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TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE: ROBERT E. LEE AND CONFEDERATE NATIONALISM

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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*****

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2010

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ABSTRACT

Robert E. Lee is undeniably one of the most revered figures in American history, and yet despite the adoration awarded to the man over the years, surprisingly little scholarly research has dedicated itself to an inquiry into his nationalistic leanings during the four most important years of his life—the Civil War. In fact, Lee was a dedicated Confederate nationalist during his time in service to the Confederacy, and he remained so for the rest of his life, even after his surrender at Appomattox and the taking of an oath to regain his United States citizenship. Lee identified strongly with a Southern view of antebellum events, and his time in the Confederate army hardened him to the notion that the only practical reason for waging the Civil War was the establishment of an independent Southern nation. Through a close reading of the evidence Lee himself left behind, it becomes apparent that Lee was an ardent Confederate nationalist, and not the gentlemanly cavalier that only followed honor and duty in waging war against the Union.

Keywords: Robert E. Lee, Confederate States of America, Civil War, Nationalism, 19th Century U.S. History, Southern History

Dedicated to my Mother

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history of our country.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Confederate States of America is a tale often told. Obscured by generations of Lost Cause ideology—as well as a veritable avalanche of literature—the fact that a separate nation, with sovereign power, once existed within the boundaries of the United States of America, however, is a reality that is explained away with surprising ease. The overwhelming trend of the historical record has created a Confederacy that very nearly resembles the Union in everything but industrial output—that peculiar institution, of course, excepted—while fighting to uphold states' rights, constitutional liberty, and American honor. This tendency has led one historian to remark that a "vast pedagogical industry works ceaselessly to oblige young Americans to remember/forget the hostilities of 1861-65 as a great 'civil' war among 'brothers' rather than between—as they briefly were—two sovereign nation-states."[1] After four bloody years of battle and death, the seceding states would be reincorporated into the Union and America would once again be 'whole,' but we should not let this blind us from the fact that for those four years, many Southerners strongly identified with their new nation, and truly came to embrace themselves as Confederates.

Nationalism, of course, can mean many different things and it is not something that is easy to define in one or two sentences. For our purposes, the type of nationalism

being discussed is not whether or the Confederate government became national in its scope—as it quite obviously did—but rather how and why Southerners connected with and embraced other Southerners to truly form a sense of comradeship and a loyalty to their cause that allowed them to persevere through four years of the worst warfare yet seen on the North American continent. It will also not do to simply quote the manifestos of the Confederate government and make the assumption that the decrees issued from Richmond described the mindset of the populace of the seceded states. As Eric Hobsbawm, one of the foremost scholastic authors on nationalism, points out, "official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters."[2] Nationalism, rather, should be considered as part of the character of the Confederacy,[3] and in that case not the sole factor that motivated Southerners to leave the Union and then kill their former brethren with vengeance and tenacity until they were definitively beaten into submission by their Northern foes. Given a choice between allegiance to the Union or the newly formed Confederacy, many Southerners consciously chose the former in 1860 and 1861, and when they did they opened a historical debate on the depth of their national constancy for years to come.

For Robert E. Lee, however, the separate nationality of the Confederate States of America was not an historical question, but rather one that shaped the most meaningful years of his life, and ultimately his legacy. Having spent the majority of his life in service to the United States—on various duties such as redirecting the flow of the Mississippi outside of St. Louis, helping defeat Mexico in the Mexican War, or rather fruitlessly chasing Indians on the plains—Lee undoubtedly felt a deep sense of loyalty towards the Union. His father, "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, was an ardent Federalist, and

the man who famously eulogized George Washington, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." And yet, despite his ties to the Union, Robert E. Lee willfully turned his back the government he had sworn to protect, ultimately becoming one of the leaders of a movement that killed over 600,000 Americans. With actions more befitting Benedict Arnold[4] than George Washington, Lee chose to abandon the United States in favor of a new country; a new nation that he felt best represented the vision of the future he preferred. Lee may not have been born to secede, but his deep feelings towards the Southern way of life and his home state of Virginia pushed him towards a nation designed to protect what Southerners held most dear—and that nation was the Confederacy.

Holding something in deep respect, however, hardly appears as a logical reason to participate in what amounted to the sacrifice of over half of a million people. Can nationalism truly explain why Lee and so many others were willing to put themselves and their lives at risk in order to preserve their own independent government institutions? Put in a different way, why were they so willing to die for something that is nothing more than an invention of the mind?[5] In its most basic form, after all, nationalism is little more than a group of people believing that they are all part of a group with a particular purpose and goal in mind. The American nation was formed upon the basis that "all men are created equal." While it is true that Jefferson considered these words to mean that everyone should be given equal political rights and opportunities to succeed, the reality of the American experience has revealed that all is not "equal" in the home of the brave. And yet Americans fight wars, and give their lives, far from their home soil even today to perpetuate myths just like this one.

Confederate nationalism, which followed in the footsteps of American and Southern nationalism, presents an even more unique problem to the general idea of nationality and equality—in a group setting—because before the Confederate States of America came into existence, the South was socially stratified in a fairly extreme manner. With such dichotomies existing between its people—white and slave, men's roles and women's roles, planters and yeoman farmers—it seems unlikely that the South could have bound itself together into a cohesive whole to fight a war that, at its heart, strove to protect the interests of only its most wealthy citizens. Nationalism itself, in fact, is deserving of this very question whenever it arises as a major force in directing any thoughtfully created national movement. For much of history humans have identified with tribes, groups, and collectivities much smaller than nations such as the Confederacy, and with the loss of these close-knit communities, the question must be asked why people are so ready to identify with other people who they cannot possibly know but in the most general sense. In other words, "having lost real communities," why should people "wish to imagine this particular type of replacement [the nation]?"[6]

Part of the answer comes from the idea that nationalism often distorts the view of what it is protecting in the most extreme sense. "Nationalism," Ernest Gellner claims, "is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself. The cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition." Ironically enough, this actually matters very little during the course of creation or in the actual embodiment of nationalistic sentiment. "Nonetheless," Gellner continues, "the nationalist principle as such, as distinct from each of its specific forms, and from the individually distinctive nonsense which it may preach, has very very deep roots in our

shared current condition, is not at all contingent, and will not be easily denied."[7] All this leads him to the conclusion that what nationalism actually is—in his opinion, a product of the industrial state—does not fit with what nationalist sentiment almost always claims. Confederates themselves, although unknowingly, set out on the pathways that Gellner delineates as they attempted to forge an idea of just what should and would constitute their new nation. They were not always faithful to what they believed was their shared collective path, but as the French scholar Ernest Renan points out, "getting its history wrong is part of being a nation."[8]

Although many factors would play roles of varying importance in constructing Confederate nationalism, one of the most important was undoubtedly religion. One scholar notes that Christianity was the "most fundamental source of legitimation for the Confederacy." Indeed, a journalist from the *Religious Herald* in early 1863 pronounced, "we [Confederates] really are the most religious people in the world." Southerners had long seen themselves as more godly and morally upright than the proverbially materialistic Yankees, and many saw the coming of the Civil War as a chance to prove once and for all that Southerners were indeed God's chosen people. America, since John Winthrop delivered his famous "city on a hill" sermon aboard the ship *Arbella*, had always liked to think of itself as a religious community, and Confederates truly believed that they were carrying on this tradition by breaking away from a North that had violated their covenant with God, losing sight of their moral compass in the process.[9] By placing themselves as a group in opposition to Yankee godlessness, Confederates helped define themselves as a national group. Although Confederate belief in the righteousness of their cause would wane over time, throwing into stark relief whether or not they were in fact

specifically chosen by God, the fact remains that many Confederates identified themselves and their nation through the lens of religion. That they were able to do so should not be surprising, for as Hobsbawm notes, "Religion is an ancient and well-tried method of establishing communion through common practice and a sort of brotherhood between people who otherwise have nothing much in common."[10]

Lee himself definitely saw the designs of Providence at work in the life of the Confederacy. His wartime correspondence is filled with references to the Almighty, and he often cites divine will as the reason for a particular defeat or victory. Typical is a letter written to his wife in early spring 1862, urging her to be weary of the position of the Union troops in her area, lest she be captured and persecuted as the wife of the Confederacy's most capable general. He concluded, however, that he himself could do little and that both he and his wife must in a higher power: "God I hope will give us his countenance & blessing and then all will go well." Another letter to his wife, written the following spring, demonstrates even more emphatically Lee's devotion to religion and also how it flavored his nationalistic feelings. On a day designated by Jefferson Davis as one for thanksgiving and praises to God, Lee penned these words: "I will not let the day devoted to thanksgiving to Almighty God for his mercies go by without holding communion with you. I know you will unite with me in fervent prayers for His manifold individual & national blessings….He alone can give us peace & freedom & I humbly submit to His holy will."[11]

Lee's personal religious views were in fact widely known throughout the Confederacy, and many Confederates took solace in the belief that Lee—and other leaders such as Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson—were pious Christians leading

other just as deserving (and pious) men into battle. These facts, combined with the revivals that swept through army camps throughout the war, particularly in 1862 and 1863, led many Confederates to bolster their patriotism with the idea that the Confederacy was "God's republic."[12] Perhaps nothing better illustrates the Confederacy's ideological foundation of Christianity than the viewpoint of someone who found reliance on the direction of Providence to be naïvely optimistic. One general who served under Lee wrote many years after the war that Providence "did not care a row of pins" about who won a particular battle. "And while on that subject I will say here that I think it was a serious incubus upon us that during the whole war our president & many of our generals really & actually believed that there *was* this mysterious Providence always hovering over the field & ready to interfere on one side or the other, & that prayers & piety might win its favor from day to day."[13] Whether they were right or wrong, and whether or not Almighty God could and would intervene on the battlefield, is not the important question in this regard. Rather, it should be noted that Southerners consciously used the notion of their own piety and Christianity successfully to form the framework of a defined Confederate nationalism that would help them endure the struggles of the Civil War.

Language is another feature often associated with nationalism, as it is probably the most obvious attribute that distinguishes one people from another. As Hobsbawm puts it, "Is it [language] not the very essence of what distinguishes one people from another, 'us' from 'them', real human beings from the barbarians who cannot talk a genuine language but only make incomprehensible noises?" In fact, the lack of a distinct vernacular language is sometimes viewed as one reason why the South did not have a

distinct nationalism: it simply shared too much history and too many cultural traditions with the North.[14] Confederates, however, did attempt to create their own national language. Since most Southerners had to rely on English instead of some provincial dialect, Southern schools stressed a return to the "pure" English language and avoidance of using Yankee "degeneracies" as well as what the text labeled "AFRICANISMS." As the Charleston *Mercury* put it, the Confederacy should speak no "corrupt provincial dialect, but the noble undefiled English language."[15] In this instance, it once again matters very little as to how different the language spoken in the North and the South actually was: it was Southerners' attempts to define themselves as different from the North that led to the conscious creation of Confederate nationalism. As Hobsbawm demonstrates, even when there is a vernacular language present in a nationalist movement, it is rarely homogenous over a large geographical area, and before the era of mandatory primary education, it was almost impossible for a "mother tongue" to develop. "National languages are therefore almost always semi-artificial constructs," he claims, but this "does not…exclude a certain popular *cultural* identification with a language."[16] Thus, while the South may not have had a distinct mother tongue or national language, their cultural identification with what they perceived to be "undefiled" English once again defined the Confederacy as a separate national entity.

The South's peculiar institution also shaped Confederate identity and nationalism. Although many Southerners argued after the war that they had fought solely for constitutional rights and liberties—and some may very well have—it is difficult to conceive of another immediate reason for secession than the protection of chattel slavery. On April 9, 1860, James Chesnut, senator from South Carolina, issued these words to an

awaiting audience: "There is a conflict—a conflict of ideas irreconcilable. The opinions of those who give life and energy to the antislavery party touching government, society, the relations of man to both and to each other, are radical and revolutionary. If these prevail, there can be no peace, North or South." While in reality there may not have been as wide a gulf between Northerners and Southerners as Chesnut so fervently believed, the most important aspect of his mindset—and it was shared by many Southerners—was the perception that they *were* different. Slavery had so enveloped almost every other sectional issue that it came to represent for Southerners "a whole ideological configuration—a plantation economy, a style of life, and a pattern of race relations—which made Southerners believe that they constituted a separate nation."[17] Ideology, as Clifford Geertz noted, is a people's attempt to cope with social, cultural or psychological strain. "And it is, in turn, the attempt of ideologies to render incomprehensible social situations meaningful…that accounts both for the ideologies' highly figurative nature and for the intensity with which, once accepted, they are held."[18]

The ideology of slavery was of the utmost importance during the secession crisis, and it provided continued support for the existence of the Confederacy during the Civil War. Typical was the attitude expressed by an editorial in one Louisiana paper: "With regard to [slavery] we recognize no arbiters, we admit no judges. African slavery is part of our political existence. In it, we 'move and have our being.'" A Montgomery paper—although perhaps moving closer to hysteria—echoed these sentiments in October 1860: "Here in the South, we believe that the white man is better than the negro; and the poorest white man in Alabama would cut the throat of his daughter, before he would marry her to a negro, if he were as rich as Croesus."[19] Slavery also provided unique support for

Confederate nationalism because by subjugating blacks, white Southerners created a social situation in which they were never the lowest—or most debased—class. J.J.D. Renfore, a chaplain in the 10th Alabama infantry, delivered an insightful oration in this regard: "I never owned a slave in my life; and yet I contend that I have more interest in the institution of slavery than the man who owns five hundred. Abolish the institution of slavery, and your children and my children must take the place of that institution….See your posterity in cruel bondage…and then tell me if this is not pre-eminently the poor man's war?"[20] With attitudes such as these, it is quite clear that slavery formed a crucial part of Confederate ideology and nationalism.

CHAPTER 2

THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

As war swept across America continent in 1861, Northerners and Southerners prepared themselves for a war that they envisioned as a short one. Elizabeth Hardin, a proud Confederate from border-state Kentucky, remarked that "by the first of July [1861] the U.S. flag was to wave over Nashville and Memphis; by the first of January [1862] they were to return from the Gulf with our scalps—*and our watches*."[21] At First Manassas, the war's first major battle, spectators came from nearby Washington to view the afternoon's events and enjoy a picnic lunch. James Chesnut, the former U.S. Senator and soon to be Confederate Senator, made one of the most hyperbolic of statements when he claimed he would "drink all the blood spilled" as a result of the South's secession.[22] Thus, inevitably, the peoples both above and below the Mason-Dixon line were woefully unprepared to wage the conflagration that would claim more than 600,000 lives before finally being brought to an end. For Southerners in particular, who would find their homes and land overrun by the powerful Union armies, forging a shared sense of nationalism and identity would be imperative in order to sustain their will to fight. While enthusiasm and fervor were "truly remarkable at the outset," it would take more than simple optimism to keep the dreams of independence alive.[23]

Drawing to a large extent on the embers of Southern nationalism that had been fanned into flames at various times in the nineteenth century, the citizens of the Confederacy developed an impressive sense of shared identity that helped them to extend the war for as long as they did.[24] One of the key factors associated with this nationalism was the esteem in which Southerners held their armies. After the summer of 1862, Confederates would turn again and again to the figure of Robert E. Lee and his seemingly invincible Army of Northern Virginia as the defenders and the embodiment of Confederate independence.[25] Mary Chesnut, perhaps the Confederacy's best known diarist, proclaimed after victory in the Seven Days' Battle, "For the first time since Joe Johnston was wounded at Seven Pines, we may breathe freely…now we are throwing up our caps for R.E. Lee."[26] Over the next year, Lee, along with his newly christened Army or Northern Virginia, would win spectacular battlefield victories and develop enough respect with the citizenry that they would keep the hope for separate Confederate nationality alive until early 1865. Along the way Lee would become the Confederacy's most glorified and respected public figure, and thousands would identify him personally with the Confederate nation, making him the most important living symbol of Confederate nationalism during the Civil War.[27]

Despite some attempts by historians in the twentieth century to diminish his importance and historical reputation, the evidence shows quite conclusively that he was the defining figure of the era for many Confederates.[28] Few Confederates pondered the possibility of continued resistance after Lee's defeat and surrender at Appomattox. If it was impossible for 'Bobby' Lee and his boys to win the war, then Confederates reasoned it was futile for anyone else to try. Elizabeth Hardin, commenting on Lee's surrender,

found herself "stupefied with grief….It seemed as though the sun had gone out at noonday." Although she refused to give up hope, she realized that the prospects for independence were now much bleaker, remarking that the fall of Richmond was the first occasion during the war for "which I had shed tears."[29] On April 10, 1865, John B. Jones, a government clerk in Richmond penned one of the most moving eulogies for Lee and his army. "This army [Army of Northern Virginia] was the pride, the hope, the prop of the Confederate cause….All is lost! No head can be made by any other general or army—if indeed any other remains."[30] While it is not extraordinary for Confederates to react with the utmost dejection over the surrender of one of their largest field armies, the depth of their affection and trust in Lee and his army effectively brought home the idea that the Southern experiment in separate nationhood had ended in total failure.

While Lee's service to the Confederate States of America concluded with his being hailed and recognized as its leading hero, his career did not begin with the same sense of triumph.[31] He was widely recognized as one of the best talents in the old U.S. Army, earning the highest praise from the Union's most respected officer, Winfield Scott, for his service during and after the Mexican War. Scott is even reported to have said that in the event of war between America and England, it would be wise to insure the life of Lee at a cost of $5,000,000 a year. In 1858, Scott once again heaped glowing words on Lee, calling him the best soldier he had ever seen in the field. Another Confederate living in Richmond, commenting on Lee's ties to the American Revolution, through his father "Light Horse Harry" Lee, claimed the North "could boast no such historic names as we, in its army."[32] On February 8, 1861, the Richmond *Dispatch* declared that the Confederacy needed proven regulars from the old U.S. Army to lead its troops, and that

Virginia could supply these officers. Men such "as Col. Robert E. Lee, who has no superior as a soldier in the United States," were experienced leaders upon whom Virginia should lean.[33] Along with such praise came opportunities and expectations, and Lee was quickly chosen to lead Virginia's state troops after the state's secession from the Union in April 1861. Virginia's acceptance into the Confederate States of America placed Lee in a somewhat precarious position as far as receiving a command went, but it was not long before he was commissioned a Brigadier General in the Confederate Army. He would wait in Richmond for orders during the victory of First Manassas, but he was then soon sent on assignments to western Virginia, and, subsequently, as a full general, to South Carolina, where he worked to prepare the coastal defenses in the southeastern portion of the Confederacy.

Although hampered by inept subordinates and difficult logistical problems, Lee nonetheless failed to live up to the promise many Confederates saw in his reputation and earned a great deal of rancor for his efforts. Lee was specifically hounded for not attacking the enemy—although in western Virginia he had planned an attack that did not materialize—and for asking his soldiers to entrench when at all possible. Although soldiers' thoughts about the importance of earthworks would change during the course of the war, as they realized that rifle pits and trenches could help keep them alive, at the beginning of the conflict fortified works were looked down on and seen as unmanly, especially by Confederates.[34] Lee, in fact, managed to earn the epithet "Granny Lee," and Mary Chesnut, ever in tune with the currents of Confederate gossip, noted that Lee had managed to garner the nickname "'Old Spade Lee.' He keeps them digging so."[35] She recorded these words at the time when Lee was being named commander of the

troops defending Richmond in June 1862—just a few days, in fact, before she would begin giving him high praise in the remainder of her diary entries. Having gained command of the Army of Northern Virginia, he would mold it into the force that would give Confederates hope and belief in the efficacy of their nation.

Nevertheless, Lee was still an unknown quantity in June 1862. Edward Porter Alexander, future Chief of Artillery in the Army or Northern Virginia, recalled in his memoirs that he himself pondered aloud whether Lee had the "audacity" to encounter the situation facing the Confederates defending Richmond. Colonel Joseph Ives, replied to Alexander: "Lee is audacity personified. His name is audacity, and you need not be afraid of not seeing all of it that you will want to see." These words, Alexander concluded, were striking, for "if ever a prophecy was literally fulfilled this was."[36] Part of the reason for Lee's bold movements and strategies may have been to appeal to the public's desires, but more than that he saw that the goals of the army and public coincided quite nicely. In a letter to Jefferson Davis, Lee wrote, "I think it important to unite as closely as possible the interests of the army with the interests of the citizens. They are one in reality & all for the country….We have now but one thing to do; to establish our independence."[37]

Lee also realized that to stay on the passive defensive would mean a war of attrition that the Confederacy had little chance of winning. His best chance, therefore, was to strike a blow at the Union armies and either defeat them in battle, or wear down the will of the Union to such a degree that they no longer had the desire to prosecute the war. Once again Lee's strategy fit so well with Confederate expectations and desires that they became almost synonymous. Lee realized, however, that most Confederates would

spend little time postulating on his theories of warfare and nationalism, and instead they would demand victories on the battlefield. Although victories could be bloody and not always advantageous for the victor, the reality that the public reacted so strongly to perceived results meant that Lee's successes, whether actual or not, had a great influence on the national will of the Confederacy. Benjamin Freeman, a soldier in the 44th North Carolina stationed at Petersburg under Beauregard, revealed the confidence in which soldiers held Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia in early 1864 when he commented that he thought a Union force under Isaac J. Wister would "try Uncle Bob Lee['s] boys but they was too hard for them. They [the Union force] run off." Indeed, as Confederate fortunes crumbled across the map over the course of the war, Lee became the one of the few bright spots that Confederates could point out in their struggle.[38]

Because of the nature of the Confederacy's existence, military questions were never far removed from political ones.[39] Jefferson Davis in particular was fairly single-minded in his conclusion that the military was the only way to achieve the Confederacy's stated political goals, often circumventing the personal liberties of Confederates to keep the war effort going. What effectively happened, then, was that the armies became one of the few ways in which nationalism was engendered. As long as Confederate armies were victorious, the people were content, but when the victories stopped coming, the citizenry became desolate. Since Lee was the one general who the Confederates could rely on for positive results, it was only natural that he came to define Confederate nationalism.[40] Davis's experience and success in war may have influenced these decisions that ultimately failed to maximize nationalism in ways today that seem naïve, but it is unfair

to apply modern principles to Davis's unique situation, and also to expect him to do things that simply would have been unfeasible in his situation.

One reason, apart from his battlefield victories, Lee so well fit the part of a symbol of Confederate unity and morale was his own ardent nationalism. Historians, however, have portrayed Lee as someone who was unwillingly dragged towards secession, who fought only for his home state of Virginia, and who, after the war, was "reconstructed" quickly without reservation or any hesitation.[41] But was this really the case? How does one justify Lee's participation in a war that claimed so many lives if he did not personally connect with and believe in the goal of achieving independence for the Confederacy? There is something sublime about the goals of warfare—the actual fighting is a different story—when a people make a valiant struggle to break free of a group or institution that they feel are making unjust demands and infringements on their liberties. To engage in the horrors of war on superficial terms and because one is "duty" bound are weak rationalizations for anyone, and especially so for a man who fought as hard and brilliantly as Lee did.

Lee, however, did see something in the idea of a Confederate nation that was worth fighting for. To begin with, Virginia, always close to Lee's heart, was an integral part of the new nation. To conclude that this was his only reason, however, does not square with the picture Lee painted of himself in a January 1861 letter to Custis in which he claimed, "The South, in my opinion, has been aggrieved by the acts of the North….As an American citizen, I take great pride in my country, her prosperity and institutions, and would defend any State if her rights were invaded." Far from being concerned only with Virginia, in this instance Lee expressed his unity with the South as a whole. Douglas

Southall Freeman, Lee's most widely read biographer, made the remark that Lee, unlike other soldiers in the regular antebellum U.S. Army, had never lost contact with Virginia during his travels and his military travels that took him across the country. In fact, he had been at home executing his father-in-law's will during the majority of the build-up to the secession crisis, so he was understandably shaped by the Virginia press and the prevailing attitudes of his native state. For Lee and his cousins, moreover, their "faith in Virginia's political rightness was as unquestioning as their belief in God." In other words, Lee was a Virginian, but he was also an American before April 1861, and a Confederate thereafter. At least as early as April 23, 1861, Lee was advocating the assimilation of Virginia's troops into the Confederate armies, and he was "fully committed to the Confederate cause."[42] While historians have long argued that Lee's ties to Virginia inhibited his bonds with the Confederacy, it was in fact just the opposite. Because of Lee's love for Virginia, and because Virginia became part of the Confederacy, his ties to Virginia undeniably strengthened his identification with and his reverence for the Confederacy.

Perhaps one of the reasons Lee is viewed as soft on secession is because he did not fit the classic definition of the "fire-eater." Simply because Lee did not wholeheartedly support secession during the crisis in the winter of 1860-1861 does not mean that he would not embrace a fervent Confederate nationalism at a later time. Unlike the Southern fire-eaters, he tried to take a realistic approach to the issue of disunion. In fact, it was because Lee foresaw a terrible outcome—the possibility of a bloody war—that he chose to remain skeptical of secession. Lee wrote his wife's cousin in early 1861, claiming, "I believe the South justly complains of the aggression of the

North, & I have believed that the North would cheerfully redress the grievances complained of." By that same token, when it became impossible for Lee to rationalize his continued involvement with a Union that planned to force the seceded Southern states back into the Union, he came to see secession, though dangerous, as a necessary step. As a result, Lee wrote to General Winfield Scott, Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army, to resign his commission, saying that the struggle "has cost me to separate myself from a service to which I have devoted all the best years of my life & all the ability I possessed."[43] No matter how much hurt it caused him, Lee had made the decision to secede, and in so doing, he would not look back. A close reading of Lee's wartime writings and records, in fact, shows that he indeed was an ardent Confederate nationalist who identified strongly with the new nation, just not in a boisterous way that made claims with little or no grounds in reality but as a quiet Southerner who could not contemplate any other course once Virginia had left the Union.

The timeline of events surrounding Lee's resignation from the U.S. Army, his commission as a full general in service to Virginia, and finally his receiving a general's commission in the Confederate Army, are crucial to understanding Lee's attachment to Virginia and the Southern way of life, and how it came to represent an important facet of his loyalty to the Confederate cause. On March 30, 1861, Lee accepted a promotion to colonel in the United States Army, offered by Abraham Lincoln, and yet less than fifty days later, on May 14, 1861, he would accept a commission as brigadier general in the Confederate States Army. In between these two important dates in Lee's life, he would resign his commission to the United States Army on April 20, and, two days later, accept a commission as a major general in service to Virginia. The final event that would

transpire to conclude Lee's rather rapid transformation into a general in service to the CSA came on April 25, when Virginia recognized the Confederate Constitution.[44] Thus, in less than two months time, Lee had renounced a government he had sworn to uphold in favor of making war—revolution, more specifically—against it.

The most interesting question about these two months now becomes whether Lee was simply caught in the whirlwind of secession, barreling along as the spirit of the times would dictate, or were his actions the result of a process that ended in his making a decision that he had contemplated for many months. In other words, was Lee as passive or impulsive as some have suggested towards secession? Lee's correspondence certainly hints that he did not act precipitously. On January 23, 1861, he wrote that he could "anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union….Secession is nothing but revolution."[45] This statement has led many historians to conclude the Lee must have been pulled towards secession even though he knew it was wrong, and thus his allegiance to the Confederacy could only have been of fleeting significance (and after the war washed completely away by his conciliatory attitude toward reunion with the North until his death). Yet secession, Alan T. Nolan so pointedly remarks, did not exist in a vacuum in the late winter and early spring of 1861. Secession for Southerners was not simply a matter of Constitutional ethics and rhetoric, but rather an "extension of certain anterior beliefs and attitudes. In the final analysis, secession was a political technique with a specific purpose: insulating slavery from the popular-government political processes of the Union."[46] Lee felt there was more to the Confederacy worth saving than just slavery, but it cannot be denied that he took up arms to defend a nation that perpetuated the institution of human bondage. Fighting for

slavery, while morally reprehensible in our modern minds, does not mean that Lee fought for the Southern way of life rather than the Confederate nation—the Confederacy, after secession, embodied the Southern view of the American destiny. Only when taking these ideas into account can one make sense of the otherwise confusing tone of Lee's pre-secession writing. His same letter quoted of January 23, 1861, for instance, also contained these statements: "The South, in my opinion, has been aggrieved by the acts of the North, as you say. I feel the aggression, and am willing to take every proper step for redress. It is the principle I contend for, not individual or private gain."

Rather than a man who allowed others to decide for him, Lee now appeared to be a very conflicted individual, forced to make tough decisions regarding his future role in the impending conflict between the United States and the South. Lee had written as late as 1857 that his country "was the *whole* country," and that he knew no "other Country, no other Government, than the *United States* & their *Constitution*," and yet he embraced secession less than four years later. In a letter written April 20, 1861, to his cousin, Roger, Lee hinted at his inner torment by penning a terse statement about national allegiance and summarizing why he had chosen the course of secession by admitting, "I consider it useless to go into the reasons that influenced me. I can give no advice."[47] Although most often silent on issues that gave him the most anxiety, Lee's personal struggle is quite obvious. In the end, his connection with the South, of which Virginia was a large part, would trump the affection he had for the Union and the Constitution, which had also been partially shaped by individuals from his native state. Nolan makes another key point in regard to Lee's feeling for the South when he says that the views expressed by Lee—and others like Jefferson Davis, who, although opposing secession,

nevertheless led the Confederacy—were really not that different from those who were considered the fire-eaters and the true cause of secession. They simply did not make their opinions known before the outbreak of war.[48]

Because Lee was not the traditional fire-eating brand of Confederate nationalist, his feelings were to be revealed during the war, rather than before. The most obvious statement of his Confederate nationalism, the fact that he chose to fight for the Confederacy against the Union, is often overlooked, but it is crucial to determining Lee's developing nationalistic feelings. Lee also impressed upon his family, fellow officers, enlisted men, and government officials the absolute necessity that everyone would have to work together for the good of the Confederate cause, along the way sacrificing as needed, if the Confederacy were to achieve the stated goal of independence. He wrote to his wife Mary in late 1861 that they must "be content with the many blessings we receive." Furthermore, "if we can only become sensible of our transgressions, so as to be fully penitent & forgiven, that this heavy punishment under which we labour may with justice be removed from us & the whole nation, what a gracious consummation of all that we have endured will be!"[49] The next September, on the eve of the Battle of Antietam, Lee would suggest to President Davis that the Confederacy sue for peace because they would not appear to be in a situation of weakness if they still possessed the ability to inflict damage upon the United States. Davis, also cognizant of this fact, prepared a proclamation that Confederate generals should issue to citizens as they marched into Union territory, which declared that "now at a juncture when our arms have been successful, we restrict ourselves to the same just and moderate demand [peace], that we made at the darkest period of our reverses."[50] This offer also contained an ulterior

motive for Lee and the Confederacy, namely that their only goal in fighting was to establish independence and an honorable peace. Lee continued in his letter to Davis: "The rejection of this offer would prove to the *country* that the responsibility of the continuance of the war does not rest upon us, but that the party in power in the United States elect to prosecute it for purposes of their own."[51] Identifying the Southern people as his country while explicitly stating the goals of the Confederacy as primarily hoping for independence, Lee expressed himself forcefully and with formidable determination, as a Confederate nationalist.

One of Lee's most revealing letters during the war concerned the recognition of the growing peace party in the North and the desire, including his own, to have the Confederacy recognized as an independent nation. Once again writing to Davis, Lee displayed a shrewd political mind that belied his often repeated claim to possess no interest in the political arena:

> Should the belief that peace will bring back the Union become general, the war would no longer be supported, and that after all is what we are interested in bringing about. When peace is proposed to us it will be time enough to discuss its terms, and it is not the part of prudence to spurn the proposition in advance, merely because those who wish to make it believe, or affect to believe, that it will result in bringing us back to the Union. We entertain no such apprehensions, nor doubt that the desire of our people for a distinct and independent national existence will prove as steadfast under the influence of peaceful measures as it has shown itself in the midst of war.[52]

Written in early June 1863, less than a month before Gettysburg, Lee felt that once again the South was in an advantageous position to come to the bargaining table. Lee's main goal, as before, was to strengthen the belief in the North that peace was the most logical and appealing outcome to a war that dragged on and on. To accomplish this, he was not

above misleading those in the North who desired peace only with the restoration of the Union. Lee did not believe this to be a realistic possibility. Instead, he articulated an ardent desire for a separate national existence under the Confederate government, stressing to Davis that that was what the citizens of the Confederacy wanted as well.

Lee often emphasized that every citizen in the Confederacy would have to do his part in order to achieve independence. That meant that every capable man should be on the battlefield, and all citizens on the home front must do what they could to support their country. In Lee's words, "Our people have only to be true and united, to bear manfully the misfortunes incident to war, and all will come right in the end."[53] On other occasions Lee recognized that work done on the home front was very beneficial to the armies. As he opposed Union Major General Ambrose Burnside in the winter of 1862-1863, Lee reminded his wife, "You had had better finish all the gloves you intend making at once & send them to the army. Next month they will be much needed."[54] Other soldiers were equally as gracious to get tidings and support from home. One private from North Carolina reported, "I got my ginger thred at last and cloths and I was glad to get those apples and bread and Chickens. It is good it makes me think about home."[55] Other Confederates, like the wife of Captain Charles M. Blackford, pulled their weight in different ways. Hardening herself to the idea of going to work, she wrote her husband, "I know that at first you will be shocked at the idea of your wife going to work to support herself, but you are so situated you can do nothing more and I should bear my share of the burden."[56] Efforts like these were necessary to continue the Southern war effort, and Lee recognized the importance of building morale and goodwill among the troops. The

nation must build the faith that it could succeed—and that it *should* succeed—before it actually would.

If it was the job of citizens away from the front lines to support the troops, it was the duty of the soldiers to defend the nation with all their might. Lee was constantly aware of the deficiency in numbers under which the Confederate armies labored, emphasizing again and again that every able bodied man must be brought to the field—and that once there, they must stay and fight. In August of 1863 Lee addressed a letter to Davis that was typical of these concerns: "The number of desertions from this army is so great and still continues to such an extent, that unless some cessation of them can be caused, I fear success in the field will be seriously endangered."[57] Without an effective fighting force in the field, the hope of breaking away from the Union and building an autonomous nation would be a hopeless endeavor. To enforce the required discipline, Lee resorted to executions of deserters, hoping to drive home the point that it was far better to stay and fight like men for their country than risk the shame that came with running away. Although Lee was a strict disciplinarian in this sense, he also realized that there were far more immediate concerns for soldiers than cowardice. Troops whose families suffered on the home front must have felt the worst, but there were other reasons to flee as well. Trying to find out why troops were abandoning the Petersburg trenches, Lee concluded, "I have endeavored to ascertain the causes [of desertion], and think that the insufficiency of food and non-payment of the troops have more to do with dissatisfaction among the troops than anything else." Without sufficient care for the troops, Lee found it hard to believe they would ever fight effectively. Taking up for his soldiers, Lee rebuked the bureaucracy, "It will not answer to reduce the ration in order to

make up for deficiencies in the Subsistence Department."[58] Lee was a firm nationalist who believed that the cause must be nurtured in order to succeed, and the armies were a great place to build this sense of identity. If the armies were to be reservoirs of strength and national sentiment, it only made sense to support them to the utmost.

The final order that Lee would issue as leader of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Order, No. 9, contained still more evidence of his deep connections with the idea of a Southern nation, and the devotion he had developed for the men who had served under him. Written by Lee's aide, Walter Taylor, the Farewell Order nevertheless expressed Lee's personal sentiments about his army, the men who served in it, and the Confederate cause. Although perhaps more famous for its opening sentence in which he set the stage for the promulgation of a key facet of Lost Cause ideology, Lee's Confederate nationalism also shines through clearly and eloquently. After confirming to his men that he surrendered because of no lack of faith in them, he admitted to have yielded because he was "determined to avoid the useless sacrifice of those whose past services have endeared them to their countrymen." Finally, in his closing sentence to the men who had idolized him for almost three years, with words dripping with emotion, Lee, through Taylor, declared, "With an increasing admiration for your constancy and devotion to your country, and a grateful remembrance of your kind and generous considerations for myself, I bid you all an affectionate farewell."[59] It is no coincidence that Lee authorized use of the word *country* twice in his farewell address, for to him and so many others in the army, fighting for the Confederacy had become the most precious and compelling goal of his life. It must have been crushing for Lee and for so many others to see their dreams crushed, but so the dictates of fate would have it. Lee would

have to spend the rest of his life reconciling himself to the fact that Divine Providence had deemed the South unworthy of its own nation—a task he would not find easy.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEGACY OF THE REVOLUTION

For the Southerners who set about forging their own nation in late-1860 and early-1861, one event loomed far larger than any other in determining the make-up of their new country: the American Revolution. One of the most radical events in the history of the world for its time, the American Revolution embodied the will of the American people in almost every way. Defying Britain and the rest of established Europe, the new United States confidently embarked on its voyage as a nation full of promise and hope, along the way striving to remain true to the spirit of the American Revolution. Indeed, one of the most pressing questions Americans had to face as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries unfolded was how to stay true to the legacy of the Revolution; in other words, how were they to be *true* Americans?

The meaning of the American Revolution was never far from the minds of Confederates as they set about creating the Confederate States of America. When Confederates chose to place George Washington on the Confederate national seal, or refer to Confederate soldiers as the equivalents of the American patriots who fought in the Revolution, Southerners consciously tried to portray "their independence as the fulfillment of American nationalism."[60] Jefferson Davis, in his First Inaugural Address given while president of the provisional government, drew on the history of the United

States to establish more permanently the idea of the Confederacy: "Our present political position has been achieved in a manner unprecedented in the history of nations. It illustrates the American idea that governments rest on the consent of the governed, and that it is the right of the people to alter or abolish them at will whenever they become destructive of the ends for which they were abolished."[61] Going on to claim that the Union had been "perverted" and that it was no longer tenable for Southerners to remain a part of it, Davis succinctly summarized that it was now their task to continue the Revolution—they were the real Americans.

Robert E. Lee, like many Americans who became Confederates, never entirely forget the loyalties and devotion he felt towards the ideas that America stood for, but he did believe that the Union was no longer the best guarantor of those principles. Lee had long thought of Virginia as his "native" country, professing as such in a very famous letter to his sister. "With all my devotion to the Union, and the feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen," Lee concluded, "I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home."[62] Leaving the Union had undeniably been one of the hardest decisions of Lee's life, but doing so in the way he did, with eyes already turned towards service in the defense of Virginia—which, by this point in time, Lee must have surely realized meant a future role in the new Confederate government being formed by the seceded states—creates a strange caveat in examining Lee's nationalism. Lee, like most Southerners, believed in the basic premises of states rights, and although he abhorred the idea of secession, he never denied that it was a legal action undertaken by some states in the South, and eventually his own state of Virginia. Yet the seceding states did not secede to become separate sovereign entities; rather, they

left the Union in order to form another nation that would best promote and fulfill the idea of what it meant to be an American. While it was their goal to remain a decentralized confederacy, this did not change the fact that Confederates deemed it necessary to form a new, Southern national government that would have at least some control and authority over the actions of the separate states.[63]

By keeping his loyalty tied to the idea of what it meant to be American, Lee, in a way, simply transferred his nationalistic allegiance to what he felt was a more proper insurer of its safety. While this in no way exonerates his actions towards a government that he had sworn to uphold and protect, it does shed some light on Lee's sense of Confederate nationalism. In other words, Lee's personal American nationalism that was subsumed under the idea of the Union did not magically disappear when he threw in his lot with Virginia and the Confederacy in early spring 1861. It simply, in so many aspects, changed titles and took on new forms.[64] Instead of protecting Washington from attack, for example, Lee chose to protect Richmond; instead of leading the boys in blue into battle, he felt more at home leading the butternut Confederates into the deadly firestorm of bullets they would face time and again. This, however, does not change the depth and character of Lee's nationalistic feelings towards what it meant to be American. As late as April 20, 1861, Lee wrote of "the feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen," and yet by May 2 of that same year he would write his wife of the Union troops, "They feel their power & they seem to have the desire to oppress & distress us. I assume therefore they will do it."[65] Given the constancy of Lee's character it is unlikely that his values of what it meant to be an American underwent a dramatic shift in these twelve

days, but almost in the wink of an eye he had come to recognize the Confederacy as "us," and the Union as "them."

Lee, however, unlike the vast majority of Southerners who would switch their allegiance to the Confederacy in the hopes of continuing the American dream, had special and unique ties to the Revolution and the Union—ties that Lee would confront, ultimately convincing himself that they should not keep him from joining the Confederacy. One of the reasons Lee gave later in life for choosing to side with the Confederacy—many other Virginians, after all, did not—was that he felt like it was a decision his father, Light-Horse Harry Lee of Revolutionary fame, would have made if he had been placed in similar circumstances. While editing his father's memoirs, Lee concluded at an end of a passage concerning tension and discord in the early republic that his father, while recognizing "his devotion to the Federal government," also understood the dichotomy "between his 'native country' and that which he had labored to associate with it in the strictest bonds of union."[66] While this may have been how Lee *thought* his father saw the issue, the evidence at hand does not seem to bear this out. Ironically, Lee also quotes two letters from his father that state quite bluntly the dangers that would arise from sectional strife: "While we deprecate and lament the obnoxious event [a financial plan by Alexander Hamilton], we must submit to it, because effectual opposition may beget civil discord and civil war."[67] Lee did concede that his father was very devoted to the Federal government. In fact, the events in the elder Lee's life portray a man who would not have condoned his son's actions to betray his country and perpetrate civil war against the Union. The assumption that Henry Lee may have changed his tune had he lived through the contentious sectional struggle that led to the Civil War is intriguing, but it cannot be

answered with any certainty. Lee may have left the Union because he felt as if his father would have done the same thing, but ultimately Robert Lee's actions were unilateral and his own, and he had to accept the consequences for betraying his former allegiances, even if that meant forever denying that he had done so.

Explaining what made Robert E. Lee an American nationalist is perhaps easier than deducing why he became such an ardent Confederate—that is, if one does not conclude that they share many similar characteristics—if for no other reason than there was a longer period of time during which his allegiance to the United States developed. First and foremost, Lee most certainly looked to his father and the revolutionary heritage of the state of Virginia to bolster his own loyalties to the Union. Lee was quite obviously concerned with the reputation of his father as a profligate who wasted money and left his family to escape his creditors, as is evident by Lee taking the time and effort to prepare an edition of his father's memoirs so that posterity would have a record of what Henry Lee accomplished in his life. The revolutionary heritage of his native state also offered reassurance for Lee. Fitzhugh Lee, Robert's nephew and cavalry commander during the Civil War, proclaimed it was to "the State of Lee's nativity [that] the independence of the colonies and their union afterward as States was largely due. One of her sons held the sword and another the pen that accomplished this great work."[68] The two men referred to were giants of the Revolution: Thomas Jefferson held the pen, and George Washington carried the sword.[69]

The memory of his father's heroism and the sacrifice made by the revolutionary generation, played in Robert's mind from a young age, but there were also other factors influencing his sense of American nationalism. Lee was 54 years-old when he made the

careful and deliberate decision to join Virginia and the Confederacy in waging war against the Union, and he had spent the better part of the previous 32 years in what can only be called distinguished service to the United States Army. It was during these years, and in the service he undertook for his country that, that engendered his deepest feelings of nationalism towards the United States. His job as an engineer took him all across the nation, and although he would reserve his deepest respect and love for his home state, his time spent away from Arlington was not always that bad. Catching a whiff of the spirit of "manifest destiny" that was sweeping the country, Lee itched to get his chance to join the army in Mexico, but instead he spent the summer of 1846 at Fort Hamilton filing endless reports. Finally, on August 19, he was ordered to report to General John E. Wool for service, an event that led Lee to write his brother Carter, "I believe I am the last man ordered, every one is ahead of me & I am hurrying to endeavor to reach San Antonio de Bexar before the army moves." Lee did manage to reach the Army in time, and a few short months later, in mid-April 1847, he penned a letter of victory to his wife, Mary: "I am at this magnificent Hacienda of Santa Anna, 8 miles in advance of the main Army….My reason for writing this is that I presume Genl Scott, who is behind the main Army, will send dispatches to the U.S. that will convey a great victory, & I wish to assure you of my safety."[70] Of course Lee wished to tell his wife that he was safe, but he also wanted her to know the part that the young engineer had taken in the great victory over the Mexican forces. Lee may have been more reserved than most, but even he could barely contain himself in the midst of such a grand victory.

Another aspect of Lee's American nationalism that bears weight was his belief in the supremacy of white males and the role that they should play within the nation. The

historical record usually presents a portrait of Lee as a benign slave-owner who abhorred the South's peculiar institution and deeply regretted that it had been passed down as a plague from previous generations to his own time. Unfortunately, this picture simply does not hold up against a close examination of Lee's correspondence. In a famous 1856 letter written to his wife—a letter that has become to some the entirety of Lee's political thinking—Lee quite explicitly stated his views on the nature of race relations within the United States. "The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa," Lee wrote. "The painful discipline they are undergoing, is necessary for their instruction as a race, & I hope will prepare & lead them to better things. How long their subjugation may be necessary is known and ordered by a wise and Merciful Providence." In the letter, Lee continued his justification, even claiming that slavery was more of a burden on white men than it was on the slaves who were kept in bondage.[71] While his views were not radically different from the majority of Americans, North and South, at the time,[72] any assessment of Lee's American nationalism must take into account this key aspect of his character—how slavery shaped his loyalties.

Like most white Southerners, Lee was totally committed to the institution of slavery. In an 1841 letter written to his wife, Lee encouraged Mary not to buy a troubled slave, Robert, who was probably receiving bad treatment from a fellow slaveowner and friend of the Lee family. The slave's owners, the Lewis family, were apparently in some financial trouble, and Mary hoped to solve two problems at once with her purchase of Robert: it would provide the Lewis family with some financial relief, and at the same time rescue a slave who was being mistreated. Her husband's advice belies the portrait of Lee as a benign Southerner. If Mary truly wished to help the Lewises in their time of

economic distress, Lee told her she should give them a "loan." She should, he suggested, consider the consequences of her actions, if she indeed did decide to purchase the slave. "In this matter," Lee asked, "is everything to be yielded to the servant & nothing to the master? What will be the effect of the precedent upon the rest & the instruction of the example intended to be set…?" What really struck Lee as important in this situation was not the treatment that Robert was receiving, but rather his rights as slave master, and also what changes an action like this could have on his other slaves. Would they be more willing to rebel and test his authority as master and patriarch of his household? Ultimately Lee was willing to approve the purchase if his wife had set her mind to it, but it is quite evident that he tried to push his wife away from this position.[73]

While not placing any more importance on Lee's sense of racial superiority than any other white man who came from the era, his racial attitudes still must be noted because they were part of his American character.[74] Lee may not have been out of the ordinary among his fellow whites, especially his fellow Southerners, but by being ordinary, and by fully accepting Southern racial logic, Lee was a willful actor in the slave system throughout almost all of his adult life. Although he would later claim that he had always felt emancipation was the final goal for all enslaved blacks, it was also clear that he was not willing to play a direct role in bringing about that momentous occasion. He would write as late as January 11, 1865, while hunkered down in the trenches around Petersburg that the current relation between master and slave that currently existed in the Confederacy was "the best that can exist between the white and black races while intermingled as at present in this country, [and] I would deprecate any sudden disturbance of that relation unless it be necessary to avert a greater calamity to both." By this point in

the war it was obvious to Lee that the pool of white manpower in the South simply could not cope with the seemingly endless hordes of the Union armies. To this end, Lee wrote one of the most telling sentences of his life when it came to slavery: "Whatever may be the effect of our employing negro troops, it cannot be as mischievous as this [slaves turning on their masters after being liberate by the Union]. If it end in subverting slavery it will be accomplished by ourselves, and we can devise the means of alleviating the evil consequences to both races." At this point Lee favored employing the slaves as soldiers, and he knew this meant emancipation, in one form or another.[75]

While his views on slavery remained unchanged, Lee recognized that life in the Confederacy had come to a breaking point, and it was time for him to determine what mattered most. The Confederacy had been founded upon the principle of insulating slavery from the agitations of the North, but by 1865, and after four years of warfare, Lee was placing the continuance of a Confederate nation above the importance of slavery. For the nationalistic Lee, the cause of Southern independence had become the principle reason for the war. It also showed that he had departed from the particular legacy of the American Revolution that had led his own revered hero, George Washington, to free his slaves upon his death in 1799. For Robert E. Lee, slavery did not disturb his comfortable sentiments of nationalism toward his new adopted nation—but neither did slavery subsume the Confederacy. With his back against the wall, Lee made the conscious choice to choose an independent Confederacy over the continuance of slavery, no matter what the consequences should be.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONFEDERATE HERO

When Lee seceded in 1861, leaving the Union behind for the Confederacy, his expression of nationalism, most notable in his wartime service, actually differed very little from his professed American nationalism. This may seem ironic and at least a little implausible given that the Confederacy and the Union were two separate nations with professed goals obviously at odds with one another. But it was, in fact, the American Revolution and its legacy that made this possible. Few men had the revolutionary pedigree that Lee enjoyed, and he spent most of his life dedicated to protecting the country that the Revolution had helped to establish. The North and the South held different notions of exactly what their revolutionary heritage had bestowed upon them, but they distinctively knew that they had gained the right to be a free and independent people as a result of the Revolution.[76] Both the Union and the Confederacy actively appealed to the symbols and heroes of the Revolutionary War as a source of motivation and as a justification for their actions, and both also fought valiantly in the Civil War to uphold what they thought America was and should continue to be. Lee made this point unmistakably clear in his proclamation to the citizens of Maryland upon his arrival in their state after his victory at Second Manassas. Issued September 8, 1862, it overflows

with emotion and passionate pleas to Marylanders' notion of freedom, independence, and liberty that was supposedly won forever in the Revolution:

> …The government of your chief city [Baltimore] has been usurped by armed strangers; your legislature has been dissolved by the unlawful arrest of its members; freedom of the press and speech has been suppressed; words have been declared offenses by an arbitrary decree of the Federal Executive; and citizens ordered to be tried by a military commission for what they dare to speak…the people of the South have long wished to aid you in throwing off this foreign yoke, to enable you again to enjoy the inalienable rights of freemen, and restore independence and sovereignty to your State.[77]

His language reflected the rhetoric of the Revolution, and Lee went so far as to invoke Jefferson's legendary phrase, "inalienable rights."

That Lee modeled his loyalties on the outcome of the Revolution is perhaps not surprising, but it does illustrate how his American nationalism was able deftly to transform itself into a distinct Confederate nationalism that was present throughout the life of the Confederacy. In Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address, the newly sworn in President pronounced, now quite famously, that the "mystic chords of memory" that tied Americans to the Founding Fathers should also convince them to support the Union in these troubled times. For Lee, however, it was the revolutionary tradition of the Founding Fathers, more so than the perpetuation of the Union, that most appealed to him.[78] Reared in a home and family that celebrated its ties to George Washington, and eventually marrying into the venerated first President's family, Lee's life was shaped almost from the beginning by a continual adoration of the man who had done more than any other on the battlefield to bring about American independence. Lee also spent his most formative years in a young America that, by the centennial of Washington's birth in 1832, had raised the achievements of Washington to almost "mythical proportions,"

creating a cult-like atmosphere where no story was too tall, and no tale too grand when it came to the venerated "Father of His Country." While traveling the frontier in 1838, Lee himself noted this phenomenon, claiming that a new biography of Washington could be found in almost every home, "ranged along side of the Bible."[79]

Ever ready to take in these stories about Washington—as was most of the country—Lee was undoubtedly shaped by the description and character of the revolutionary hero's life and leadership style. In early nineteenth century America, there was a growing acceptance of the idea that it was "civic service" and "self-sacrifice" which truly made a man great, and in fact these were the proper republican principles that must flourish if democracy were to continue. If Lee needed a better example of someone subverting his own interest to the will of the nation, he would have been hard-pressed to find anyone who excelled Washington.[80] Lee himself spent many anxious months in sacrifice to his country, the Confederacy, much as Washington had, and although Lee may have regretted the necessity of such practices, he was always ready to accept them as fact. "Our people have not been earnest enough, have thought too much of themselves," Lee began a letter to his daughter, Annie. He continued, "This is not the way to accomplish our independence." Less than a month later, on March 14, 1862, Lee wrote again, this time to his wife, of the struggles and sacrifices necessary to secure victory for the Confederacy. "It will give me great pleasure to do everything I can to relieve him [President Davis] & serve the country, but I do not see either advantage or pleasure in my duties. But I will not complain, do my best."[81] By channeling the tradition of his revolutionary forbears who had sacrificed much to win their independence, Lee carried

on the legacy of the American Revolution and shifted his American nationalism into a defined Confederate nationalism.

Another aspect of Lee's nationalism was his ability as a general to inspire loyalty in his men towards himself as their chieftain, in the process creating an enthusiasm for the nation for which they were fighting, much as Washington himself had done during the Revolutionary War. Edward Porter Alexander, the same Confederate officer who had discussed Lee's audacity, recognized this spirit as he prepared his troops to march into Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863. Although he voiced many worries about the "chances" they were taking by invading the enemy's territory, Alexander recalled that in reality he felt no fear over the likelihood of success because "like the rest of the army generally, nothing gave me much concern so long as I knew that Gen. Lee was in command." After so many battlefield victories, Alexander felt that the men thought they could achieve anything under Lee's leadership. "I am sure," he asserted, "there can never have been an army with more supreme confidence in its commander than that army had in Gen. Lee. We looked forward to victory under him as confidently as to successive sunrises." Almost a year later, in the spring of 1864, Alexander again mentioned how Lee drew the loyalty and fighting spirit out of his men by coming to the front lines, by all appearances ready to make the charge with his men. "As the Texans started Gen. Lee rode up. They saw him & gave a cheer. The old man, with the light of battle in his eyes, & in the joy of seeing them arrive, rode up behind their line, following them in the charge."[82] Although the men were amazed at his willingness to participate in the actual conflict, they would not allow Lee to place himself in such danger, demanding that he return to the rear before the fighting became too thick.

Alexander was hardly the only person to be impressed by Lee's demeanor and his ability on the battlefield. Charles M. Blackford, a Confederate captain who saw service under Lee and other generals during the war, left a record of admiration for Lee that makes the remarks of Alexander seem modest and reserved. Recalling the first time he saw Lee in person, Blackford dubbed him "by far the most magnificent man I ever saw," and later after his initial visit to Lee's headquarters, he would add, "I felt myself in the presence of a great man, for surely there never was a man upon whom greatness is more stamped." His appearance and bearing were of obvious importance to Blackford, but moving beyond these physical characteristics, the captain was also impacted by Lee's battlefield prowess. He wrote of a "sense of confidence and trust" that he felt with the strategy of the army under Lee's direction, at one point even saying that Lee's coming west to take command of the Army of Tennessee could dramatically shift the balance of power in that theater: "He is much needed. Bragg is overcropped, the mere knowledge that Lee was at the helm would be worth untold reinforcements. The belief that most men have in his infallibility of judgment makes them invincible." At other times Blackford noted that the feeling of the men towards Lee was one of "blind devotion," and that he "is called 'Marse Robert' and 'Uncle Bob' and whenever seen the men shout and rally around him as their darling chief for whom they would willingly die."[83] Despite his confidence in the "invincibility" of Confederates while fighting under Lee, Blackford himself admitted that some soldiers would have to die for the Confederacy to will itself into existence, and the loyalty built through the personality and actions of Lee were crucial in getting men to fight so diligently for the cause.

Robert E. Lee's notion of American nationalism, at least before the Civil War, is something that has not been closely studied. In fact, many writers and historians have quoted extensively from Lee's correspondence and have noted his personal actions to claim that he never really lost his love for the Union; it was only that he felt pulled along by the ebb of history, which led him to follow Virginia and to fight for the South. Before the war, Lee repeatedly expressed his love of the Union and his wish that it be saved if at all possible. In a letter dated January 22, 1861, Lee wrote to his wife's cousin, "Markie" Williams, expressing his dismay at the recently seceded states:

> I am unable to realize that our people will destroy a government 42naugurated [*sic*] by the blood & wisdom of our patriot fathers, that has given us peace & prosperity at home, power & security abroad, & under which we have acquired a colossal strength unequaled in the history of mankind. I wish to live under no other government, & there is no sacrifice I am not ready to make for the preservation of the Union save that of honour…I believe that the South justly complains of the aggressions of the North, & I have believed that the North would cheerfully redress the grievances complained of. I see no cause of disunion, strife & civil war & pray it may be averted.[84]

Undoubtedly, here was a man who loved his country—to a point. What exactly Lee had in mind when he said "honor" is open to interpretation, but it weighed very heavily on Lee's mind.[85] In a letter written the next day, January 23, to his son Custis, Lee again expressed his concerns about honor:

> The South, in my opinion, has been aggrieved by the acts of the North, as you say. I feel the aggression, and am willing to take every proper step for redress…As an American citizen, I take great pride in my country, her prosperity and institutions, and would defend any State if her rights were invaded. But I can anticipate no greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice everything but honor for its preservation…Secession is nothing but revolution.[86]

While it is difficult to pinpoint precisely what Lee meant when he used the word "honor," it is certain that he believed he would forsake his personal honor if he did not follow his native state out of the Union.

If we are to take Lee at his word about the depth of his feelings for the Union, and by all appearances one should, the only logical conclusion for his defection to the Confederate States of America is that Lee felt the new nation provided the best hope for the future of America that he had held since young manhood. The core of Lee's American nationalism—a devoted trust in the righteousness of Virginia and her history, a belief in the continuance of American expansion and domination from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and a commitment to the master-slave relation as the best possible arrangement between whites and blacks—now came to reside not in the Union, but in the Confederacy. In the end, Lee decided that his remaining in the Union would sacrifice his honor, and the most explicit reason he gave was because of his trust in the righteousness of his home state and the people with which he shared it. "Trusting to Almighty God, an approving conscience & the aid of my fellow citizens," Lee concluded in his acceptance speech to the Virginia Convention upon taking command of Virginia forces in April 1861. "I will devote myself to the defence & service of my native State, in whose behalf alone would I have ever drawn my sword."[87]

Having drawn that sword, Lee would eventually do much more than simply defend his native state. After being transferred to service in the Confederacy, as a result of Virginia officially joining the new nation,[88] Lee spent time in West Virginia, South Carolina, and as the war drew to a close, as commander of all Confederate forces in the field. Thus, even if Lee intended to play only a small role in any impending conflict

between the Confederacy and the Union, the actual course of events led to his participation across a much broader spectrum, an eventuality that greatly increased his personal sense of Confederate nationalism. In a very real sense, Lee consciously constructed his allegiance to the Confederacy and thus built his feelings of nationalism over the duration of his service, first to Virginia and then ultimately to the Confederate States as a whole.

Yet some scholars doubt that nationalism can be engendered in such a manner. Several scholars, in fact, believe that the Confederacy and its citizens never became true nationalists or achieved even the status of nationhood because the Confederate States of America only existed for a relatively short period of time—too short, say these historians, for a nation to be created or for nationalistic sentiments to spread. If nationalism had to be forcefully created, so the argument goes, then there never was any sense of true belonging and brotherhood to begin with in the South. Yet if historians are so willing to classify the South as lacking nationalist sentiment, how does one explain "the birth of the Confederacy and its willingness to fight four years of the bloodiest warfare then known to mankind?"[89] These historians seem to be missing the important fact that nationalism is not simply something that emerges over a lengthy period of time; it can, under the right circumstances—circumstances that Lee and the citizens of the Confederacy experienced firsthand—be created in a conscious process that is a natural by-product of nation building.

Nationalism, ambiguously defined as an ideological system that binds people together in an almost mythical union, is not something that is merely present and ready to be taken at a specific point in time. A collective past and the way a people remember

history must be consciously worked at and produced for mass consumption. The Scottish kilt, long seen as a symbol of national pride for the Scots and as a way of expressing their disdain for the overbearing English, was in actuality a spectacularly developed piece of propaganda aimed at building Scottish national unity.[90] An Italian nationalist leader, understanding this concept better than most, uttered these revealing words in 1860 upon the successful organization of an Italian state: "We have made Italy. Now we must make the Italians."[91] And lest we assume that all nationalist movements occur in places far away, the collective American consciousness is filled with memories that have either been fabricated or crafted in such a way as to build pride in and loyalty towards the United States. The image of "Uncle Sam" was not an accident, and propaganda from the American Revolution until present day affects the way Americans see their country and others around the world.

The conscious creation of nationalism, therefore, was not an activity engaged in by the Confederates because they lacked the prerequisite conditions to have nationalism, but simply that nationalism, in whatever form, is something that has to be produced. "'Official nationalism,'" Benedict Anderson has observed, "was from the start a conscious, self-protective policy, intimately linked to the preservation of imperial-dynastic interests."[92] The Confederacy followed much the same path. Confederates, like Robert E. Lee, had to mold themselves into patriots for their new nation, much as Americans had done initially when they were making themselves into American patriots during the Revolution. For Lee, the issue remained that the Confederacy offered the best possible vision of the future for him. By focusing specifically on what made the Confederacy separate from the Union—whether that was racial issues, economic vitality,

or their supposed Anglo-American descent—Lee and others engaged in the myth-building process that paved the way for a serious and very real Confederate nationalism to take shape.

Not only did Confederates, Robert E. Lee included, consciously strive to create a shared sense of nationalism, they also physically acted out what it meant to be a Confederate, and in doing so they most fully achieved and exemplified what it meant to be a Confederate nationalist.[93] Stricken as they were by the destruction of the Civil War, Confederates were not allowed the chance to seriously and extensively reflect on the character and nature of their new nation. As Emory Thomas points out, "The pressure of time and the pace of events demanded that Confederate Southerners define themselves in deeds. Accordingly, the Confederacy acted out its national identity."[94] Robert E. Lee was one of those men too consumed by activity, preparations and battles, reports and troop movements, to dedicate himself to an examination of the heart and soul of the Confederacy, but this did not mean that he failed to appreciate what it stood for or that he could not understand what his men were fighting for. In a telegram to Jefferson Davis, sent in the moments after the fighting had completed at Second Manassas, Lee passed along his thoughts on the victory, and expressed how experience in warfare and fighting for one's country engendered a feeling of love and respect. "This Army [of Northern Virginia] achieved today on the plains of Manassas a signal victory," Lee began, "We mourn the loss of our gallant dead, in every conflict yet our gratitude to almighty God for his mercies rises higher and higher each day, to him and to the valour of our troops a nation's gratitude is due."[95] Lee's use of the word "nation" should be noted, not because of its uniqueness in this particular telegram, but because it was an expression he used

again and again throughout the war in reference to the Confederacy. Through and because of Lee's wartime experience, he became one of the most devout Confederate nationalists.

As his American nationalism was best exemplified through service to the United States army, it was likewise action on behalf of the armed forces of the Confederacy that led Lee to embrace Confederate nationalism most fully. On September 9, 1861, while leading troops in West Virginia, Lee implored his troops to keep in mind the "great principles" over which they were fighting. "The eyes of the country are upon you. The safety of your homes and the lives of all you hold dear depend upon your courage and exertions. Let each man resolve to be victorious, and that the right of self-government, liberty, and peace shall in him find a defender."[96] The course of the war—the mountains that he experienced while victorious at Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg, as well as the valleys he had sloughed through at Gettysburg and around Petersburg—did little to alter these early feelings that Lee had expressed. Just before Appomattox, and just before the death knell sounded for the Confederacy, Lee wrote some very revealing words to General William N. Pendleton: "We had, I was satisfied, sacred principles to defend."[97] Through the war Lee had come to fully believe in the Confederate cause.

Lee's feelings for his country and depth of belief in its righteousness, two major characteristics of nationalism, were expressed numerous times throughout the war. Early in the conflict, before the idea of European intervention had become unrealistic, Lee wrote his wife advising not to expect foreign aid, and that in any case it was unnecessary. "You must not build your hopes on peace on account of the United States going into a war with England," he said. "We must make up our minds to fight our battles & win our

independence alone. No one will help us. We require no extraneous aid, if true to ourselves. But we must be patient. It is not a light achievement & cannot be accomplished at once." Four days later, in a letter to his son, Lee once again put forth these sentiments. The United States, Lee believed, would not allow itself to be dragged into war with England or France and risk losing the war to the Confederacy at this time. "The news from Europe is indeed good," Lee allowed, but he maintained that the Confederates must "make up our minds to fight our battles ourselves. Expect to receive aid from no one." The desire to receive help, Lee concluded, was one of the mast destructive feelings currently afloat among Confederates:

> Make every necessary sacrifice of comfort, money, & labour to bring the war to a successful issue & then we will succeed. The cry is too much for help. I am mortified to hear it. We want no aid. We want to be true to ourselves, to be prudent, just, fair, & bold. I am dreadfully disappointed at the spirit here. They have all of a sudden realized the asperities of war, in what they must encounter, & do not seem to be prepared for it.[98]

Once again, it was activity and action on behalf of the Confederate war effort that in the end pushed Lee even further into the Confederate nationalist camp. What had begun with his revolutionary pedigree had come full circle in the momentous battles of the Civil War. Robert E. Lee had become a Confederate citizen and a Confederate nationalist.

CHAPTER 5

ONLY MEMORIES

Although the dream of the Confederacy and a separate national existence ended with Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, the story of his life, and his deep feelings for the Southern nation for which he had fought, were far from over. Familiar is the tale of Lee's retreat to a humble farm in Virginia, only to be subsequently lured into the field of education as president of Washington College (later renamed Washington and Lee) in Lexington, Virginia, because it offered him an opportunity to influence the young men of the South, while at the same time working to rehabilitate the shattered relationship between the two sections of the Union. Yet Lee experienced a great deal of conflict about what his role should be in bringing the Southern states back into the Union, as well as confusion as to how history would portray his legacy in a struggle that had cost more than 600,000 Americans their lives. Lee was officially indicted for treason against the United States on June 7, 1865, and although he felt certain that the terms Ulysses S. Grant offered at Appomattox—that Lee and his men "were not to be disturbed by United States authority as long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they reside"—should be enforced, he took the necessary steps to apply for a pardon from President Andrew Jackson on June 13, 1865. It was one of the most controversial moves of his career.[99]

Just as secession had broken Lee's ties with the Union, many former Confederates felt that his willingness to turn colors so quickly was a slap in the face to everything that the Confederacy had stood for. To some, as Charles Bracelen Flood maintains, "this was a betrayal of men scarcely cold in their graves. By his asking for a pardon, these hard-liners felt, Lee was kneeling before the enemy and was admitting that everything—secession, creation of the Confederacy, fighting the Northern armies that had marched into the South—had been wrong." For a man as grounded in reality as Lee, he saw the acceptance of federal authority as the only way for a former Confederate to regain his political rights and a beginning to reassuming some sort of control over state and national politics. In a letter to former governor Letcher of Virginia, written in August of 1865, Lee counseled that the outcome of the war had decided the issues at hand between the state and general government, and that all any honest former Confederate could do was "promote harmony and good feelings; qualify themselves to vote; and elect to the State and general Legislatures wise and patriotic men." A few days later he wrote again, this time to a former Confederate naval captain, advising that it was "the duty of everyone to unite in the restoration of the country."[100] Lee was willing to at least give vocal assurance to the idea that he believed in the importance of unity after the war, but he would not, as some people believed the pardon implied, go as far as to resent his role in the Confederacy, or deny what it had stood for.

In the immediate aftermath of the War, Lee planned a history of his army that never materialized, but his reasons for writing are revealing nonetheless. In a circular letter sent to many of his general officers, Lee pronounced, "I am desirous that the bravery and devotion of the Army of Northern Virginia be correctly transmitted to

posterity." In another letter, addressed to W.B. Reid of Philadelphia, Lee again stressed this desire: "I concur with you entirely as to the importance of a true history of the war, and it is my purpose, unless prevented, to write the history of the campaigns in Virginia." Writing in November 1865 to General Jubal A. Early, Lee used similar words, and claimed "my only object is to transmit, if possible, the truth to posterity, and do justice to our brave soldiers."[101] Because Lee would never have the time or resources to finish his history, it is not possible to decipher exactly what Lee thought the "truth" of the Civil War was, but it is safe to assume that he would have presented an account favorable to the Confederacy, a view in line with his pronounced Confederate nationalism.

Appearing before a grand jury convened to hear evidence for a potential trial against Jefferson Davis, Lee refused to be goaded into implying that Davis had been responsible for all Confederate military actions. Instead, Lee took the onus for his actions entirely on himself, claiming, "I am responsible for what I did and I cannot now recall any important movement I made which I would not have made had I acted entirely on my own responsibility." Far from being ashamed of his role in the conflict, Lee confidently asserted that even without guidance from the Confederate president, he would have been willing to chart the same course throughout the Civil War that he did. Other support for the Southern and Confederate point of view came in response to a Congressional inquiry into whether or not some Southern states were ready to be reincorporated into the Union. On February 17, 1866, Lee answered questions from several congressmen. One of the most probing questions asked whether or not a jury chosen from among the citizens of Virginia was likely to convict Jefferson Davis "for having levied war against the United States, and thus having committed the crime of

treason?" Lee's response revealed his post-war attitude toward the Confederacy and its course of action while it had existed: "I think it is very probable that they would not consider that he had committed treason." After the question was reiterated, Lee again asserted a negative response, "I do not think that they so consider it [treason]."[102] Lee's application for a pardon, in this light, hardly appears as a rejection of what the Confederacy had stood for.

The four terrible years of conflict that were the Civil War changed Lee more dramatically than any other period in his life. Looking beyond Lee's conciliatory rhetoric in the post-war years, it becomes rather clear that Lee had experienced quite a profound transformation in his political and personal views during the war. One of the most striking features of his correspondence is that Lee defended time and again the constitutionality of secession—one of the cornerstones of the Confederacy's existence—even though he had serious qualms about it before the war began. In a letter written in response to Varina Davis, the former president's wife, Lee claimed that she should not fear for the impending trial of her husband for treason as "the exhibition of the whole truth in his case will, I trust, prove his defense and justification." Since the case would have to hinge on whether or not secession was constitutional, it must be inferred that Lee believed this to be the case. An 1869 letter to General E.G.W. Butler reinforced this opinion, as Lee wrote that he believed Alexander Stephens's *A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States* was "a strong exposition of the Southern views on the subject of which it treats and I think the South is indebted to him for his defence of her opinions and acts." Furthermore, in an interview with the future ninth Duke of Argyll, Lee maintained that to "the minds of the Southern men the idea of 'Union' was ridiculous

when the states that made the Union did not desire it to continue."[103] Lee may not have believed in secession before the war, but at its conclusion, and for the rest of his life, Lee would ardently support the view that he had only done what he had thought was constitutionally right. Lee's American nationalism became Confederate nationalism, and transformed by the experience of the war, Lee would remain devoted to the ideas and ideology of what it meant to be a Confederate until the day he died.

ENDNOTES

[1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 201. For studies on the violent nature of Civil War combat see, George S. Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007); Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[2] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.
[3] David M. Potter, "The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Jul., 1962), 924-950. "The equation of northernism with nationalism and southernism with sectionalism prejudges by definition the question which purports to be under scrutiny, and denies without actual analysis of group feelings, that the southern movement could have been truly national; it also leads to an easy assumption that all northern support for federal authority must have been nationalistic rather than sectional."
[4] Lee himself most decidedly did not feel this way, and indeed I will make the argument throughout this essay that at least part of the reason why Lee chose to secede was because he felt like the North had perverted the republican values of the Founding Fathers. From this point of view, it becomes just as easy to label Lee as the Washington character (the one saving republican virtue) and the North as Benedict Arnold for corrupting what the Founding Fathers had sought to create.
[5] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 141. He is specifically asking the question about nationalism in general.
[6] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 46.
[7] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56.
[8] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 12.
[9] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 22-27.
[10] Hobsawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 68.
[11] Robert E. Lee to Wife, April 4, 1862, Robert E. Lee to Wife, March 27, 1863, in Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Da Capo, 1987), 142 and 419.
[12] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave off Defeat* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 86-87. See also, Drew Gilpin Faust, "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Armies," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Feb., 1987), 63-90; Samuel J. Watson, "Religion and Combat Motivation in the Confederate Army," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Jan., 1994), 29-55. Watson quotes an army lieutenant and chaplain in the Army of Northern Virginia as saying, "over forty-five years of ministerial life…I have never found men so open to the frank discussion of the subject of personal religion as the officers and men of Lee's army."
[13] Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, Gary W. Gallagher, ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 58-59.

[14] Richard E. Beringer, et al, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 426.
[15] Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 11.
[16] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 52-54.
[17] John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830 - 1860* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 3-4.
[18] Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *Ideology and Discontent*, David Apter, ed. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 48.
[19] Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 24 and 125. Reynolds' work does a fantastic job of showing how the mass media of the South (newspapers) both shaped and reflected Southern feelings towards secession from the beginning of 1860.
[20] Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 72-73.
[21] Elizabeth Hardin, *The Private War of Lizzie Hardin: A Kentucky Confederate Girl's Diary of the Civil War in Kentucky , Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia*, G. Glenn Clift, ed. (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1963), 12-13.
[22] W. Scott Poole, *South Carolina's Civil War: A Narrative History* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 21.
[23] William C. Davis, *Look Away!: A History of the Confederate States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 194. On the aspect of death and dying in the Civil War see, Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).
[24] For an incisive study on the evolution of Southern nationalism and its force in directing the movement towards an independent Confederacy, see McCardell, *Idea of a Southern Nation*. On the development of nationalism before the formation of official nations or states, see Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 10. "In short, for the purpose of analysis nationalism comes before nations. Nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way around."
[25] The best treatment of this aspect of Confederate nationalism in recent time is the work of Gary W. Gallagher. For instance, see Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, specifically 63-111.
[26] Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie*, Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avary, eds. (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1961), 196.
[27] Brigadier General Manning Force to Peter Force, May 27, 1864, Manning Ferguson Force Papers, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. Force, a Union general, believed that by this point in the war General U.S. Grant had decided that to crush the rebellion he would not have to besiege Richmond or defeat Lee in battle, but rather destroy his army entirely. "I infer from Genl Grant's operations that he is not aiming at taking Richmond or simply defeating Lee, but is bent on destroying Lee's army, and this must be done. That army now constitutes the rebellion, and the rebellion will not be thoroughly eradicated, until that [army] is eradicated."
[28] Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977). It should be noted that Connelly's work does a great service by helping to combat the mythical image of Lee as a god-like Confederate savior, but he goes too far in his criticism and reduces Lee's role to something that it simply was not. Connelly's work can also be seen as an attempt to dimish the importance of Lee in favor of the western theater of operations. See also, Alan Nolan, *Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Random House, 2000). Many other authors over the years have also alluded to the fact that they believed that Lee was too aggressive in combat, in the process wasting the lives of too many of his men. See, Stephen W. Sears, "Getting Right with Robert E. Lee," *American Heritage*, 42, No. 3 (1991), 58-72; Michael Fellman, "Struggling with Robert E. Lee," *Southern Cultures*, 8, No. 3 (2002), 6-17; Roy Blount, Jr., "Making Sense of Robert E. Lee," *Smithsonian*, 34, No. 4 (2003), 58-65.
[29] Hardin, *The Private War*, 223-232.
[30] John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, Earl Schenck Miers, ed. (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1961), 535.
[31] A multitude of biographies exist on the life and career of Lee, and I will not pretend to have consulted all of them. Almost all of the biographical information on Lee used in this piece comes from one of the

following sources, unless otherwise cited. Richard Harwell, ed., *Lee: An Abridgement in One Volume of the Four-Volume R.E. Lee by Douglas Southall Freeman* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961); Emory M. Thomas, *Robert E. Lee: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995); Elizabeth Brown Pryor, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee Through His Private Letters* (New York: Viking, 2007).

[32] Harwell, *Lee: An Abridgement*, 76; Jones, *Rebel War Clerk's Diary*, 13.

[33] *Richmond Dispatch*, February 8, 1861.

[34] Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 142-147.

[35] Chestnut, *Diary From Dixie*, 188.

[36] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 90-92. See also Peter S. Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

[37] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, April 19, 1864 in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 704.

[38] Benjamin H. Freeman to Father, February 9, 1864 in Stuart T. Wright, ed., *The Confederate Letters of Benjamin H. Freeman* (Hicksville: Exposition Press, 1974), 33. The failures of other Confederate generals in comparison to Lee have been well documented. For a good, brief account see Davis, *Look Away!*, 189-193.

[39] For a recent, detailed study that attacks this tendency to rely too much on the military to supply the needs of nationalism and the will to keep fighting, see Richard Beringer, et al, *Why the South Lost*. Although flawed on many levels, the work does a good job of synthesizing the many arguments that exist for the downfall of the Confederacy.

[40] George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Rable focuses to a large extent on the nature of Confederate politics, but he also comes to the conclusion that as the war wound down, people had lost faith in Davis, while still holding fast to their faith in Lee, see specifically page 283.

[41] For a take on Lee's passivity towards secession, see Fellman, *Making of Robert E. Lee*, 54-55. "In 1861, when choosing sides became inevitable, he backed into his secessionist position as passively as possible, again accepting rather than actively choosing his social and political role." For much of the argument on the misrepresentation of Lee's character through Lost Cause ideology and, just bad historical writing in general, I owe much to Nolan, *Lee Considered*.

[42] Harwell, *Lee: An Abridgment*, 104 and 120.

[43] Nolan, *Lee* Considered, 32-33; Robert E. Lee to General Winfield Scott, April 20, 1861, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 8-9.

[44] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 30-41.

[45] Ibid., 34-35. See also, John William Jones, *Personal Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), 136-7.

[46] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 45.

[47] Pryor, *Reading the Man*, 276-278.

[48] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 45-49.

[49] Robert E. Lee to His Wife, December 25, 1861 in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 95-96.

[50] Jefferson Davis to Robert E. Lee, September 7, 1862 in *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers, and Speeches* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1923), 338-339.

[51] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, September 8, 1862 in Ibid., 301. Italics are my own.

[52] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, June 10, 1863 in Ibid., 507-509.

[53] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, August 8, 1863 in Ibid., 589.

[54] Robert E. Lee to His Wife, January 29, 1863 in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 395-396.

[55] Benjamin H. Freeman to Mother, October 18, 1862 in *The Confederate Letters*, 16.

[56] Mrs. Charles M. Blackford to Captain Charles M. Blackford, October 10, 1863 in Susan Leigh Blackford, compiler, *Letters From Lee's Army or, Memoirs of Life In and Out of The Army in Virginia During the War Between the States* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Company, Inc., 1962), 217.

[57] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, August 17, 1863 in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 591.

[58] Robert E. Lee to James Seddon, January 27, 1865 in Ibid., 886-887.

[59] Robert E. Lee, General Order, No. 9 in Ibid., 934-935.

[60] Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 13-15.

[61] *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Confederacy: Including the Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, *Volume I*, James D. Richardson, ed. (Nashville: United States Publishing Company, 1905), 32-36.
[62] Robert E. Lee to Anne Marshall, April 20, 1861 in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 9-10.
[63] Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 58-59. Over time, of course, the Confederacy would become much more centralized than originally intended. "The Confederate government, albeit unwittingly, transformed the South from a state rights confederation into a centralized, national state."
[64] For a discussion of the phenomenon of shifting nationalistic identification see, Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11. "National identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods."
[65] Robert E. Lee to Mrs. Anne Marshall, April 20, 1861, Robert E. Lee to Wife, May 2, 1861, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 9-10 and 18-19.
[66] Robert E. Lee, ed., *The Revolutionary Memoirs of General Henry Lee*, 3rd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 45-46.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Fitzhugh Lee, *General Lee* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1895), 78-80.
[69] Richard B. McCaslin, *Lee in the Shadow of Washington* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001). McCaslin argues throughout that Lee consciously shaped his life to follow that of Washington.
[70] Pryor, *Reading the Man*, 155-159.
[71] Ibid., 144-145.
[72] For a small sampling of racism in Southern history before the outbreak of the Civil War, see, Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, eds., *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*, 2nd Ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005).
[73] Pryor, *Reading the* Man, 141-143.
[74] Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jun., 1972), 5-29. "The rise of liberty and equality in this country was accompanied by the rise of slavery. That two such contradictory developments were taking place simultaneously over a long period of our history , from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth, is the central paradox of American history."
[75] *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 4-Volume 3, 1012-1013.
[76] Frank E. Vandiver, "The Confederacy and the American Tradition," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Aug., 1962), 277-286. "Southern moderates worked to preserve old American principles of nationalism, not to foster radical sectionalism. And as their government took shape, they could console themselves with the thought that the war really represented an evolutionary move rather than a revolutionary one. American principles of democracy and nationalism were expanding and flourishing in Southern hands."
[77] Ibid., Series 1-Volume 19, 601-602.
[78] McCaslin, *Lee in the Shadow of Washington*, 13.
[79] Pryor, *Reading the Man*, 42-43.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Robert E. Lee to Miss Annie Lee, March 2, 1862, Robert E. Lee to Wife, March 14, 1862, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 121-122 and 127-128.
[82] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 222, 358, and 377.
[83] Blackford, *Letters From Lee's Army*, 86, 114-116, 184, and 211.
[84] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 32-33.
[85] Fellman, *Making of Robert E. Lee*, 314n. Fellman believes that it may have been stoicism that led Lee into his decision, and he claims that stoicism was sometimes synonymous with honor in the South; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 105-111. "Lee was not one to allow personal feelings to interfere with his high sense of duty. For

him as for many of his kind, honor was not 'my family, right or wrong.' The Stoic and Christian traditions would not prevent that ancient rubric to prevail if honor itself was jeopardized by a selfish aim."
[86] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 34.
[87] Robert E. Lee, "Speech to the Virginia Convention Upon Acceptance of Command of Virginia Forces," in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 11.
[88] John Letcher, "General Orders, No. 25," in Ibid., 44-45. "I do further order that all officers of the Virginia service now on duty in any of the departments of the staff continue to discharge their respective functions, under the direction and control of the President [of the CSA]."
[89] Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 4. For an interesting take on how Confederate flags were used to construct patriotic spirit and a feeling of national inclusion see, Robert E. Bonner, "Flag Culture and the Consolidation of Confederate Nationalism," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 68, No. 2 (May, 2002), 293-332.
[90] Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 15-41.
[91] Massimo d'Azeglio, quoted in E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (New York: Scribner, 1975), 89.
[92] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 159.
[93] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 112. "It was never the abstraction of 'liberty' that animated Southern patriotism, but rather the concrete determination to uphold personal and community independence from overt or insidious attempts to destroy it."
[94] Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 298.
[95] Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, August 30, 1862, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 268.
[96] *Official Records*, 5:192.
[97] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 56.
[98] Robert E. Lee to Wife, December 25, 1861, Robert E. Lee to G.W.C. Lee, December 29, 1861, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers*, 96-98.
[99] Charles Bracelen Flood, *Lee: The Last Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 61-65.
[100] Ibid.; Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 132-137.
[101] Robert Edward Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1909), 218-219.
[102] Flood, *Lee: The: Last Years*, 120-123, 170-171.
[103] Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 132-139; see also, Brown, *Reading the Man*, 457.

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