTERED SOVREIGNS: JOHNSON'S ISLAND AND THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR IN MEDIA AND MEMORY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Jason Robert Carruthers

August, 2012
DEAD BUT SCEPTERED SOVREIGNS: JOHNSON'S ISLAND AND THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR IN MEDIA AND MEMORY

Jason Robert Carruthers

Thesis

Approved:                               Accepted:

Advisor                                   Dean of the College
Dr. Lesley Gordon                          Dr. Chand Midha

Faculty Reader                             Dean of the Graduate School
Dr. Gregory Wilson                         Dr. George Newkome

Department Chair                           Date
Dr. Martin Wainwright
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to provide special thanks to the entire faculty of the History Department at the University of Akron, specifically my advisor, Lesley Gordon, and my faculty reader, Gregory Wilson. Their ongoing guidance, as well the knowledge they shared with me in the classroom, have proved invaluable during this process. Additionally, Walter Hixson, Stephen Harp, Shelley Baranowski, Constance Bouchard and Michael Graham have provided invaluable insight and support during my time at Akron. Likewise, I wish to thank my undergraduate advisor from Oklahoma Wesleyan University, Dan Wimberly, for pushing me and helping me to make the decision to pursue a career in history. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for staying by my side during this often difficult journey. Without all of these individuals, and countless others, my completion of this degree would not have been possible.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER

I. **INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................1

II. **HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW** .....................................................................8

III. **BEFORE THE STATUE: 1890-1909** .................................................................21

IV. **HISTORICAL CONTEXT: OHIO, 1865-1910** ......................................................24

V. **THE 1910 STATUE DEDICATION** .................................................................29

VI. **THE 2010 STATUE REDEDICATION** ...............................................................38

VII. **OTHER FORMS OF CULTURAL DISCOURSE** .................................................41

VIII. **CONCLUSION** ...............................................................................................50

BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................55
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Located off the coast of Sandusky in Lake Erie, the Johnson's Island Prisoner of War Depot detained over 15,000 Confederate soldiers from January 1862 to September 1865.¹ What makes Johnson's Island unique, however, was the fact that the vast majority of prisoners housed in its prison were Confederate officers. In all, fifteen Confederate generals were held in the prison, many of whom had graduated from West Point and the Virginia Military Institute. Due to the nature of the way in which the Confederate officer corps was constructed, this meant that the prisoners were usually better educated and of a higher social class than the general populace of other Union prisons. This affected not only the rebel captives' relationship with each other, but also their relationship with the guards and favorable conditions which they were afforded. Many of the guards felt resentful to the wealthier and higher-born prisoners, and many captives felt similarly unhappy about being forced to bow to the whims of those they considered beneath themselves.

These conditions were quite tame, especially when compared to those experienced by soldiers imprisoned at more infamous POW camps, such as Andersonville and Elmira. The prisoners were, for the majority of the war, allowed to

receive mail and money from relatives back home, using that money to purchase food, tools, and various means of entertainment from a merchant on the island. For most prisoners, the challenge was not to survive against disease and starvation, but boredom. To that end, prisoners were permitted to pursue hobbies or perform jobs during their free time, even playing baseball games, both amongst themselves and against the guards, as well as forming minstrel groups and performing plays.\textsuperscript{2} Although conditions deteriorated after the prisoner exchange system broke down, inmates at Johnson's Island suffered relatively little, especially when compared with similar facilities located throughout the North. In fact, it is reasonable to assume that, generally speaking, the inmates on Johnson's island were likely enjoying better living conditions than many of their comrades who were still fighting against the Union armies.

Today, all that remains of the Union prison is a small cemetery, which contains the bodies of about 250 Southern inmates who died there, most of whom perished as a result of sickness, along with a handful of executions. After the federal government's lease with the island's owner expired, the vast majority of the prison's buildings were either abandoned or destroyed. The cemetery itself remained the private property of island owner L.B. Johnson until 1905, when the land was purchased by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, a Confederate memorialization organization which maintained myriad groups in northern cities throughout the 1900s, including many in Ohio.

In 1910, the new UDC ownership group commissioned sculptor and Confederate veteran Moses Ezekiel to craft a memorial to the Confederate dead who remained in the

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid, 41, 57-62.
cemetery. The statue, called the "Lookout Soldier," depicts a young Confederate soldier, holding his rifle in one hand, using the other to shield his eyes from the sun as he stands watch over his fallen comrades. The inscription on the statue reads, "Southern, 1910. Erected by the Robert Patton Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy of Cincinnati, Ohio, in memory of the Southern soldiers who died in the Federal prison on this island during the War Between the States - dead, but sceptered sovereigns who still rule us from the dust."

The Confederate Cemetery on Johnson's Island, as viewed from the rear fence. Photo taken September 17, 2011
The "Lookout Soldier" statue on Johnson's Island; the soldier looks out over the waters of Sandusky Bay. Engraved by M. Ezekiel, 1906. Photo taken September 17, 2011.
The inscription on the pedestal of the "Lookout Statue" on Johnson's Island; note the reference to the "War Between the States" - typical of both the UDC and Lost Cause mythos. Photo taken September 17, 2011.

On June 8, 1910, the Robert Patton Chapter of the UDC held a large dedication on the island; the ceremony played host to upwards of 2,000 people, northerners and southerners, men and women alike.3 The Sandusky Register, the largest newspaper in the area featured well over a dozen articles covering the event, filling its pages for three days.4 Two additional, smaller monuments were dedicated by the Ohio Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Lieutenant General James Longstreet Camp

3 Ibid, 124-125.
1658, Sons of Confederate Veterans, on June 21, 2003. Then, on June 12, 2010, a 100th Anniversary re-dedication ceremony for the Lookout statue was held on the island, hosted by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Chapter 2070, LaSalle Corbell Pickett, of Akron, Ohio.

This thesis, then, examines the extent to which recent historians' arguments of reconciliationist sentiment, including the acceptance of the Lost Cause mythos, has existed among whites in northern Ohio. To this end, the work will demonstrate the ways in which memory of the prison camp on Johnson's Island, and by extension, the Civil War itself, has evolved in the minds of Ohioans from the 1890s to the present, through the lens of its presentation in the media. Through this, it will become that that the ways in many of the recent trends within the historiography in the last decade, while often true in many instances, are arguably too all-encompassing to apply completely to the example of Johnson's Island.

From the 1890s through the 1910 dedication of the Lookout statue, the majority of white Ohioans, like most Americans, remembered the legacy of the Civil War as a heroic, valorous brothers' war. Discussion of the prison camp's legacy in the media ignored the

---


6 Ibid. A note on Ohio-based UDC groups: the existence of these types of Southern memorialization groups, including the UDC and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, was not uncommon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they continue to exist in the twenty-first century. This demonstrates, to some degree, both the divided northern/southern loyalties in the decades following the Civil War, and the still contested threads of the Lose Cause mythos in contemporary culture. For more information on intra-state divisions in Ohio, consult Chapter IV.


8 For a more detailed discussion of these trends, see Chapter II.
role of slavery and abolition in the Civil War, and sought to marginalize those who challenged this heroic narrative. Primary sources demonstrate that throughout most of the twentieth century most northern white Ohioans accepted their Confederate brethren as brothers in arms in a terrible, yet honorable conflict. The heritage of Johnson's Island was presented as a Southern Civil War site located on northern ground. Moreover, many Ohioans were willing to accept Johnson’s Island as viewed through the lens of the Lost Cause mythos. However, since the early 2000s, evidence exists that that sentiment has partially changed. Recent cultural discourse in the area immediately surrounding Johnson's Island, especially in the media, has demonstrated more significant divisions between those who accept the Lost Cause narrative, and those who reject it. The actions of groups like the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, which were once acknowledged and supported by media outlets, are now often ignored. Nevertheless, other cultural examples demonstrate evidence of a belief, either conscious or unconscious, in many tenets of the Lost Cause. More specifically, discussion of what caused the Civil War, especially the role played by slaves, freedmen, and slavery itself, is still largely omitted from the larger conversation.
CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW

As the United States commemorates the sesquicentennial of its Civil War, it is obvious that the conflict still maintains a prominent position in the minds of the American people. Historical societies and museums across the nation have already presented everything from battle re-enactments to impersonators of Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, and more are on the way. Tony Horwitz argued that, as of 1998, in the minds of many Northerners and Southerners, the Civil War did not end in 1865, or even in 1877. Rather, he posits that Americans on both sides have never properly dealt with the conflict, prompting the war to rage on within contemporary culture.\(^9\)

This "unresolved Civil War" has given rise to a variety of attempts to explain the origins of the conflict as well as the reasons why the North was ultimately triumphant. One of the most prevalent examples of this is the development of the mythical southern Lost Cause.\(^{10}\) In this story, slavery was not the cause of the Civil War; slaves were well cared for by their masters, and often felt a strong, familial tie to their owners. Therefore,


the Confederate cause was a noble one, as Southern men valiantly fought and gave their lives to protect abstract ideals like Southern "heritage" and the rights of the states. The South was not defeated, but rather overwhelmed by Northern industry and larger numbers of Federal troops. This mythology of the Lost Cause served not only to help proud white Southerners explain their defeat, but was also employed to help facilitate reconciliation between Northerners and Southerners in the years after the war.

The "Lost Cause," as a historical entity, has a burgeoning historiography all to itself. In *Baptized in Blood*, author Charles Reagan Wilson discusses the development of the Lost Cause into what he calls a "civil religion." According to Wilson's argument, following the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, Southerners constructed "a set of ideological beliefs, ritualistic practices, and organization structures that seeks transcendental meaning...around the memory of a dead political nation." He posits that Southerners adapted long-established notions of American exceptionalism, already masked in the throes of divine approval, political righteousness and cultural superiority, to their own notion of Southern exceptionalism. Ultimately, the Lost Cause mythos contended that Southerners were a chosen peoples, and they had the righteous duty to preserve an abstract "southern way of life," which almost unilaterally included a clear

---

11 Charles R. Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 2nd ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), x. This 2nd edition of *Baptized in Blood*, published in 2009, remains largely unaltered, aside from a new preface, wherein Wilson responds to many of the criticisms of his work, as well as new advancements in the field. His original work was actually published in 1980, also by the University of Georgia Press.

12 Ibid, x-xi.
retention of the bigoted racial views that fueled the justification of slavery before and during the war.\textsuperscript{13}

However, the two regions could not and would not stay so staunchly divided forever. Southerners, according to Wilson, soon replaced "the political dream with the cultural dream...[finding] that they could honor the American political nation if it honored the Southern civilization, including a degree of local self-government."\textsuperscript{14} Lost Cause proponents began linking the cause of the Confederacy with the revolutionary ideals of the Founding Fathers, providing common ground on which the former rebels could meet with northerners. "As the rest of the nation had changed because of industrialism, urbanization, immigration and other forces of modern America," Wilson argues, "the South [appeared to have] remained...quintessentially American." Moreover, utilizing church sermons and records as primary sources, the author posits that the unity provided by the Spanish-American War was a contributing factor in sectional reconciliation, although he argues that this reunification was nowhere near solidified until the days following World War I.

Published only a few years later, Gaines M. Foster's \textit{Ghosts of the Confederacy} departs from Wilson's emphasis on a civil religion, instead broadening his spectrum and focusing on broader, chronological developments. He posits that it was not until the late 1880s that a large scale movement toward Confederate celebration and commemoration in a positive sense solidified. Again echoing the arguments of Wilson, Foster argues that this movement took the form of myriad memorial groups, including the United

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 161.
Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Sons of Confederate Veterans. There are, however, important differences between Wilson and Foster's work. First and foremost, while Wilson argues that it was not until the 1920s that sectional reconciliation took place, Foster contends that it was the earlier Spanish-American War of 1898 which largely reunited the once warring factions. More significantly, however, Wilson posits that the Lost Cause, as a civil religion, was the basis of an enduring Southern identity that changed and adapted to fit its political and cultural climate, existing into the present day. Foster, on the other hand, argues that while the Lost Cause was useful to Southerners in the decades following the Civil War in terms of coping with defeat and cultural upheaval, it faded in importance and utility after the turn of the twentieth century “because it had lost much of its specificity and power to shape behavior.”

This is no small assertion, and one which proved to be a departure from much of both earlier and later scholarship on the Lost Cause. Moreover, as subsequent studies on the mythos of the Lost Cause have revealed, this bold argument proved both erroneous and short-sighted.

Augmenting the arguments of both Wilson and Foster, Karen Cox argues in *Dixie’s Daughters* for the primacy of one specific memorialization group – the United Daughters of the Confederacy – in the late 1800s and early 1900s propagation of the Lost Cause mythos. Her argument, first and foremost, is that the UDC, more than any other group, was responsible for shaping the memory of the war and perpetuating the Lost Cause - and, by extension, Blight's concept of the reconciliationist narrative. She

---

continues that the UDC "raised the stakes of the Lost Cause by making it a movement about vindication, as well as memorialization...they did so not simply to pay homage to the Confederate dead. Rather, UDC members aspired to transform military defeat into a political and cultural victory, where states' rights and white supremacy remained intact."¹⁶ Along those same lines, in *Burying the Dead But Not the Past*, Caroline Janney posits that "in order to avoid cries of treason from northerners...[Southern men] consciously framed...blatant displays of Confederate patriotism within the domestic sphere of women" by working toward them though female-led memorialization groups like the UDC.¹⁷

The validity of Gaines Foster's aforementioned assessment of the Lost Cause as unimportant in the development of Southern and American identity in the twentieth century has been refuted, in large part, by the study of the war's memory. Amongst others, David Blight worked to refute this notion in his now-seminal work, *Race and Reunion*. As Blight posits, between the late 1890s and early 1900s former supporters of both Blue and Grey slowly began to recall the war by emphasizing the bravery of the soldiers involved, embracing the notion that both Confederate and Federal soldiers fought valiantly, giving their lives for what they believed was right.¹⁸ In this context, neither

---


¹⁷ Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies' Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 64.

¹⁸ *Race and Reunion*, 3. Although not the first historian, or even necessarily the best, to make an argument for reconciliation and adaptation of the Lost Cause mythos, Blight is nevertheless one of the most well known. As such, his arguments can be safely assumed to represent the mainstream historiography of Civil War memory, which several scholars are working to alter. For more, see historiographical discussions on: John Neff, Kirk Savage, and Barbara Gannon.
side was right, and neither side was wrong; it allowed Americans to celebrate their commonalities rather than their differences, helping the still-fresh wounds of sectional conflict to heal. However, the perception of valorous Civil War soldiers was, generally speaking, applicable only to white combatants. Marginalized by the discourse were newly freed African Americans, as was the fact that Confederate soldiers had taken the aforementioned battlefield to fight for their presumed right to keep slaves in bondage. However innocuous this may appear, in terms of achieving sectional reunion, the omission of slaves and blacks in general from the history of the conflict worked in unison with many proponents of the Lost Cause.

Overall, Blight argues that, when given a choice between racial justice and sectional reunion, white Americans chose the latter, which consequently worked to marginalize black memory itself. As African Americans tended to remember the war along though the emancipationist vision of men like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois, their memory of the Civil War was subsequently cast aside, along with racial justice.¹⁹

Similar to the topic of the Lost Cause and memory, recent scholarship has emerged on the subject of commemoration and memorialization of the casualties of the war. In The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration, Thomas J. Brown – continuing
Blight’s arguments - posits that memorials, statues and cemeteries were one of the largest ways in which Americans coped with the unprecedented death toll experienced during the war.\textsuperscript{20} One of the most significant trends Brown takes note of is that, from the late 1860s to the turn of the twentieth century, Northerners began to look increasingly positively on the legacy of the Confederacy and, consequently, southern casualties of the Civil War. Brown argues that "increased northern admiration for the South expressed itself in Civil War commemoration primarily through attitudes toward [ordinary] Confederate soldiers."\textsuperscript{21} Brown – citing the aforementioned arguments of David Blight - contends that this increasingly positive view of the Confederacy came only after northerners, consciously and unconsciously, marginalized the legacy of slavery and any move toward racial justice from the discourse. Thus, it is reasonable to assert that this increasing move toward northern favorability of the Confederacy, as it was expressed through commemoration and memorialization, was indicative of Blight's larger trend of reconciliation.

Similarly, recent scholarship by Drew Gilpin Faust has explored the various ways in which the overwhelmingly catastrophic death toll of the Civil War influenced the development of American culture as a whole, especially in terms of the memorialization and commemoration of the dead. One of these new ways of dealing with death, Faust argues, was the process of building memorials and filling national cemeteries to honor the casualties of the war. These processes, however, were not necessarily divided on

\textsuperscript{20} Thomas J. Brown, \textit{The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents} (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 7-8.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 8.
sectional lines. Faust argues that the process of commemoration often worked to unite northerners and southerners, as their combined grief toward the nation's dead came to overwhelm sectional differences.\(^{22}\) Moreover, Faust notes that "the cult of the Lost Cause and the celebration of Confederate memory that emerged in the ensuing decades were in no small part an effort to affirm that the hundreds of thousands of young southern lives had not, in fact, been given in vain."\(^{23}\)

While David Blight – and, by extension, Thomas Brown and Drew Faust – are representative of the general consensus of opinion within the historiography of Civil War memory, there are nevertheless scholars whose work questions their conclusions. For instance, John R. Neff's *Honoring the Civil War Dead* argues that that the prevalence of Civil War monuments was a testament to a lack of reconciliation and a concerted effort, whether direct or indirect, to preserve particular sectional interpretations of the war's meaning.\(^{24}\) Moreover, he contends the fact that the memorials were dedicated to those killed in battle by an enemy - whether Northern or Southern - served as constant, although less acknowledged, counterbalance to outspoken veterans. Neff also questions those scholars who solely affix blame for manipulating the historical narrative to Southerners, arguing that for the first few decades after the war, Northerners were equally proactive about creating their own narrative of the conflict's meaning. He continues, acknowledging that while sectional reconciliation undoubtedly took place, it did so


\(^{23}\) Ibid, 193.

amongst clear, although admittedly dwindling, opposition from Americans who had no interest in reconciling their sectional differences.²⁵

Along similar lines, in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, Kirk Savage explores the role played by monuments themselves in the struggle over reconciliation. He argues, as does Neff, that the decision of what to portray in public memorials and structures, with regard to the history of the war, was constantly contested and representative of the still raw sectional differences in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.²⁶ Savage accurately portrays public spaces as places where debates over the "accepted" narrative of the Civil War took place. His demonstration that accepted monuments, especially toward the 1890s and turn of the century, took a decidedly racist tone - emphasizing noble, benevolent white soldiers and excluding or demeaning former slaves or freedmen - is evidence of the aforementioned reconciliation between whites. The author also makes a well-founded point about the public perception of the nature and purpose of memorials in the post-Civil War era. He argues, "in the expansive era of the nineteenth century, monuments were not bestowed by the state on the citizenry, or at least they weren't supposed to be...monuments were supposed to arise spontaneously by popular demand, only then to be donated to the state for safekeeping."²⁷ Thus, the idea of what a memorial was “supposed to be” likely had direct influence over what the memorial actually became, as well as what it meant to those who supported its creation.

²⁵ Neff, 6-7.


²⁷ Ibid, 6.
Also working to recast the trajectory of the historiography, Barbara Gannon argues in *The Won Cause* that many scholars have been too hasty in their assumption that members of the GAR shared the racist sentiments of other contemporary Americans, especially in the South. Rather, she posits that many white Union veterans felt a sense of camaraderie with African Americans who had also served the Union during the Civil War. The author also contends that Union veterans and the GAR served as an impediment to proponents of the Lost Cause, nothing that "the existence of African American posts directly challenged southerners' efforts, reminding white Americans of black service in a war for black emancipation." Their focus on the "won cause" - their collective success in putting down a rebellion and preserving the Union of the Founding Fathers - also served to impede attempts by Lost Cause proponents to situate the Confederacy within the broader American narrative. Ultimately, Gannon does accept the victory of the Lost Cause and the emergence of a reconciliationist vision – however, she argues, the transition was never as widely or easily accepted as the general historiography has posited.

While the aforementioned historiographical trends are generally extremely broad, they all nevertheless relate directly to the issues surrounding Johnson’s Island, the Lookout Statue, and their respective places in cultural discourse and collective memory in both 1910 and 2010. Much of the arguments presented by Charles Wilson and Gaines Foster are in stark contrast with the evidence presented in this study regarding Johnson’s Island. For instance, Wilson’s insistence that there existed a deeply-entrenched, separate

---

northern civil religion – one diametrically opposed to the Lost Cause iteration – as late as the 1890s seems incorrect, at least in the context of the areas surrounding Sandusky, Ohio. Furthermore, Foster’s argument that the Lost Cause lost its importance by 1898 is clearly incorrect in this instance, as evidenced by its continuing presence, not only in the early 1900s, but also in the early 2000s. Likewise, Janney’s argument that southern men utilized women’s groups in order to make Lost Cause rhetoric appear less combative helps to explain why so many northerners were not put off by its existence, even in their own backyards.

In many ways, Johnson’s Island also works within the broader historiographical landscape regarding the memory of the Civil War. In terms of David Blight’s argument, the instances uncovered surrounding the statue and the cemetery match up relatively well. One can see the elements of the reconciliationist vision within the media coverage surrounding the island, even as early as 1890. That said, while Blight acknowledges the existence of exceptions to his argument, the evidence here demonstrates those exceptions in action, thusly poking holes in his broad and sweeping conclusions regarding the degree to which Americans had accepted the Lost Cause mythos. Likewise, Faust’s argument that Americans utilized memorials and commemoration to allow themselves to cope with death informs our understanding of why so many residents of northwest Ohio, civilian and veteran alike, were willing to accept this narrative of reconciliation, as well as adds depth to the significance of those who refused to do so.

The arguments of those scholars who seek to complicate the accepted narrative are likewise useful in terms of deepening our understanding of the memory of Johnson’s
Island, even when they do not appear to be applicable. John Neff’s assertion, for instance, that Civil War memorials allowed survivors to establish their relationship to the deceased, validate or explain the cause for which they died, and negotiate their place within American culture helps to explain why the Ohioans in question were so willing to accept the Lost Cause mythos, and demonstrates their acceptance of the narrative of a valorous, brothers’ war.  

However, his argument that memorials to fallen Civil War soldiers worked as both reminders and proponents of prolonged sectional tensions does not fit the mainstream narrative of acceptance found in the discourse surround the cemetery in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Likewise, Gannon’s argument that members of the GAR went to great lengths to preserve the legacy of black Union veterans, while undoubtedly true in some instances, does not appear to be applicable in this particular case, due to both their lack of attendance at the 1910 statue commemoration and the local white media’s lack of acknowledgment of their absence in any form. Along those same lines, Savage’s argument that the contest for the culturally accepted legacy of the Civil War often occurred around statues and memorials is especially useful here. This provides those northern Ohioans mentioned here with historical agency, showing that, by reconciling with former Confederates on Johnson’s Island, they were making a decision to support aspects of the narrative behind the Lost Cause.

The main weakness in the aforementioned historiography, as they pertain to this particular project, is that even works that deal with the Lost Cause and Civil War memory often fail to deal with them in a specifically northern context. In other words, little scholarship has been dedicated to investing exactly how, and in what forms, this trend

29 Neff, 2.
toward reconciliation and acceptance of the Los Cause mythos made its way into the North, as well as the level and frequency to which it was adapted. This study will work to fill a very narrow portion of that scholarship gap.
Two decades before the dedication of the Lookout statue, *The Sandusky Register* published what was thought at the time to be a complete listing of all the Confederate dead who were located in the cemetery, as well as a map locating each grave. In May 1890, two-hundred-six marble headstones replaced the decrepit wooden markers, an upgrade paid for by a group of wealthy southerners who were dismayed to see cemetery's poor conditions. Reacting to this news, the author of the article praised the "warm-hearted Georgians" for making arrangements to deliver and install the headstones.30 Further, the article stressed the need for additional upkeep of the cemetery, positing that "the entire grounds should be leveled off and grass seed down where the ground is broken. With these improvements...the little spot...would no longer bear evidence that those who sleep below its low green tends are forgotten."31 Additionally, the author went on to refer to the southerners who donated the marble headstones, as well as southerners in general, as the northerners' "brethren." This reference to southerners as brothers, as well as the general concern for the upkeep of the cemetery and the memory of those

30 “The Confederate Dead That Sleep on Johnson’s Island,” *Sandusky Daily Register*, May 12, 1890, 4-5.

31 Ibid, 5.
entombed there, demonstrates that the reconciliationist attitude was taking hold in
Sandusky, Ohio as early as 1890.

Fifteen years later, the property rights to the cemetery on the island were sold to
the Robert Patton Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy of Cincinnati,
Ohio. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, which was established in the 1890s, is a
Confederate memorialization group which works to to propagate the Lost Cause
mythology, in classrooms, churches, and homes. The contemporary objectives of the
UDC, which are largely unchanged from their 1890s counterparts, are:

To collect and preserve the material necessary for a truthful history of the War Between the States and to protect, preserve, and mark the places made historic by confederate valor; To assist descendants of worthy Confederates in securing a proper education; To fulfill the sacred duty of benevolence toward the survivors of the War and those dependent upon them; To honor the memory of those who served and those who fell in the service of the Confederate States of America; To record the part played during the War by Southern women, including their patient endurance of hardship, their patriotic devotion during the struggle, and their untiring efforts during the post-War reconstruction of the South; To cherish the ties of friendship among the members of the Organization.32

Although copious references are made to the glorious Confederate "Cause,"
acknowledgment on the group's website of what their Cause was, or what it stood for, are
largely absent, aside from a handful of vague references to states’ rights. The UDC also
refrains from using the term "Civil War," opting instead for the softer sounding "War Between the States," and occasionally the more self-victimizing "War of Northern Aggression," attempting to absolve their ancestors of any blame in starting the war.33

33 Ibid.
The institution of slavery and its role in the Confederacy's defense of "states' rights" is completely ignored.

A 1905 article in the Register which discussed the UDC's purchase of the cemetery demonstrated a reconciliationist attitude, as well as an evident respect for the Rebel dead. The article referred to the island cemetery as "the sacred spot wherein sleep 200 of the best blood of the South." Like the article from 1890, this piece praised the Daughters for the "noble work they have undertaken" in purchasing and caring for the cemetery, as well as seeking to honor its inhabitants. The articles suggest that many locals continued to view former Confederates in friendly terms, as well as seeing the heritage of the soldiers buried in the cemetery as worthy of commemoration. Ultimately, this illuminates the ways in which white Northerners in Sandusky were beginning to share goals with groups like the UDC and, generally, proponents of the Lost Cause.

---


35 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: OHIO, 1865-1910

At this point, it is worthwhile to take a step back to consider the place of the Civil War and the Lost Cause in the collective memory of Ohioans during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the antebellum period, the racial views of Ohio’s residents developed in a matter consistent with much of the rest of the United States, especially those located in the still-developing Midwest. Ohio historian George Knepper argues that, in the early 1800s, “even well-disposed whites perceived blacks as an inferior race, incapable of developing the full equivalent of white accomplishments and virtues.” He continues, “Ohioans were determined to keep the state “white man’s country.”” However, as Ohio moved into the 1840s and toward the 1850s, pockets of abolitionism began to coalesce, largely due to the objections held by religious groups like the Quakers, Methodists, and Presbyterians. However, as is consistent with the general trends of the historiography, anti-slavery sentiment was rarely coupled with a belief in true racial

36 George W. Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 3rd ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 197.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid, 209.
equality – for many Ohioans, their idea of racial justice lay somewhere between slavery and equal rights for African Americans.

Similarly, racial views in Ohio tended to vary greatly by location, especially in a sense of North and South. Southern Ohioans tended to be much more sympathetic to the southerners’ desire to perpetuate slavery than did their northern counterparts. This was largely because, as Knepper contends, southern Ohioans were more likely to have economic ties to the intra-state slave trade, as well as the cotton and tobacco industries. Furthermore, those living in southern Ohio were more likely to have familial ties to the middle and deep South than were northern Ohioans. That said, this sectional divide was not always the determinant in whether an Ohioan would be pro-slavery or anti-slavery. For instance, while radical abolitionist John Brown lived in the northern part of the state, famed author Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote her pivotal abolitionist work, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, in the southern city of Cincinnati.

This trend of discordant opinions regarding slavery continued into the actual Civil War, as Ohioans remained divided on their loyalties in the conflict. Ohio, especially in the southern part of the state, was heavily saturated with Peace Democrats – also known as Copperheads – many of whom were “as visible and outspoken as any in the North…in criticizing Lincoln, his party, and his policies.” Many of these same dissidents were responsible for the strong showing, albeit in a losing effort, by George McClellan in the Election of 1864. Following the close of the war in 1865, as Ohioans struggled to cope

---

39 Ibid, 202-204.

40 Ibid, 220.
with the loss of over 30,000 of its citizens and a broken nation, they similarly struggled to
deal with the sudden reality of emancipation of the nation’s slaves.\footnote{Ibid, 242.} Much like the
aforementioned election, during the Reconstruction period, northern pro-Union
Democrats overruled southern Democrats, as many of the state’s representatives
supported Republican radicalism. Republicans themselves, however, remained torn on
issues of racial justice, as some supported granting the newly freed blacks the rights to
citizenship and the vote, while others contended that whites and blacks simply could not
peacefully co-exist, thusly supporting expatriation.

This division on racial issues likewise continued into the twentieth century in the
Buckeye state, in the midst of rapid industrialization and economic prosperity. Native
Ohioan and President William McKinley led the United States toward territorial and
economic expansion overseas, extending American spheres of influence into Latin
America and Southeast Asia.\footnote{Ibid, 262-263.} As a racialized narrative of American exceptionalism –
an expansion of the views which perpetuated slavery itself during the 1800s - was being
used to justify the subjugation of foreign peoples, blacks on the homefront were being
similarly discriminated against by whites. This was more easily accomplished in Ohio
than many other states because, in the early 1900s, “blacks were a small percentage of the
population and had virtually no political influence.”\footnote{Ibid, 265.} This, then, sheds new light on the
generally accepted arguments in the field’s historiography that the push toward racial
equality was marginalized by the fact that Civil War-era abolitionists were dying off

\footnote{Ibid, 242.}
\footnote{Ibid, 262-263.}
\footnote{Ibid, 265.}
without being replaced. In Ohio, it seems, African American rights and the legacy of emancipationism may have also been marginalized because they lacked the numbers in population to provide themselves with significant political and cultural agency.

However, the abandonment of issues of racial equality did not automatically mean that Ohioans had forgotten the legacy of conflict in the Civil War, even into the late 1880s. Knepper notes that Joseph Foraker made a political career out of “waving the bloody shirt,” and argues that he won the 1885 gubernatorial election by “castigating Grover Cleveland for vetoing the pension bill and for urging return of captured Confederate battle flags. [Foraker assured veterans that] no rebel flags would leave Ohio.”

The overwhelming support for this hard-line stance against reconciliation and the legacy of the Confederate veterans – only five years before the aforementioned articles in the Sandusky Register, which referred to both the former prisoners buried on Johnson’s Island and those who sought to honor their memory as “brothers” – demonstrates that there was indeed something unique about the place of the island in the minds of many northwestern Ohioans.

Similarly, it is important to note that into the early 1900s, while the African American population of Ohio was still relatively low, the city of Cleveland “had a substantial black middle class of skilled workers, shop owners, real estate agents, and professional people…[many of whom] served regularly in the Ohio General

44 Ibid, 271.

45 “The Confederate Dead That Sleep on Johnson's Island,” Sandusky Daily Register, May 12, 1890, 4-5.
Assembly.” The fact that this was occurring in Cleveland – approximately sixty miles from Johnson’s Island – at around the same time as the 1910 Lookout Statue commemoration makes the latter that much more intriguing.

46 Knepper, 304.
CHAPTER V

THE 1910 STATUE DEDICATION

When, on June 8, 1910, the UDC-commissioned Lookout Statue was officially unveiled on Johnson's Island, it did so to tremendous recognition and fanfare. Over 1,200 people, from both the North and South, were ferried from mainland Sandusky to the island to observe the ceremony. A small parade was held, as Union and Confederate veterans marched alongside one another, flying both the United States and Confederate flags and marching to the tune of "Onward Christian Soldiers." At the ceremony itself, the national anthems of both the United States and former Confederacy were played, following addresses from several Southern speakers, including a former Confederate general. Coverage by the media, particularly the Sandusky Register, was extremely thorough - articles about the statue and its dedication flooded the newspaper's pages for three days.

The idea of a reunion between Union and Confederate soldiers was not without precedent by the early 1900s. The first official recorded meeting between veterans of the

---

two factions occurred as early as 1875 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. The most notable example before the end of the nineteenth century, perhaps, occurred at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, which played host to thousands of members of both the Grand Army of the Republic and the United Confederate Veterans. However, the state of Ohio, while playing host to several reunions of Union soldiers, never featured an official gathering of both northerners and southerners alike. While the records in question are not exhaustive, with the analysis of records still a work in progress, it is nevertheless reasonable to surmise that this sort of unofficial reunion between veterans of both sides would have been less than commonplace.

Nevertheless, the mood of this particular gathering seemed to be one of reconciliation - a notion the local media coverage of the event emphasized. Many seemed to believe - or want to believe - that the wounds of the great Civil War of fifty years prior had been completely healed. One article in the Register from June 9, 1910, recapping the prior day's events, bore the subtitle "Former Enemies Meet as Friends on Johnson's Island." The author continued:

It was a great day for the veterans. 'Hello there Johnnie,' was the way a little party of the men who fought for the union addressed a little group of Southerners, as the latter left the steamer R.B. Hayes at the Johnson's Island dock. 'Hello Yanks,' was the way the Southerners returned the salutation. A moment later enemies in war were friends in peace and were sauntering up the pathway leading to the cemetery, slapping each other on the backs and calling each other 'comrade.' [When two veterans from formerly opposing sides were asked to pose for a picture together, one of the men stated] 'Let's clasp hands and show the folks the

---


49 Ibid.

50 "Tears Dim Eyes of Blue and Gray as Monument Is Unveiled," Sandusky Daily Register, June 9, 1910, 1-2.
war is over.' The picture was taken with both men in the act of exchanging felicitations.

This anecdote is significant because, as the author quotes one of the soldiers as stating, it was supposed to show Americans that the war had ended. Another article in the Register, from June 8, 1910, stated, "the blue and gray will meet and fraternize in perfect harmony, under the folds of the flag they both now love one as much as the other." Yet, as the exact same article noted, both the Confederate and American flags were present. One wonders to which flag the former Confederate soldiers pledged their loyalty. Stories of former enemies conversing and laughing together, as well as marching together and observing a common flag, were just some of the ways in which the media spread the idea - factual or not - that the North and South had truly reconciled.

In portraying the events through a lens of common valor and reconciliation, the Register – an avowedly Republican publication – was, in many ways, towing the party line of the time. One must keep in mind that the Republican Party, as it existed in Ohio in 1910, was drastically different than the often radical version of the 1860s and 1870s. By the time of the 1910 dedication ceremony, Ohio Republicans were more white, more conservative, and largely opposed to most semblances of black rights. Furthermore, many Republicans, even in the North, were as taken in by the Lost Cause mythos as were Democrats from the South. This helps to explain the tone of the publication's discussion of the ceremony, Southerners, and the Civil War in general.

51 “Unveil Monument to Mark the Resting Place of Two Hundred and Six Confederate Soldiers,” Sandusky Daily Register, June 8, 1910, 1-2.

The tone of the media coverage of the event, for the most part, was very much invested in Oliver Wendell Holmes' viewpoint that all soldiers who fought and died, regardless of side, were heroes. Many newspapers, including the *Sandusky Register* - and, by extension, many of their readers - were convinced that the Civil War was fought by two sets of equally brave, dedicated soldiers who were willing to die for their beliefs. As Blight posits, by focusing on bravery and valor, rather than the genuine differences that caused the Civil War, the North and the South were able to come together much more easily. One article quotes Joseph A. Magnus, Chairman of the Robert Patton Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy's advisory board, as saying:

As a Southerner, as a man, as a love of those who do their duty, their whole duty, as they see it, my pulse quickens, my heart swells with pride and my south dictates me to tell you...[that] we, today, are here to dedicate this beautiful bronze figure, a fitting tribute to the brave men who gave their lives in defense of a cause that they believed to be just. A detachment of those heroes lie buried around us, and...if they could speak I am sure they would say...'God bless you for your efforts to honor us, we who willingly gave our lives in defense of home and honor.'

This article, along with several others, typifies the aforementioned reconciliationist attempt to avoid addressing the root causes of the Civil War, allowing old wounds to be closed without necessarily healing. By stressing that both sides were just in fighting for what they believed in, neither the North or the South had to accept blame for perpetuating the bloody conflict.

---


54 "Dedicate Bronze Figure as Fitting Tribute to Men Who Gave Their Lives for Cause Believed to Be Just." *Jos. A Magnus," Sandusky Daily Register, January 9, 1910, 8."
In similar fashion, George W. Gordon, commander-in-chief of the Confederate veterans and the last living Confederate Major General, provided the keynote address to the crowd of both northerners and southerners at the Lookout Statue's dedication. He announced:

We have not assembled here today to glorify the sanguinary science of war, that abhorrent and cruel institution of violence, blood and death; but we are here to accord a tribute of love and loyalty, veneration and gratitude to the memory of the lamented victims of the war - the brave and self-sacrificing men who sleep within this consecrated spot - consecrated by the dust and deeds of patriot martyrs; men who perished in the defense of principles that they had been taught to cherish and maintain - the principles of constitutional liberty and state sovereignty - doctrines that were taught to our ablest and most distinguished southern soldiers, General Robert E. Lee, at a national school in a northern state...the United States Military Academy at West Point...when that great sectional crisis came to our Union in 1861 and Virginia and other states seceded therefrom, Lee went with his state to which he had been taught that his allegiance was due, and as the southern people had been taught by their statesmen, publicists, legislators and jurists. So that, in our unhappy interstate conflict, the men whose memory we honor today, felt and followed these teachings as Lee did. His course was one with theirs, his cause was their cause. But it is not our purpose here to discuss the causes and questions that led to our deplorable war nearly a half-century ago. We have no desire to revive political animosities and sectional antipathies. On the contrary, it is our duty, as it was the advice of Lee, to silence sectional agitation and to restore unity and concord to a once dismembered union and estranged brotherhood. Around the graves of our common dead, let all dissensions be hushed. 55

This lengthy excerpt is significant in a variety of ways. Gordon sought to re-cast the Civil War as Oliver Wendell Holmes' noble, brothers' war, which produced no winners and losers. However, at the same time, he also offered one of the few explanations of the causes of the war. As one would expect, Gordon made only vague references to states' rights and "constitutional liberty," suggesting that General Lee and his men fought only to preserve the "heritage" passed down to them from generations prior. Not surprisingly,

55 "Not to Glorify Science of War, but Accord a Tribute of Love, Gratitude and Loyalty to Memory of Victims of War," Sandusky Daily Register, June 9, 1910, 6.
there is no reference to what the root cause of the "political animosities and sectional antipathies" of the Civil War really came down to: slavery, and abolition. The fact that he made this claim in the presence of hundreds of northerners, but his statement garnered no criticism - either from the citizens in attendance or from the newspaper itself - demonstrated just how deeply-rooted this sentiment had become.

Although residents of Sandusky appeared to share this conciliatory sentiment, they were not an entirely monolithic group. There was one lone example of a dissenting opinion in the *Sandusky Register*, expressed by the former warden of the prison camp on Johnson's Island. Under the headline "Kept the Rebel Prisoners; Refused to Help Dedicate," the publication subtly chastises Ohioan O.P Foster for "declining an invitation of the Daughters of the Confederacy to be one of the speakers at the unveiling [of the monument.]" Asked why he declined to take part of the dedication, he replied:

I don't think it would be right for a member of the G.A.R. to do so. They wanted to carry the Confederate flag in a parade and have a northern veteran carry the United States flag. The Confederacy is not a nation and the flag represents nothing but a sentiment...I cannot uphold that sentiment. I am also against the proposition to place a statue of General Robert E. Lee in the rotunda of the national capital because I think it an honor undeserved. We [some G.A.R. members] may seem bitter, but I have been through the south recently and the feeling there is just as bitter as it ever was.

This is significant in two ways. First, it exhibits what one might already have imagined: the reconciliationist mindset, spurred by those who would seek to portray the Civil War as a brothers' war with no defined friends and enemies, winners and losers, was not

56 Ibid, 7.
57 "Kept the Rebel Prisoners; Refused to Help Dedicate," *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 9, 1910, 5.
58 Ibid.
universally accepted. He also implied that there are others - specifically Union veterans - who would share his sentiments. Secondly, the negative light in which the Register casts Foster and his decision not to participate in the dedication shows that the author was obviously aware that Foster was in the minority with his line of thinking. He is being attacked, albeit indirectly, for deviating from the commonly accepted reconciliationist mindset, as exhibited throughout the rest of the newspaper's coverage of the event.

This discussion of reconciliation begs another, perhaps more important question - were the two former sectional enemies really as fully united as the presenters at the memorial dedication ceremony, as well as most of the media members who covered it, would have their readers believe? There is evidence to suggest that actual reconciliation, especially in the minds of the Southerners, was exaggerated to a significant degree. In several instances, the quotes of southerners recorded by northern journalists have a decidedly non-reconciliationist, even combative tone. However, these instances almost always go unnoticed by the journalist covering them. Former Confederate General Julian S. Carr, during his speech at the statue's commemoration, said to a group of former Union soldiers, "I am not going to say a thing that will hurt your feelings, but I'm a Dem-- I'm a Rebel, and I'm proud of it."59 The joke is obvious - Carr was playing on the Republican vs. Democratic political divide between the North and the South in the early 1900s. However, the exclamation of his pride in being a Rebel seems to be a serious deviation from the tone of the rest of the day's speeches, wherein one side was intentionally not elevated above another. However, the author does not acknowledge the departure,

instead simply quoting the general and moving on. This, along with the comments by former Warden Foster, lead one to believe that reconciliation may have been slightly exaggerated.

While the local reaction to the 1910 dedication of the memorial on Johnson's Island was quite fervent, it is apparent that the reactions throughout northern Ohio were decidedly more reserved in reconciliationist tone, especially in terms of praise for their former adversaries. An article in the *Akron Beacon Journal* described the cemetery only as a "spot around which so many historic memories clustered."\(^{60}\) Rather than offering gushing praise for the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy who commissioned the memorial, or the southern veterans who themselves ventured north to attend the ceremony, the *Beacon* instead lionized the men of the McMeens Post of the Grand Army of the Republic, Sandusky, Ohio, who in 1887 "paid a generous tribute to the men who had fought against them...they had the cemetery weeded and cared for and on the Memorial day following held services there similar to those held over the Union dead in Oakland cemetery, Sandusky...every succeeding Memorial day up to three years ago they carried out similar services." Additionally, the article was critical of the families of the southerners, noting that part of the reason these former G.A.R. soldiers decided to discontinue their services, in addition to their old age, was "the fact that up until that time practically no interest had been shown in the Confederate graves by either the relatives or friends of those buried there."\(^{61}\) This is perhaps indicative of the regional difference in the perception of Johnson's Island and its heritage - having a more tangible

---

\(^{60}\) "Dedicate to Lost Cause," *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 8, 1910, 9.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.
symbol of the Civil War in their own backyards, residents of Sandusky and its surrounding areas felt more connected to the history of the island and the cemetery, and thus, to the narrative of the Lost Cause, as well as the plight of the Confederate dead. Moreover, the *Beacon* was published and circulated in northeast Ohio, which was a hotbed of much of the state's abolitionist sentiment throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Although Akron's ties to racial justice had also dissipated, it is reasonable to surmise that a greater amount lingering emancipationist feelings amongst the *Beacon*'s readership and/or staff led to its tepid response to the UDC and the southerners' monument.

---

CHAPTER VI

THE 2010 STATUE REDEDICATION

For all the media fanfare that surrounded the 1910 commemoration of the Lookout Statue in the pages of *The Sandusky Register*, the reception has been quite different in recent years. In June 2003, when the Lieutenant General James Longstreet Camp 1658, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the Ohio Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy placed two new, albeit much smaller, monuments in the island cemetery, the *Register* did not publish a single word of acknowledgment. Similarly, in 2010, when the Ohio Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy held its re-dedication of the Lookout Statue - the same event which, one hundred years earlier, occupied almost half of the *Register*'s pages for three days - it was barely addressed at all. The newspaper's coverage of the event consisted of three small pictures and three one-sentence captions, offering nothing in the way of analysis. The lack of coverage was not solely limited to the *Register* - other major northern Ohio newspapers, including the *Akron Beacon Journal*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, and *Toledo Blade*, all of which had acknowledged the 1910 dedication, neglected to acknowledge the UDC's re-

---


commemoration of the memorial on Johnson's Island. Given the hype surrounding what was then the upcoming Civil War Sesquicentennial, the shunning of the southerners' ceremony is that much more significant.

This lack of media coverage was not due to an attempt by the UDC to keep the ceremony under wraps. The group continued to be outspoken about their activities on the island, including the re-dedication service and yearly observance of Confederate Memorial Day.\(^{65}\) It is apparent that much of the rhetoric of the Lost Cause, propagated by the UDC in the 1890s and evident during the 1910 statue dedication, remains unchanged. To both advertise and summarize its activities in the cemetery, the LaSalle Corbell Pickett Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy of Akron, Ohio, created its own website. In its description of the prison depot, the website reads, "disease, starvation, execution and the side effects of severe weather took its toll on brave men who fought to preserve southern rights and freedom."\(^{66}\) Vague references to the supposed rights of the South, without acknowledging that those "rights" essentially revolved around the right to own other human beings, is typical of the language of the Lost Cause myth. Similarly, the website obviously works to victimize the Confederate soldiers, claiming that "more than 12,000 men suffered deprivation and mistreatment while prisoners of war on the island," despite the fact that most sources lead one to conclude that conditions on the island were favorable, especially when compared to other


\(^{66}\) Ibid, "The Prison."
Civil War prisons like Andersonville and Elmira.\textsuperscript{67} Still more traditional Lost Cause rhetoric is on display in the group's description of its purpose in re-commemorating the Lookout Statue, stating that "we [seek to] honor our Confederate soldiers and citizens who lie buried here on this sacred ground...there is no holier spot of ground than where defeated valor lies."\textsuperscript{68} Obviously, as one would expect, the mythology of the Lost Cause is alive and well in the minds of the members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid; Frohman, 26. See also: Benjamin G. Cloyd, \textit{Haunted By Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).

\textsuperscript{68} Brake, "The Statue."
The dearth of media coverage of the 2010 re-dedication of the Lookout Statue on Johnson's Island does mean that the media is ignoring the existence of the prison, the cemetery, or the history behind it. In fact, the opposite has been true, especially in light of the current commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War. As exhibited in the pages of the *Sandusky Register* around the time of the 1910 dedication of the memorial, many Ohioans seemed willing to cede ownership of the memory of the prison depot to Southerners in hopes of fostering reconciliation. In recent years, however, this does not appear to always be the case. Instead, some media outlets discuss Johnson's Island in a broader sense, downplaying the role played by the UDC and other Confederate memorial groups, instead recalling the site as one of Ohio's many historical claims to the Civil War.

A 2011 article in the *Fremont News-Messenger*, which provided a list of Ohio's top contributions to the Civil War, cited the Prisoner of War Depot on Johnson's Island amongst some of Ohio's "most interesting" people and places, alongside John Brown,
Morgan's Raid, and the 127th Ohio Volunteer infantry. The author, Larry Phillips, describes Johnson's Island as follows:

Located north of Port Clinton in Sandusky Bay of Lake Erie, Johnson's Island was a Union prison for Confederate officers during the Civil War. The island's isolated location made it difficult for prisoners to escape. In addition, the island was near several important Ohio cities and lines of road, rail and water transportation...estimates vary on how many men served time here, but it is likely that at least 10,000 were incarcerated there during the course of the war.

Phillips' description, as well as his high regard for the prison's importance, is significant on multiple levels. First, his language is free of many of the Lost Cause myths and tropes that plagued newspaper articles from the early 1900s, especially from smaller towns in the Sandusky area. Secondly, his ranking of Johnson's Island as the most important contribution made by Ohio to the Civil War - although almost certainly overstated - demonstrates the rising prominence of the site in the minds of Ohioans. Furthermore, the list - which also cites John Brown, the 127th Ohio Volunteer Infantry and Morgan's Raid, among others - is made up entirely of northern, pro-Union events, places, groups and people. This articulates the ways in which the historical memory of Johnson's Island has transitioned, from a place where Confederate soldiers died to a location which helped the North defeat the South and preserve the Union.

Furthermore, examples of an outright rejection of Confederate values and the Lost Cause mythos can be found in the pages of the Sandusky Register which would have been unheard of 100 years earlier. In a 2011 article, columnist John Hildebrandt wrote:

---


70 Ibid.
The [Civil War] was about many things, but mostly it was about slavery; it was really not a battle over states' rights. The South was determined to protect and perpetuate its way of life, which at base was an economic and cultural system fueled by the institution of chattel slavery. Ultimately, you cannot put a good states'-right face on it. If in doubt about what the South was fighting for, read the statements of southern leaders in 1861, when they made their case for secession. It is clear that they were fighting to preserve the institution of slavery.\footnote{71}{"Civil War Had Big Impact to Sandusky Area," \textit{Sandusky Register}, April 18, 2011, http://www.sanduskyregister.com/news/2011/apr/17/civilwar1xml.}

The author's flat-out rejection of the Lost Cause myth that the Civil War was not fought over slavery is significant, as is the reader-reactions in the 'comments' section of the article's online version. While the majority contain largely unintelligible bickering, a few reveal direct lines of thinking into the minds of the readers of the \textit{Register}. Many are supportive of the author's assertion regarding slavery as a cause of the war, denouncing the Confederacy and its peculiar institution. One specific commenter referred to Robert E. Lee as “the Judas Iscariot of American history” – perhaps an overstatement, but certainly a refutation of a portion of the Lost Cause. A second reader posted, "thank God the North won and slavery was abolished," while another contended that “the leaders of the Confederacy were traitors to the United States and should have been hung for treason.” Seemingly attacking the Lost Cause mythos directly, the second reader continued to argue that “the conservative Southern mentality that caused the Civil War is still at work today fighting against the rights of the common people. They glorify the Southern aristocracy from days gone by and fight against the rights of the common people. Like their ancestors, they too are traitors from the United States and true liberty for all"\footnote{72}{Ibid.}
That said, many reader comments from the same article are in opposition to the aforementioned views, clearly draped in some elements of the Lost Cause. One comment, in defense of General Lee, argued that he “most certainly did not act to defend slavery – when his father-in-law died in 1862, he freed the slaves his wife inherited.” All historical validity of the aforementioned act aside, the notion that Lee’s actions as a Confederate general were not, at their core, designed to uphold slavery in the South, is to accept the Lost Cause narrative that the Civil War was about vague “states’ rights” and self-determination, not human bondage. In addition, another reader defended the Confederates against charges of treason, arguing that “the Supreme Court told Lincoln that the states had the constitutional right to succeed [sic] from the Union. Lincolns [sic] reply was that he would throw all the Justices into Federal Prison if they pushed that view.”

Obviously, the article resonated with residents of Sandusky in different ways, as demonstrated by both the newspaper's decision to run the article and the readership's recorded response to it. This differentiated response demonstrates the still-contested legacy of the Lost Cause, as well as the memory of the Civil War as a whole, within the Sandusky area.

However, discourses on Johnson’s Island, the Lost Cause and the meaning of the Civil War are not limited to journalists and other media outlets. There are currently several groups in northern Ohio, not connected to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Sons of Confederate Veterans, or any other southern organization, which are committed to preserving and promoting local awareness of the former prison.

---

73 Ibid.
One such group, the Johnson's Island Preservation Society, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to:

[preserving and protecting] the historical heritage of Johnson's Island for future generations to enjoy and study...by enhancing the education of the communities of Northwest Ohio [and] disseminating information to all those interested...[because] the history of Johnson's Island is for the public to know, appreciate and preserve.”

To this end, the organization maintains a privately owned Johnson's Island museum, located in Sandusky, Ohio. These attempts to preserve and promote "the most significant Civil War site in Ohio," along with the language used to do so, demonstrates a clear attempt to underscore the importance of both the cemetery and the prison that once stood there. While the group attempts to maintain a largely neutral stance, in terms of supporting or denouncing the Lost Cause, its website does refer to the Civil War as “the War between the States,” which is often a phrased used by pro-Lost Cause organizations, including the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Similarly, an independent archaeology group - The Friends and Descendants of Johnson's Island Civil War Prison - is,

Dedicated to the preservation of the Johnson's Island Prisoner of War Depot...for present and future educational, research, and interpretive uses...[and because of] the great historical and archeological research being conducted there...and [we] remain committed to continuing the ongoing study of an important chapter in our nation's past.

---


This demonstrates a desire by an organization not affiliated with the SCV or UDC to take ownership of the legacy of Johnson's Island, discussing its importance in a national context, as opposed to a southern one.

These conflicting versions of the past are likewise prevalent in cultural and scholarly discourses involving Johnson's Island. In 2009, University of Akron student Jonathan Kelsey, a theater arts major, published a thesis called *The Writing of JI: From These Walls*. A student and close collaborator of Dr. David Bush, the archaeologist affiliated with the aforementioned Friends and Descendants of Johnson’s Island, Kelsey's thesis was, amongst other things, a historical dramatization which attempted to capture the prisoner experience on Johnson's Island. In a reflective chapter discussing his writing process, Kelsey noted that he was not attempting to provide an accurate historical portrayal of life on the island, but rather to capture the essence of their experiences there. However, in his attempt to do so, it appears likely that his approach strayed too far from historical fact and into the realm of augmenting facts for the sake of entertainment. In another appendix to the script, entitled "History of Johnson's Island," the author neglects to comment on the relatively favorable conditions enjoyed by the prisoners early in the war, instead mentioning only a perceived "lack of excitement...inside the prison" and the crowded conditions experienced toward the end of the war. Certainly, one would surmise that the inmates at Andersonville Prison would have jumped at the chance to be plagued only by a lack of excitement. Nevertheless,

---


Ibid, History of Johnson's Island.
Kelsey's narrative casts a Confederate as its sympathetic protagonist, portraying his story of one of isolation and struggle for survival. While the experience was undoubtedly extremely unpleasant for the author's character, the lack of discussion of why he had been imprisoned or whether that warranted captivity, demonstrates lingering Lost Cause strains at work in Kelsey's dramatization.

In another work related to Johnson’s Island, James E. Duffey, an adjunct professor at Kent State University, also emphasizes the southern side of the story. In Victim of Honor: The Story of John Y. Beall and the Northwestern Conspiracy, Duffey presents a narrative of the most well known of several Confederate-orchestrated attempts to attack the prison camp on Johnson's Island and free the imprisoned Confederate officers. Once this had been accomplished, John Beall and his accomplices planned to hijack the only U.S. naval ship on Lake Erie and sail down the coastline, pillaging and destroying everywhere he went, which the authorities in Richmond hoped would lure advancing Union armies out of the deep South. Although this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, Beall and his accomplices attempted to carry it out by using methods of deceit, espionage, violence, intimidation, and ultimately guerilla warfare against civilians.

Despite this, however, the author describes Beall as "a man of exceptional character and principle, who [faced] the ultimate challenge to his honor and integrity in the last months of the Civil War." Ultimately, after Beall refused to give away the movements of other Confederate spies, he was executed by the Union government for treason and espionage. Of Beall's demise, the author contends that he died "a victim of

his own honor.” What Duffey neglects to mention, however, is to what Beall's honor was pledged. In the end, Beall died to protect not just his homeland, but a homeland which dedicated itself to preserving its right to hold human beings in bondage against their will. The fact that Duffey accepts Beall's "honor" at face value, without discussing where his loyalties were truly located, serves as evidence of a persistent Lost Cause mythos.

The narrative put forth in Duffey’s argument obviously resonated with residents as Ohio, as evidenced by the Ohio Humanities Council and the University of Akron’s decision to sponsor and produce a documentary on Johnson’s Island and Beall’s actions which used *Victim of Honor*, as its primary source base. A premier screening of the documentary occurred on the University of Akron's campus in April 2012, which gathered well over one hundred attendees, including several amateur Civil War re-enactors, clad in both Blue and Gray alike. The film itself is riddled with Lost Cause rhetoric and imagery, as is the website and blog developed alongside the project. The website describes John Beall as "a college-educated pirate from Virginia [who] served under the legendary Confederate General Stonewall Jackson [and later] sailed out onto Lake Erie...intent on liberating the Confederate officers imprisoned on Johnson's Island." It continues to describe Beall's exploits as a "story of intrigue, conspiracy and adventure," conjuring images of a fictional tale about rum-drinking pirates on the high

---

80 Ibid, 2-3.


seas, not a traitor who sought to wage destruction against enemy non-combatants. The actual film portrays the story in a similar vein to Duffey's book, presenting Beall as a tragic martyr who died in the service of long-lost ideals and duties. *Rebels on Lake Erie* concludes with Beall's execution, sorrowfully contending that he died simply "for doing what he thought was right." Similarly, the imagery and presentation of the film was littered with evidence of the Lost Cause mythos at work, including graphics which depicted an Ohio-shaped Confederate flag and the choice of almost entirely Confederate-based Civil War era music.

---

83 Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, it becomes clear that, in the late 1800s through the early 1900s, the legacy of the Civil War and Johnson’s Island Prisoner of War Depot played a large role in the minds of many of the Ohioans in question, especially those in close proximity to Sandusky and the island itself. They tended to remember the Civil War not as a war fought for slavery, or any other sectional discord; rather, their memory of the conflict was one of a valorous war between two supremely dedicated factions of brothers. Although Charles Wilson and Gaines Foster argued that sectional reconciliation did not take place in most places until the early 1900s, the example of Sandusky, Ohio, and its surrounding areas seems to have been an exception, at least in terms of the media. As evidenced through local media coverage as early as 1890, many residents of northwest Ohio, including Union veterans, were only too happy to welcome white Southerners as comrades, as well as to cede ownership of the legacy of Johnson’s Island to the former Rebels. In a large portion of their minds, the cemetery was a Confederate Civil War site, as opposed to a northern or national location. Through this, it becomes clear that John Neff’s argument that memorials served as a painful reminder of sectionalism and an impediment to reconciliation had, at least in this case, all but unraveled prior to the 1910
statue commemoration. In this sense, it seems that Foster’s assertion that the Lost Cause mythos lost its utility as a source of southern identity by the turn of the twentieth century was largely incorrect. In fact, in the name of sectional reunification, many northerners and former Confederate enemies utilized elements of the Lost Cause in order to create a new discourse about the Civil War and, by extension, a new national identity of reunification. Furthermore, Gannon’s argument that sectional reconciliation did not take place fully until after the deaths of the veterans themselves is not supported in this case, as media outlets portrayed many elderly veterans of both sides demonstrating their newfound regional friendship.

However, the reconciliationist argument posed by David Blight, amongst others, sometimes paints with strokes too broad to apply universally to the post-war sentiment of the area surrounding Johnson’s Island. Though the examples of the refusal of the prison’s former warden to take place in the Lookout Statue’s commemoration, as well as the occasional disconnect between the language used by Northerners and Southerners and their supposedly benevolent intentions, it is obvious that the reconciliationist argument was not as widespread of hegemonic as some might like readers to believe. In a way, this is consistent with the overall historiography of the field. While most of the aforementioned authors posit varying timeframes and place emphasis on different events in explaining the negotiation of the memory of the Civil War, almost all agree that, in the decades following the war, the road to reconciliation was multifaceted. This study’s findings support that sentiment.
The same diversity of response also seems to have characterized the perception of both the 2010 statue rededication and the island itself. While media coverage of the 1910 ceremony to dedicate the Lookout Statue filled the Sandusky Register for days, the 2010 rededication was barely mentioned in that same publication, and completely ignored in other area newspapers. This is not, however, a refusal by media outlets to acknowledge Johnson’s Island’s existence. Instead, what appears to have emerged is an effort by Ohio media outlets, independent historical organizations, and, by extension, northern Ohioans themselves to reclaim the historical memory of Johnson’s Island, recasting it as a Union Civil War site, as opposed to a place which belongs to southerners and proponents of the Lost Cause. However, it seems that this contemporary discourse is also challenged, perhaps to a larger degree than were the events of 1910. The book by James Duffey and the ensuing documentary, along with its success and popularity amongst viewers, is evidence that the influence of the Lost Cause is alive and well in the discourse surrounding Johnson's Island.

Perhaps the most important question here is, why? Why were so many Ohioans in 1910 so willing to cede ownership of the memory of Johnson's Island to southerners and buy into the mythos of the Lost Cause, while small number resisted from the margins? And why, around a century later are more people attempting to reenlist the island as a northern memory, while others are still brought into the fold of Lost Cause rhetoric? The most obvious answer regarding white Ohioans in 1910, and the answer many of the aforementioned authors would offer, is reconciliation. All Americans, not just Ohioans, had tremendous difficulty reconciling the overwhelming death toll of the
Civil War and the notion that the nation had almost torn itself apart with its already-entrenched beliefs that the United States was a divinely inspired and ordained nation.\textsuperscript{85} The need to affirm their own exceptionalism, along with pragmatic economic and political motivators, prodded whites toward national reconciliation. In addition, as Blight would argue, many white northerners simply found racial justice incompatible with their worldview, and thus, stumbled upon common ground with their former enemies.

For contemporary Ohioans, however, the answer is less straightforward. The most obvious answer for attempts to reclaim the memory of Johnson's Island for the North is that, one hundred years later, sectional reconciliation has largely been achieved. There is no longer the feeling of an overarching need amongst Americans to heal a broken nation. Today, the United States is arguably as unified under the flag of nationalism as in any other time in its history. Moreover, as Thomas Brown noted, many Americans are beginning to see through the Lost Cause mythos, realizing its true incompatibility with American ideals of freedom and self-determination. Nevertheless, vestiges of the Lost Cause still surround Johnson's Island in 2012, propagated by those who would seek to continually romanticize the ideals of the antebellum South and the Confederacy. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these proponents citizens keep alive the feelings, if not the rhetoric, of the Lost Cause mythos, and ensuring that this "civil religion" still has both meaning and traction in contemporary American culture.

Whether the Ohio cultural discourse surrounding not only Johnson's Island, but the Civil War in general, is trending toward or away from affirming the Lost Cause remains to be seen, and is a subject certainly warranting further study.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


"Civil War Commemoration." Sandusky Register, June 13, 2011.


"Confederate Cemetery on Johnson's Island Sold To the United Daughters of the Confederacy." Sandusky Daily Register, March 14, 1905.


"'Dedicate Bronze Figure as Fitting Tribute to Men Who Gave Their Lives for Cause Believed to Be Just.' -Jos. A Magnus." Sandusky Daily Register, January 9, 1910.

"Dedicate to Lost Cause." Akron Beacon Journal, June 8, 1910.


"Former Prisoner on Johnson's Island Detained and Will Not See Unveiling." Sandusky Daily Register, June 7, 1910.


"Kept the Rebel Prisoners; Refused to Help Dedicate." *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 9, 1910.

"Not to Glorify Science of War, but Accord a Tribute of Love, Gratitude and Loyalty to Memory of Victims of War." *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 9, 1910.


"Tears Dim Eyes of Blue and Grey as Monument Is Unveiled." *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 9, 1910.


"The Confederate Dead That Sleep on Johnson's Island." *Sandusky Daily Register*, May 12, 1890.


"Unveil Monument to Confederates." *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 7, 1910.

"Unveil Monument to Mark the Resting Place of Two Hundred and Six Confederate Soldiers." *Sandusky Daily Register*, June 8, 1910.
Secondary Sources


