# Sing Not War

*The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America*

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# Contents

*Acknowledgments* xi

INTRODUCTION Toil On, Heroes 1

**1** Melt Away Ye Armies • *Endings and Beginnings* 33

**2** Maimed Darlings • *Living with Disability* 75

**3** Saner Wars • *Veterans, Veteranhood, and Commerce* 125

**4** Regiments So Piteous • *Soldiers' Homes, Communities, and Manhood* 159

**5** Another Gathering Army • *Pensions and Preference* 199

**6** Sad, Unnatural Shows of War • *Veterans' Identity and Distinctiveness* 245

*Notes* 287 *Bibliography* 307 *Index* 333

## *introduction* **Toil On, Heroes**

Among the most stirring sights in Gilded Age America were the periodic assemblages of Civil War veterans. They gathered, often in uniform, to commemorate, to reminisce, to march before cheering, flag-waving countrymen and -women. They celebrated Memorial Day and the Fourth of July; were honored at college reunions and Robert E. Lee's birthday celebrations; were featured at state fairs and at the Great Columbian Exposition of 1893. For many Americans, these graying, dignified survivors of the war were the representative men of the Union and Confederate armies. And they were the most common and most easily understood members of the nineteenth century's "Greatest Generation."[1]

This book is partly about those men, the scores of thousands of Billy Yanks and Johnny Rebs who returned to their families and communities with only temporary fanfare and who melted with apparent ease back into civilian life.

- The former Confederate captain in a Thomas Nelson Page short story, working as a conductor on the long Christmas Eve rail journey from New York to New Orleans, entertaining travelers with gentle war stories, passing out eggnog, and managing the passengers as if they were his old company in Virginia.[2]
- Joe Elser, whom Carl Sandburg recalled from his boyhood with fondness and awe as using carpentry skills and a veteran's pension to make a quiet, apparently contented life, telling stream-of-consciousness war stories to Carl and his brother, haunted somewhat by the scenes he had witnessed and by a loneliness he embraced but never admitted.[3]
- Eccentric old soldiers such as Cornelius Baker, who filled a vacant lot on the south side of Chicago with a battery of wooden cannon and a brace of American flags and called it Fort Baker.[4]
- And men who became famous for being veterans, among them

“Colonel” Polk Miller, who served as a private in a Confederate artillery battery and built a successful business before becoming one of America’s best-known performers of “plantation music” by the 1890s. Miller told stories, played the banjo, and sang spirituals and Confederate anthems, recording a rousing version of the “The Bonnie Blue Flag” early in the twentieth century.[5]

Those veterans dominate parts of *Sing Not War*, just as they tended to dominate the public’s perception of Civil War veterans. They are the typical “old soldiers,” the veterans who as individuals and members of veterans’ organizations influenced the politics and patriotic impulses of the Gilded Age like no other group of men. But *Sing Not War* is also—perhaps mainly—about the other veterans, those who fit less easily back into their prewar lives, who suffered from disabilities and poverty, from mental handicaps and institutionalization.

- The down-on-their-luck tramps memorialized a few years after the war by a new game making the rounds in the Dakota Territory. In the Old Soldier, one player tries to get the others to say “no” to his pitiful begging.[6]
- The usually nameless subjects of the short, tragic reports tucked deep inside the *New York Times*: the “poor old man with only one arm” mugged by an opportunistic thief; the invalid on his way to a soldiers’ home swindled by a hack driver; the desperate old soldier who, when refused admittance to a soldiers’ home, failed in his attempt to shoot the secretary of the Board of Commissioners when his revolver misfired; the man deserting his wife and children for another woman after collecting six months’ worth of pension payments; the victim of con men/kidnappers disguised as policemen who “arrested” their mark after he became suspicious of the agent he had hired to collect fourteen hundred dollars in pension money; the participants in a bloody St. Louis street fight between an old Rebel and old Yankee; the old man “Driven Crazy by Drink” who tried to shoot his wife, failed, and then fired a bullet into his own head, failing to kill himself as well; the “tall, soldiery looking old man” in jail for public intoxication, begging for a reduced fine because, as he wrote on a note, “Did good fighting at Cold Harbor.”[7]
- And the decidedly unheroic and nearly unnoticed faces in the background, like the “Grand Army Man” in Willa Cather’s “The Sculptor’s Funeral,” a story about bitter West Kansans receiving the body of a

> noted prodigal son who had gone east to seek his fortune. A veteran in a faded blue "Grand Army suit" lurks on the edge of every scene. Deferential, curious, a little odd, he at one point remarks, "It's too bad he didn't belong to some lodge or other. I like an order funeral. They seem more appropriate for people of some reputation." After making this, his longest speech in the story, "the spare man with an ingratiating concession in his shrill voice," who "always carried the flag at the G.A.R. funerals," recedes into the background.[8]

These are simply isolated examples, of course, and as in any book drawn largely from qualitative sources, one needs to consider the extent to which the necessarily anecdotal evidence provides a representative sample of former soldiers. *Sing Not War* does not attempt to provide a cross-section of all veterans' experiences. This approach is partly a function of the project's evolution since its origins more than a dozen years ago: it was conceived as a general history of Civil War veterans, North and South, black and white. But as certain questions emerged, certain kinds of sources came to dominate the answers, and certain choices had to be made. As a result, the best-adjusted men at times fade from the narrative, and the less fortunate, marginalized men take center stage. At other times, former Confederates become more or less invisible as the book veers into issues and events that affected them less deeply.

One group left virtually entirely out of this particular narrative are the tens of thousands of African American soldiers who survived the war. Recent scholarship has begun to explore the ways in which they did and did not share white veterans' postwar experiences. Although some African Americans belonged to integrated Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) posts and a few were admitted to national and state soldiers' homes, African Americans barely appear in documents related to the homes, and aside from the *National Tribune*, they are rarely found in soldiers' newspapers, mainstream media, or advertisements featuring old soldiers. Moreover, the racial issues that complicated the lives of black veterans would have added to the book an unwieldy layer of analysis. Finally, while other historians have explored black veterans' experiences by focusing on individual communities, specific GAR chapters, and pension records, that approach was too narrow for the issues raised here.[9]

Thus, *Sing Not War* is not a comprehensive account of Civil War veterans. Yet it does describe the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans during the two or three generations after the Civil War. Indeed, military

service was the most common characteristic among northern and southern men living during the Gilded Age who had not yet reached the age of forty in 1861. Forty-one percent of all northern white men born between 1822 and 1845 served in the Union Army, while the percentages were 60 for those between 1837 and 1845 and a whopping 81 for those born in 1843—the boys who turned eighteen in the war's first year. Similarly, perhaps three-quarters of all white men of military age living in the Confederate states served in the Confederate Army, with just over 80 percent of them between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine at the time of enlistment.[10]

Moreover, veterans were everywhere in Gilded Age society. Although the fast-growing industrial city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, might not have been representative of all American communities, the remarkable presence of veterans in this community of about 225,000 speaks to the wide variety of places and circumstances in which veterans found themselves. The 1890 special census of Union veterans and their widows reported many neighborhoods crowded with old soldiers. On two-block stretches of two streets just east of downtown lived nearly two dozen Union veterans, including two lawyers, a carpenter, a dentist, a travel agent, a gardener, two business executives, an editor, a printer, a salesman, and a laborer. A few blocks south, a grouping of seven veterans and four widows took up much of the 100 block and spilled over into the 200 block of Detroit Street. A few blocks farther west, twenty veterans and at least two widows lived on a four-block section of Fifth Street. Their occupations included police officer and lawyer, laundry worker and paper hanger, grocer and baker, electrician and wire worker. The 100, 200, and 300 blocks of Jefferson Street and its alley were home to a rather hardscrabble group of at least a dozen veterans and half a dozen widows; several of those with jobs worked as laborers, while the others had low-paying employment as teamsters, porters, tanners, and clerks. Not far away, several boardinghouses provided homes for veterans and at least one widow. Two of the men had lost legs, another had lost an arm, and yet another had been incarcerated at Libby Prison; only four had jobs, three of them as laborers. Three consecutive blocks of Prospect Avenue—physically a five-minute stroll from Jefferson, but a world away in terms of social status—contained the homes of a dozen veterans (including a lieutenant colonel, three captains, three lieutenants, and a brigade surgeon) who held important jobs, including a general manager, the president of an iron company, a lawyer, and a publisher, George W. Peck, who was also the current governor of Wisconsin.

All of these men and women lived within a short walk of one another

in the crowded streets of one of America's rising cities. Census takers found more than seven hundred veterans, about 60 percent of whom appeared in the city directory. Their occupations reveal that Union veterans were present in all walks of life, working in just over one hundred different fields: although the most common occupation was "laborer" (10 percent), the directory also listed eighteen clerks, seventeen carpenters, sixteen engineers, a dozen farmers, eleven businessmen, ten messengers or coachmen, nine teamsters, eight shoemakers, seven lawyers, a half dozen machinists, five bookkeepers, four travel agents, three telephone operators, two cooks, and one judge, one artist, one bartender, one billboard repairman, and one florist. Altogether, about 43 percent were skilled or semiskilled workers, 18 percent were unskilled, and another 18 percent were white-collar workers, and 7 percent owned their own businesses or worked as attorneys or medical professionals.[11]

*Sing Not War* seeks to look beyond those numbers to explore the ways in which white veterans of the Union and Confederate armies reentered Gilded Age society. The book shows how the nineteenth century's "Greatest Generation" blended—or failed to blend—back into their lives and communities and how their nonveteran countrymen and -women perceived these experiences. Put simply, the volume asks, "How did veterans live, and how were they seen to live?" The effects of traumatic homecomings, economic discrimination, and physical and mental disabilities complicate our perceptions of veterans. Separate chapters dissect the pensions and homes created for old soldiers, less to talk about them as systems and more to expose the conflicts that they sometimes created in politics and in communities.

*Sing Not War* argues that Civil War veterans were set apart, and the specific ways in which this process took place encompass subsets of the larger, distinct group of old soldiers. Although the sad stories of disaffected, ruined men that dominate parts of *Sing Not War* might represent only a small percentage of veterans, the issues faced by the most marginalized veterans and the anger that flared from time to time over issues such as veterans' pensions loom larger than the simple numbers of men directly involved. Although relatively few men were wholly disabled, increasing numbers came to believe that the war had contributed to minor or even major physical handicaps, and by the end of the century, sympathetic observers estimated that hundreds of thousands of men had eventually lost their vigor as a result of vague wartime maladies and that the life expectancies of tens of thousands had been reduced by a decade or more. Even fewer veterans lived in soldiers' homes, although those who did served as quite visible representa-

tives, especially in the towns and cities in which the homes were located. Very few men resorted to begging on the streets or ended up in almshouses or on county farms, although many, many men seem to have lived on the edges of survival, getting by on paltry pension checks, odd jobs, and charity.

To understand the ways in which the experiences of a minority can become representative of a much larger group, at least to the public, one needs only to flash forward a hundred years, when physically disabled and mentally traumatized Vietnam veterans—a relatively small percentage of the total number of men who served in Southeast Asia, where only a tiny fraction of servicemen saw combat—came to dominate public perceptions of veterans in the 1970s and 1980s. The ways in which dramatic and tragic experiences covered by journalists, imagined by novelists and screenwriters, projected by veteran memoirists, and diagnosed by psychiatrists created shortcuts to categorizing all veterans as traumatized "baby killers" is instructive. In one example of the power of image to trump reality, the images of psychologically damaged veterans that rose to prominence in the late 1960s and early 1970s were used to discredit veterans who opposed the war. That one observer could refer to "the Vietnam War as mental illness" suggests that the experiences of a few indeed have the power to shape public understanding of the many.[12]

Although comparing veterans of the Vietnam War to any other group of veterans is a risky business—the nature of combat, the political and technological contexts, the processes for recruiting and organizing armies, and the expectations of the soldiers differed substantially—the much-studied and -discussed postwar lives of the men who served in Southeast Asia are nevertheless instructive. At the very least, the well-documented difficulties many Vietnam veterans encountered in resuming their civilian lives and the way that the problems of a minority came to represent an entire generation of soldiers in the public consciousness and popular culture can help us understand the ways in which marginalized Civil War veterans could have influenced public perceptions more than their numbers would suggest. Marginalized and traumatized veterans became parables of representative men along a spectrum of public perceptions of veterans that ranged from "There but for the grace of God go I" unfortunates to exemplars of manly citizenship.

As a result, the specific experiences of the disabled, institutionalized, and troubled veterans described in *Sing Not War* might not have reflected the postwar lives of most veterans, but they did complicate public perceptions,

especially in the North. And as opponents of expanding pensions increasingly applied the characteristics of less stable and less admirable old soldiers to all veterans, the more disturbing consequences of the war for the men who fought it took on an importance beyond their quantifiable effects.

The specific stories of unfortunate men that dominate parts of the book are simply extreme versions of stories that thousands of other veterans could tell. And the conditions and situations that cast those men into the margins of Gilded Age society were quite public and shaped civilians' attitudes about veterans as deeply as did parades and monuments.

According to Susan-Mary Grant, the three million or so men who fought and died, marched and garrisoned, deserted and bushwhacked—the men who represented the Union and the Confederacy on the battlefields and prisons and encampments of the great war—quickly receded from the vision of many Americans. The returning soldiers were separated from the "reimagined community" created in response to the huge changes wrought by the war. And many acted as though fitting in was all they wanted to do. Robert Beecham had fought in the Iron Brigade at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, where he was captured and later exchanged; had served as an officer in the 23rd U.S. Colored Regiment; had fought at the Crater, where he was wounded and captured again; and had endured nine months of prison before escaping just before the war ended. Yet he ended his memoir of his three years of fighting with the bland comment, "My days of war were over; before me were the paths and the vocations of peace."[13]

But when Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain described the "clouds of men on foot or horse, singly or in groups, making their earnest way . . . each for his own little home" after the fighting ended, he captured the rather sudden shift in the lives of men who had shared hardships with comrades, survived bullets and disease, and fought big fights for big issues. Now they were just men, trudging to their "little homes" without well-defined roles in their nation's purpose and without an identity beyond that of laborer, farmer, or clerk. As Chamberlain reflected many years later, the newly minted veterans were "left alone, and lonesome" when they returned to peaceful pursuits.[14]

Yet their communities seemed to expect more of them than of other men—indeed, the men's own rhetoric seems to have encouraged others to expect more. Their epic sacrifices and bravery, the scale of the conflict and its high stakes, and the agonizing and wonderful changes wrought by the war ensured that no one could simply return to "normal," even if "normal" was still available.

*The Fight Begins Again*

Many men had no idea what the rest of their lives had in store when they returned from the greatest adventures, the most wrenching experiences, the most serious hardships most would ever know. Despite their anticipation, the reunions of soldiers and their families were rarely recorded in diaries or memoirs. When they were, the authors tended to focus on relief and joy. There was a certain sense of hurrying back to normality. Yet these worn, somber men could not just shrug off all they had seen in camp and on the battlefield and resume interrupted lives.

The writer Hamlin Garland's recollections of the subtle changes the war wrought in his father suggests that even men who seemed to have fit in—the ones who did not end up in soldiers' homes or almshouses or who were not critically injured—were still affected deeply by the war. Richard Garland spent nearly two years fighting and marching with Sherman, leaving behind a wife; a daughter, Hattie; five-year-old Hamlin; and two-year-old Frank. Hamlin spent the first few pages of his autobiography describing Richard's reappearance on their little farm in western Wisconsin at the end of the war; he also penned a much longer fictional version, "The Return of a Private," from the point of view of the returning soldier. The short story begins with the title character and a few comrades getting off a train. The townsfolk are too used to soldiers coming home to pay much attention to these dusty, tired veterans. The men sleep a little but are eager to get home, so they set out on foot.

The scene turns to the private's family members, who are visiting a neighbor's house when they spot a gaunt stranger trudging wearily up to their gate. Emma, the wife, suddenly recognizes her husband, Edward, gathers her children (an older girl and two boys about the same age as Hamlin and Frank would have been in 1865), and dashes for home. The veteran "was like a man lost in a dream. His wide, hungry eyes devoured the scene. The rough lawn, the little unpainted house, the field of clear yellow wheat behind it, down across which streamed the sun."

Then his wife is upon him, breaking his reverie, embracing and kissing him as the children stand in "a curious row," daughter sobbing, sons uncertain. The veteran hugs his wife and daughter, then turns to the little boys. Tommy, the older one, greets him, but little Teddy hangs back, peering at his father from behind the fence. "Come here, my little man; don't you know me?" Anticipation verges on tragic disappointment. The soldier finally produces an apple that tempts the little boy into his arms.

After the family goes inside the little house, the veteran relaxes, stretched out on the floor. He asks about neighbors and about the dog who died while he was away. It is a quiet moment, only slightly marred by the hard work looming ahead: "His farm was weedy and encumbered . . . his children needed clothing, the years were coming upon him, he was sick and emaciated, but his heroic soul did not quail. With the same courage with which he had faced his Southern march he entered upon a still more hazardous future." Garland enhances the ambiguity of the private's return with his last sentence: "The common soldier of the American volunteer army had returned. His war with the South was over, and his fight, his daily running fight with nature and against the injustice of his fellow-men, was begun again."[15]

Garland's autobiography helps to explain this ambiguous resignation. Despite his family's joy at Richard's return, "all was not the same as before." Belle Garland seemed bitter that Richard had, "like thousands of others[,] . . . deserted his wife and children for an abstraction, a mere sentiment." A harsh side of Richard Garland also emerged, "for my father brought back from his two years' campaigning . . . the temper and habit of a soldier." His return suddenly shifted the female-oriented dynamics of the family, a change of pace for the two little boys, who barely remembered Richard and had grown accustomed to their mother's lighter touch. "We soon learned . . . that the soldier's promise of punishment was swift and precise in its fulfillment." "We knew he loved us," Garland wrote, "for he often took us to his knees of an evening and told us stories of marches and battles, or chanted war-songs for us." But "the moments of his tenderness were few," and the slightest misbehavior was corrected harshly and immediately.[16]

The two versions of Richard Garland's homecoming as told by this middle son of the middle border provides a shift in perspective that illuminates the complexity of telling the stories of Civil War veterans. Similar homecomings occurred at thousands of doors and gateways, in untold numbers of yards and barns and streets. But the long lives that followed veterans' war making and peacekeeping have been too little explored by historians. Indeed, although returning soldiers spent decades nursing old wounds and the disillusionment spawned by their combat experiences, both were supplanted in the 1880s by the patriotic, even nostalgic gloss imparted to the war by the GAR, the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), and other organizations. Historians have closely examined those organizations as well as the roles that veterans played in the development of sectional and national memories of the war and the process of reconciliation between the sections. Although the literature on the experiences of soldiers is quite large, most historians who

study soldiers have not followed them into peacetime. A few have examined the experience of men in soldiers' homes in the North and South as well as the war's long-term ramifications on the psychological and physical health of soldiers. With only a few exceptions, these excellent histories have used veterans to help explain the paramount historiographical issues of the sectional conflict: memory, reconciliation, the Lost Cause, Republican politics, and other important subjects in which veterans are not necessarily the central characters.[17]

*Sing Not War* seeks to understand the lives of Civil War soldiers *as veterans*. One reason that historians have rarely attempted to do so may be that the richest sources for studying combatants are their countless letters, diaries, and memoirs. As two of the most literate armies to have fought up to that time, Yanks and Rebs constantly wrote to their families and kept personal accounts of what they had witnessed. Yet they stopped writing when the war ended, and when thousands took up pens a decade or two after mustering out, they wrote almost entirely about battles and marches and comrades rather than their response to returning to civilian life. Given the absence of a critical mass of first-person accounts by old soldiers writing about their postwar lives, one may be tempted to accept Beecham's prediction of a sudden and satisfying transition to civilian life. Perhaps their thoughts were just that uninteresting, their lives that straightforward—perhaps it really was that easy to turn their swords into plowshares.

But that supposition is not reasonable. As Eric Dean has shown in his sample of Indiana soldiers, veterans of Civil War combat were clearly exposed to traumas resembling those of twentieth-century soldiers, and although the memoir literature is virtually silent on the issue, such psychological responses as nightmares, delusions, and other manifestations of the terrors of combat must have plagued many soldiers. Conjecture based on research into the lives of modern veterans is supported by anecdotal but compelling evidence that suggests that things *were* different for countless men scarred by war. Even a casual survey of newspapers in the months after the war reveals extraordinary suffering and unease among veterans and among the civilians observing them. Antoine Adrian, a veteran of the 13th New York Cavalry, spent more time than usual dressing and combing his hair just a few weeks after the war ended; then, after calmly announcing that he "should not again sleep in the house," he walked to the outhouse and shot himself in the forehead. The *Utica Telegraph* blamed the state of a "raving lunatic" brought to an asylum on his suffering at Andersonville: "The scenes of that death-pen . . . had been seared into his brain as with a red-hot iron,

till all else is burned out but that one terrible thing which is now within a living horror." A one-legged ex-soldier in St. Louis, employed at the federal arsenal but suffering from delirium tremens, slashed his throat three times and soon thereafter died in a hospital. Next to a road crowded with paroled Confederates walking home near Salisbury, North Carolina, a Confederate officer sat on a pile of railroad ties, his shirt covered with blood. Passersby gradually realized that he had wounded himself. He calmly declined offers of help and asked someone to take his greatcoat, lying on the ground a few feet away, to his wife in Augusta, Georgia. As he talked, he smeared the blood from his wound all over his arms.[18]

A quartet of isolated deaths hardly proves a point, and the ghastly forces that push men and women to end their lives violently are far beyond historians' power to understand or even adequately describe. Yet we do know that all veterans of major wars—especially combat veterans—return to a different world than they left. Postwar society invariably differs from prewar or even wartime society, so veterans need to adjust to the changes that occurred while they were gone. But veterans have also changed: they are two or three or four years older, haunted by horrific images and dead friends, slowed at least temporarily by injuries or other weakening conditions, freed from routines and discipline that have become second nature. And of course, their friends and families and communities have changed, too.

The veterans on the margins of Gilded Age society, *Sing Not War* suggests, may not be statistically representative of all Civil War veterans. Nevertheless, their experiences, however far from the postwar lives of most men, remain relevant. This book initially took all veterans as its subject, and although at times its descriptions of desperation and poverty and institutional ennui seem to leave most of them out of the narrative, it is not unreasonable to assume that most veterans shared at least some of the disappointments and fears of the men most obviously trapped in postwar nightmares.

## *Those Who Have Borne the Battle*

Although this volume provides neither a history of the era nor, strictly speaking, a history of old soldiers' institutions or organizations, brief introductions to veterans' associations, soldiers' homes, and pensions are in order.

Like millions of their fellow Americans, Civil War veterans were organizers and joiners. The first Union veterans' organization was apparently the 3rd Army Corps Union, which, although it started out as a kind of burial insurance program for officers, began holding reunions on May 5, 1865, the

anniversary of its first action at the Battle of Williamsburg. The societies of the Army of the Tennessee, Army of the Cumberland, and Army of the Ohio, which had fought during the war's last year with Sherman, were organized within two or three years after the war ended, and by 1868 the Society of the Army of the Potomac had been formed. Confederate associations started a little later and tended to be smaller. The first was the club formed by officers of the 3rd North Carolina at an 1866 funeral, but many other organizations emerged in the coming decades, ranging from Maryland's Society of the Army and Navy of the Confederate States to the veterans of the "Old First Virginia Infantry" and Pegram's Battalion in Richmond.[19]

During the next two decades, survivors of hundreds of Union and Confederate brigades, regiments, and even companies held reunions and organized associations. Union veterans also organized on behalf of political causes such as Winfield Scott Hancock's 1880 presidential campaign and Kansas Populism in the 1890s, while military telegraphers, prisoners of war, and other specialized groups formed their own associations.[20]

A few elite groups on both sides sought to preserve the history of the war through publications and lectures. Such organizations included the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, the Survivors' Association of the State of South Carolina, and the better-known Southern Historical Society, organized and administered by Jubal Early and other generals and officers from Virginia.[21]

The GAR and the UCV became the largest and most influential of the associations. After a false start in the late 1860s, the GAR benefited from the renewal of interest in the war in the late 1870s and the expansion of the pension system, which covered only 60,000 men in 1880 but more than 400,000 a decade later. The Robert E. Lee Camp No. 1, Confederate Veterans, formed in Richmond in April 1883, promoted a philosophy of sectional reconciliation and took the lead in organizing the UCV in 1889. As many as 160,000 men—between a quarter and a third of all surviving Confederates—eventually joined the group's more than eighteen hundred local chapters.[22]

These organizations would become inextricably linked with the homes and pensions created for soldiers in both the North and the South. Most programs to care for Union veterans, widows, and orphans took their inspiration from a passage in the final paragraph of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may

achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." For many people, Lincoln's suggestion that the nation should care for the northern victims of war became an irrevocable pledge following his assassination and the victorious close of the war.[23]

Lincoln's promise did not cover former rebels, but a rough equivalent to Lincoln's vow appeared in a bill passed by the Confederate House of Representatives late in 1863 establishing the "Veteran Soldiers Home" for disabled Confederates. The bill offered "Confederate States and the citizens thereof . . . the opportunity of becoming identified with this philanthropic and patriotic enterprise, and of participating in the pleasing and grateful duty of contributing to the relief of those who have periled all, and have been disabled in the service of their country." Although the rhetoric did not quite match the Second Inaugural, the charitable and patriotic impulse was similar, and the former Confederate states ultimately honored the service of their disabled volunteer soldiers with homes and pensions, albeit on a much smaller scale than in the North. The soldiers' homes and pension programs no doubt transcended anything that either President Lincoln or the Confederate House of Representatives had in mind.[24]

Congress took the first step in the spring of 1865, when it established the National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. By the end of the decade, branches had been established in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (the Northwestern Branch); Dayton, Ohio (Central); Togus, Maine (Eastern); and Norfolk, Virginia (Southern); with five more subsequently added in Leavenworth, Kansas; Johnson City, Tennessee; Danville, Illinois; Santa Monica, California; and Marion, Indiana. The philosophy that shaped the homes grew out of the antebellum growth of a new notion of family that revolved around the idea of home as not simply a dwelling but a kind of support group from which parents and children drew comfort, strength, and stability. "Homes" rather than colder and less welcoming "asylums" were established for orphans, widows, former prostitutes, and other dependent groups. During the war, the U.S. Sanitary Commission and other voluntary, largely female organizations in the North and South established "soldiers' homes" to provide temporary care for the sick and temporary housing and meals for men traveling to and from the front. The National Asylum for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers was created in the contexts of these assumptions and preexisting institutions. Indeed, almost without fail, residents and neighbors referred to the new asylums as "soldiers' homes," and Congress changed the name to the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers (NHDVS) in 1873. Over the next several decades, the treatment and the behavior of the men in these

homes would be held to a very high standard of domesticity. In 1884, Congress dropped the requirement that veterans have disabilities as a result of wartime injuries, and by late in the century, the National Homes had become havens for elderly veterans.[25]

In addition to the ever-expanding federal institutions, nearly thirty states also established homes for Union veterans, subsidized in part by federal funds. Some state homes were founded in reaction to specific policies and complaints regarding the NHDVS: men living in the states where the branches were located were not favored in placements, wives were unable to live with their husbands, and, as the veteran population aged and rules regarding admission were loosened to include men whose disabilities might not be related directly to service, overcrowding occurred. In most states, the state departments of the GAR and GAR members in state legislatures provided the necessary push to establish a separate system of state homes. A common complaint was the increasing number of veterans appearing in county poorhouses, insane asylums, and other facilities. The first annual report from the Massachusetts home, for example, claimed that 103 of the 248 men admitted during the institution's first year came from almshouses, while the Michigan GAR found 460 veterans living in poorhouses. In state after state during the 1880s and early 1890s, the GAR convinced legislatures to fund homes, many of which provided cottage-style housing for at least a few veterans and their wives.[26]

By the turn of the twentieth century, the differences between state and federal homes had narrowed, aside from their size and some states' practice of allowing wives and husbands to live together in individual cottages. Thirty homes existed in twenty-seven states, ranging in size from the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Quincy, which had more than nineteen hundred residents, to the North Dakota Soldiers' Home in Lisbon, with thirty-three. Most housed between two hundred and five hundred men, with fewer in small eastern states and recently settled western states. State homes submitted to biannual visits by inspectors from the Board of Managers of the NHDVS as a condition of the annual payment of one hundred dollars they received from Congress for each soldier in their care.[27]

A similar collection of motivations characterized the Confederate soldiers' home movement, which was propelled by the rise of the Lost Cause and, more important, by the South's worsening economic conditions in the 1870s and 1880s. The Panic of 1873, flat prices for southern cash crops, and the second depression in less than a generation in the early 1890s pushed already hard-pressed veterans to the edge, forcing them to rely increasingly

on family members, local charities, and county poorhouses. In urban areas, homeless and often disabled veterans had become common enough sights to raise eyebrows and to inspire governments and individuals to do something about the problem. Like their northern counterparts, soldiers' home supporters' depicted asylums and poorhouses as unworthy refuges for disabled and poor heroes. It was demeaning for old soldiers and dishonorable for their luckier countrymen to allow these men to languish in tawdry county institutions. The *Richmond Dispatch* declared in 1892 that "it is disgraceful that any worthy veteran . . . should be forced to live like a pauper."[28]

As in the North, southern veterans' groups commonly made the initial investments to create homes and then appealed to the state legislatures for help. In Texas, the John B. Hood Camp of Confederate Veterans opened the Texas Confederate Home in 1884. By 1891, the home had been transferred to the state. The Confederate Home in Missouri followed a similar path despite objections from the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which had more or less managed the home from its founding in 1891 to its takeover by the state six years later. North Carolina's home had started as a tiny, private concern in 1890 after a fund-raising fair brought in enough money to rent a house for seven soldiers. Within a year, the legislature had taken over, doubling the number of men housed in the institution. Virginia held out longer than most states; the R. E. Lee Camp had established a home in 1890 to prevent "honorable and brave Confederate soldiers . . . from dying in the county almshouses." In 1892, the group began receiving thirty thousand dollars from the legislature each year, with an agreement that in twenty-two years, the property would revert to the state. But the hard times of the 1890s caused donations to plummet and admissions to soar by 25 percent; by 1896, the home was filled to overflowing, and thirty-five applications were awaiting decisions.[29]

In 1910, 31,830 veterans—about 5 percent of those still living—resided in federal or state homes. Just under 100,000 Union soldiers eventually entered federal or state facilities, and about 20,000 Confederate veterans were admitted to southern homes.[30]

The other programs devoted to those who had borne the battle were the pension systems for volunteer soldiers established by Congress and southern state governments. Precedents existed for these initiatives. Poor Revolutionary War veterans had received pensions early in the century, and disabled veterans of the War of 1812 and the war with Mexico had been pensioned prior to 1861; those systems were expanded during the Gilded Age to include most veterans of those wars.[31]

Although the pension system for Civil War volunteers was tweaked a number of times, three main laws shaped the government's responsibilities. The General Law, first passed in 1861 and amended several times, established pensions for soldiers' widows and orphans and for soldiers disabled as a direct result of military service. The law established a precise table of injuries and conditions and amounts covered by pensions based on rank and the extent to which the injuries prevented men from performing labor requiring physical exertion; a scale setting rates for "total disability" and fractions thereof was the basis for quarterly payments. Privates received eight dollars a month for total disability, while officers received as much as thirty dollars. Over the years, rates were changed, specific conditions were added, and the percentage of disability surgeons had to assign to applicants was changed from fractions of eight to eighteen. The major systemic revision of the General Law came with the Act of 1890, which extended pensions to any disabled man who had received an honorable discharge after serving at least ninety days. His disability need not have been incurred during his military service but could not be caused by "vicious habits." Early in the twentieth century, a presidential executive order and several laws made age a disability.[32]

Southern states, of course, paid for Confederate pensions, which, in several cases, grew out of artificial limb programs. South Carolina began distributing artificial legs in 1866, when the legislature appropriated twenty thousand dollars, obtained lists of amputees from tax collectors, and awarded a contract to supply artificial limbs to a Rochester, New York, firm. Radical Republicans interrupted the process, but after the state was "redeemed" in 1877, the program was reinstituted, this time including prosthetic arms. By the late 1880s, the artificial limb effort had been replaced by pensions. Similarly, Virginia's prosthetics program evolved into a pension plan in 1882, when the state began providing sixty dollars in cash for each missing limb or eye. Six years later, the legislature passed the first true pension law for Virginia Confederates. Dedicated only to the state's poorest disabled veterans—recipients had to have an annual income of less than three hundred dollars and no more than one thousand dollars in personal wealth—the first rate scale reached a maximum annual payment of sixty dollars. Although the acceptance rate was higher, it seems, than for Union pensions—in one Virginia county, about 80 percent of those who applied immediately after the law passed received pensions—the application process was fairly elaborate. As in most southern states, the rates gradually rose and the process was somewhat eased, until in 1900 disability due to

old age was allowed and a full disability earned a pensioner one hundred dollars.[33]

Union pensions were much larger than Confederate pensions. By the 1890s, the average northern recipient was receiving $160 a year, while the average payment to Confederate veterans was $40. In 1885, a quarter of a million men—nearly 17 percent of all Union veterans—were receiving federal pensions, and the percentage continued to climb until 1915, when more than 93 percent of all living veterans—just under 400,000—received pensions. By 1893, pensions to Union veterans accounted for 43 percent of federal expenses; in contrast, a century later only 21 percent of the federal budget was taken up by social security. An 1893 report stated that the number of Confederate veterans receiving pensions or living in state soldiers' homes was just over 27,000, with a total annual cost of $1,126,736. At the same time, the number of Union veterans receiving pensions was 876,068, while 19,518 men were in federal or state soldiers' homes. The total appropriation for Union pensions for 1893 was $146,737,350, although a deficit of at least that much was projected. The article pointedly suggested that federal pension rolls contained over 300,000 more men than had served in the Confederate Army.[34]

### *Sentenced to Life*

For civilians and soldiers alike, being a veteran came to mean something different than being a soldier. Ambrose Bierce was definitely not speaking for all veterans when he remarked that the war had left him "sentenced to life" or when he answered the question, "What has happened to Ambrose Bierce the youth, who fought at Chickamauga?" with the simple, "He is dead." Yet even veterans who did not share Bierce's bitter and macabre response to their wartime service were in a sense reborn as different men because of their experiences.[35]

One way of understanding more fully the lives of veterans is to study the margins of society—the least successful veterans. Of course, most veterans managed peaceful and more or less satisfying transitions back to civilian life, a phenomenon that says something important about the United States and about Americans' relationship to wars and to the men who fight them. But equally important issues can be raised by examining the ways in which society responded to and interacted with those veterans who did not pick up their lives where they left off, who ended up on the fringes of their communities.

As a result, as they do in virtually all histories, the men who left behind concrete evidence of their attitudes and experiences have to represent those who remain silent, at least to historians. *Sing Not War* relies on a number of traditional types of sources but also draws heavily on sources that historians have not utilized. These include hundreds of pages of testimony to both congressional and GAR investigators of soldiers' homes in the 1880s. They also include the dozen or more "soldiers' newspapers" published in the North as well as the better-known *Confederate Veteran* and rarely cited newsletters produced by the Arkansas and Kentucky state homes. And they include various accounts by inmates of veterans' homes, mainly in the North, who wrote with passion and despair and hopefulness about their lives. Most men did not publish reminiscences or letters in soldiers' newspapers—indeed, most of these men do not appear in any source useful to exploring their inner lives—but we must believe that those who do appear are somehow representative of the men who chose not to put pen to paper. Many old soldiers undoubtedly flinched when they read or heard the extreme rhetoric that sometimes spouted from pension advocates, yet most of the veterans probably sighed and agreed with at least some of the partisan language. And while many veterans probably deplored the resentment that fired some advocates' harsher public statements, it is quite likely that they deplored the public airing of those sentiments rather than the sentiments themselves.

A number of threads wind through the six chapters that follow. One is the clash between the rhetoric of patriotism and gratitude and the political, economic, and moral differences that grew between veterans and civilians, especially in the North. Although Memorial Day and GAR reunion parades reminded northerners of the excitement and gratitude that had welled up during the Grand Review in May 1865 and for months thereafter in more intimate homecoming celebrations throughout the country, a widening chasm characterized the relationship between Yankee veterans and nonveterans. Veterans—not all of them but enough to become stereotypes—came to be associated with addiction, failure, and fraud. Poor, disabled, wounded veterans reminded civilians of the fine line between success and failure, the catastrophe that a long-term illness or injury could wreak in the lives of Americans at a time with poor medical treatment, no health insurance, and virtually no disability insurance. Seeing failed veterans also reminded the more successful of the vulnerability of men's moral strength and character, reinforcing the idea that the building blocks to a thriving life in business had to be put in place early in life.

But the ambiguities of the relationship between those often aggressively

patriotic and even defensive organizations and the larger public also reveals that while veterans may have become constructive citizens, even leaders, their identification with military service and the honors and privileges that it should have bestowed on them automatically put them on the margins of the larger society. Specific issues—especially pensions and the behavior of the men who failed to flourish in postwar society—led to a clash between the nation's natural gratitude and deep-seated notions about independence, charity, and the role of government. Americans were uneasy about "volunteers" claiming pensions or other rewards. And civilians' reluctance fully to appreciate veterans caused them to withdraw to their own organizations and issues.

Another thread that runs through this book is the startling differences in the way Union and Confederate veterans were perceived by the societies in which they lived. The heroic version of the veteran served as a common denominator in both sections, but although that image continued to dominate in the South, in the North it was joined by much more complicated images and attitudes. Union veterans came to be seen not only as symbols but also as social problems. Those same predicaments simply made the symbolism of defeated Confederates more poignant. They became relics, like so many of the war objects being collected by the Gilded Age Americans described in chapter 3. R. B. Rosenburg titled his book on Confederate soldiers' homes *Living Monuments*, and that term goes a long way in describing the peculiar position that Confederate veterans filled in postwar southern society. They were indeed frozen, made into living statues only a little more capable of animation than the thousands of stone sentinels guarding county courthouses and village squares throughout the South by the 1880s and 1890s. As a result, memory inevitably plays an important role in the story, but *Sing Not War* is almost equally about forgetting, as Americans put behind them much of what it meant to be a soldier and "remembered" a one-dimensional heroic version that many veterans could not realize.

Of course, families and communities in the North celebrated the return of their men and boys and continued to respect them throughout the remainder of their lives. And some Confederate veterans earned the contempt of their fellow southerners by behaving irresponsibly and by refusing to fit into civilian society.

But extraordinary differences existed. Confederate veterans were seen as central characters in southern society, honored and successful and valued simply because they were veterans. In the North, as veterans' papers came to argue, at least some veterans were ignored or even treated with contempt.

Despite the powerful symbol of the bloody shirt employed by many politicians who had served in the army, that reverence for military service did not extend to all veterans. Even the pity that fueled much of the public's reaction to veterans played out differently: for southerners, it often became a source of compassion and even honor; in the North, pity sometimes—and increasingly as the century progressed—could lead to scorn and criticism.

Hard luck followed some veterans in both sections, of course, but the ways in which society interpreted the men who succumbed to poverty, drink, or boredom tended to diverge. In the North, marginalized veterans were often seen as agents of their own decline, almost purposefully swimming against the stream of progress, economic growth, and opportunity. They may have served bravely in the war, but as the country moved deeper into peacetime, they were expected to get over their experiences and move on. Conversely, southern veterans who found themselves in the same situations could appear as victims of conditions outside their control.

Put simply, veterans in the North were seen through multiple lenses and exposed to critical commentary on their choices after leaving the army. In the South, veterans would always be those proud, ragged, honorable men who limped home with their heads held high. If they succeeded in their postwar lives, they would do so despite the hardships they had survived. If they failed, who could blame them? Although these differences can be exaggerated, the evidence suggests several conditions that led to significantly different relationships between civilians and veterans in the North and the South.

First, virtually all white men of military age had served in the Confederate Army, making it the main wartime experience for male southerners. In the North, although the percentage of men who served in the army was higher than in any other American war, a slight majority did not serve. In other words, many good, worthy men did not fight for the Union, ensuring that northerners could perceive multiple paths to fulfilling a citizen's duty.

Second, the economic explosion that made the United States the most powerful economy in the world during the Gilded Age obviously affected the sections differently. Many observers believed that anyone who could not make something of himself in the fast-paced and opportunity-rich North probably deserved to fail. But in the South, where sharecropping trapped white as well as black farmers and where the depressions of the 1870s and 1890s were particularly severe, needing help from family or communities did not necessarily bring shame to needy veterans.

Third, despite the fact that Republicans generally controlled the federal

and many northern state governments, they held that power by fairly narrow margins. As a result, Democrats and Republicans alike did not hesitate to drag veterans' issues, especially federal pensions, into national politics, forcing veterans to choose between the parties and inevitably affecting the ways that Americans viewed pensions. In the South, as the one-party system established itself after Reconstruction, there was no reason to make any facet of veterans' lives into a political issue. Moreover, when the former Confederate states finally established pensions for needy veterans in the 1880s and 1890s, the amounts and number of people covered were tiny—and uncontroversial—compared to the federal pensions distributed by the U.S. government.

Because of the pension issue, the politicization of the GAR, and the occasional upsurge of interest in the large system of federal homes for disabled soldiers, Union veterans projected a much more complex set of images than did their Confederate counterparts. Southern veterans were not saddled with the complications created by national, taxpayer-financed programs; the aid that came their way was private, local, and eventually state-sponsored—sources of social welfare programs with which Americans had always been more comfortable. Union veterans were counted, individualized, remembered as people, and sometimes criticized, feared, and held in contempt. Individual Confederate veterans were rarely distinguished from this larger group of noble, painful symbols. Moreover, some issues—for example, pensions and soldiers' homes—that were vital to the lives of Union veterans and to civilians' perceptions of those veterans' lives were really nonissues for Confederates; as a result, southerners nearly disappear from parts of this book.

Finally, another thread that occasionally surfaces is the extent to which veterans matched society's expectations for them as men. According to some historians, Gilded Age males experienced a "crisis of manhood" in which the qualities of what it meant to be a man entered a time of flux and change. Emerging ideas about gender and race, the maturation of the industrial economy in the form of powerful corporations and bureaucracies, and the replacement of the geographic frontier with the more abstract and perhaps even more bruising frontiers of economic entrepreneurship and personal ambition cast men adrift in a gendered sea without a compass. Even if, as other historians suggest, the era's attitudes about manhood featured more continuity than crisis, many people nevertheless believed that such a crisis existed. Fewer chances for dramatic leadership were available; the work performed by most men shifted from straightforward, active labor in the fields

or mines to more passive, less strenuous work in offices. More and more men in the classes that were the supposed victims of the crisis became doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, occupations that were lucrative but not traditionally manly. Men's responses were often conflicting—some developed an ethos of prudence, perseverance, and calm, while others modeled themselves after robber barons, adopted violent sports such as boxing and football and more cerebral sports such as golfing and baseball, took wilderness vacations and hunted game, joined a new generation of private militia companies, and joyfully marched off to war when it erupted with Spain in 1898.[36]

Issues related to masculinity had surfaced as the nation mobilized for war. Steven J. Ramold has recently suggested that men entering the Union Army encountered clashing versions of manhood. Most private soldiers came out of an American tradition of manhood that emphasized individualism and freedom, but the officers and policy makers creating the vast new armies were part of a more modern Victorian ethos of restraint and corporate goals. Moreover, the traditional American reliance on citizen-soldiers—called into service only in times of crisis, only barely controlled by their officers—ran headlong into the professionalism of the regular army, with its harsh discipline and separate legal system, and of the volunteer officers who adopted that regular army point of view. In a way, soldiers encountered a Catch-22: the extent to which they adapted to the Victorian restraint and military discipline was the extent to which they became lesser men according to antebellum standards. And the extent to which they failed to adjust to military expectations was the extent to which they failed to measure up to emerging postbellum standards of male behavior. Although states'-rights-loving Confederates were famously less "tamed" than Union soldiers, southern soldiers also found their previous notions of manhood challenged by military life.[37]

Most of the debate over whether American men faced a crisis has revolved around northern men. But military defeat, a ruined economy, and the sudden—and temporary—rise to political manhood of former slaves created a different set of challenges and opportunities for southerners' notions of manhood. They might not personally have felt their manhood threatened by the new order, but they most assuredly did not want anyone else to doubt their capacity to fulfill manly responsibilities. Some retreated to the comfortable antebellum paradigm of manhood shaped by honor, public piety, and self-control. Others sought a model that one historian calls the "masculine martial ideal." Holding up Confederate veterans as masculine arche-

types, this version of manhood refigured the violence that lay just beneath the surface of prewar society as political and cultural necessities. Violent resistance to northern aggression provided a historic reference point and ensured that veterans in the South would never lose their archetypal symbolic luster. It also inspired violent insistence on protecting racial honor by unmanning freedmen through electoral aggression and by reasserting racial superiority in the reduction of African American men to savages threatening white society. Indeed, black men played a major role in establishing white manhood. As slaves, African American men had made all white men politically equal; in the post-Reconstruction era, as disfranchisement and Jim Crow metastasized, they provided a convenient if blunt definition of what "men" certainly were not. As a result, southern veterans and nonveterans alike could demonstrate and relish their manhood in the resubjugation of African Americans and shrug off any challenge to their masculinity by joining as actors or as audience in the rituals of racialized violence that ignited the South during and after the Gilded Age.[38]

Indeed, the aggressive foreign policy of the Gilded Age, the paths to war in Cuba and the Philippines, and the drive to establish an always-prepared citizen army through the National Guard embraced Civil War veterans. Most important, they served as inspirations and as models for the National Guard units that states began to organize during this time. Many of these units started off as private militia companies, but by early in the twentieth century, most states had established fairly coherent administrative structures and training. As one historian has pointed out, like Civil War veterans, National Guardsmen "explicitly linked" military service and manhood. Even if they never got into battle, offering themselves in service to their states and country fulfilled the voluntary, patriotic ideal that Civil War soldiers had so perfectly demonstrated. The connection was made real when, at veterans' encampments or National Guard gatherings, young and old soldiers drilled together or competed against one another in contests or even sham battles, providing a symbolic bridge from the bloody battlefields of the past to the possibility of future sacrifice. In the South, some Confederate veterans, still wearing their tattered uniforms, went straight into the ranks of the short-lived state militias. A number of the men who joined the burgeoning Illinois National Guard in the early 1870s were Civil War veterans, and several of the higher-ranking officers at the state level had commanded men during the conflict.[39]

Although few veterans were directly involved with the Guard, with or without their knowledge they formed part of the equation when the mean-

ing of manhood reached the level of a crisis. The ways in which the general public perceived survivors of the war—especially those veterans who were physically or mentally disabled, who had fallen on hard economic times, or who had made their manliness an issue by demanding larger and broader pensions—were no doubt shaped by the ambiguity that came to surround manhood. As a result, the public discourse about veterans—the piteous commentary on the crippled, the nagging concerns about veteran tramps and beggars, the harsh criticism of "coffee-coolers" and "pension sharks"—can be fruitfully examined in the context of the era's ideas about men. Indeed, the conversation about manhood provided the language that helped critics articulate what was wrong with veterans. This discussion about manhood in the Gilded Age has many facets, many of which do not help explain attitudes about veterans. But several are useful in understanding those complicated perceptions.

Perhaps the most valuable concepts are those that came to be associated with males who failed to act like men. Gilded Age Americans could easily identify those character traits that inevitably contributed to a man's inability to thrive and lack of capacity to meet his responsibilities. Men and women of this era certainly did not invent these qualities, but they seem to have taken on a greater sense of urgency and to have acquired a secular tone during this crucial time in the evolution of American values. "Failure was a want of achievement where achievement measured manhood," writes E. Anthony Rotundo; "failure was a sign of poor character." Failed men's chief shortcomings included a lack of industry, or laziness; a shortage of moral fiber, or a weakness for "vice and debauchery"; and a general submission to habits that prevented men from overcoming the obstacles and bad luck that everyone encountered from time to time. All of these terms were applied to veterans at one time or another during the Gilded Age. And that public discourse gave editors and politicians the terms on which to challenge the more common stereotype of soldiers as worthy recipients of a nation's emotional and material gratitude.[40]

Ironically, even as selected veterans were held up as poor examples of manhood, the notion of "manliness and the military ideal," as Rotundo calls it, gained force throughout the period. However, with the Civil War as an increasingly distant inspiration for Gilded Age men, one did not have to actually experience war or even to want to experience war to demonstrate the courage and self-sacrifice and contempt for soft living that characterized so many modern lives. William James's "Moral Equivalent of War" suggested that hard work, discipline, and purposeful maturity could create vir-

tual soldiers who would provide a stiff backbone for the nation. In some ways, although Americans could wax effusive in their praise of the aging Civil War veterans who marched past them in Memorial Day and Fourth of July parades, it was difficult for any veteran who did not fit the physical and moral mold of those dignified but graying old soldiers to match the idealistic version of manhood being created by James and other Americans. How could old men ravaged by disease or alcohol or battered by economic forces beyond their control compete with "virtual" veterans?[41]

At a different level, Civil War veterans—actual "heroes" whose actions had saved the Union or nobly represented the Confederacy—also could not compete with a generation of "heroes" built up by "the cult of the self-made man and the philosophy of laissez-faire," as David G. Pugh has written. Inspired by social Darwinism, these "heroes" "confiscated huge chunks of land, built great machines and factories, fixed prices via secret alliances, and formed their empires with oil, coal, and steel." Such "prophets of progress"—the Carnegies, the Rockefellers, the Morgans—were heroic simply because of their oversized success stories. They were individuals, not parts of giant armies; they were titans, not privates and corporals; they were famous for being bold, not for following orders. They exerted their excessive masculinity by creating their own rules and by celebrating the "gaining of wealth and prestige" rather than marching in step with faceless comrades in search of honor and gratitude. They viewed their businesses as armies and their markets as battlefields; they waged war, at least in their own minds, no less than the men who had been fighting at Gettysburg or the Wilderness while Carnegie and Rockefeller, both in their twenties, had started building their fortunes.[42]

Men who failed to live up to this capitalist ethos were, according to Scott A. Sandage, "born losers," either unable or unwilling to fulfill their roles in the incessant "moving forward" that shaped American ideas about success. Of course, more men failed than succeeded at getting rich, following a linear path to success, or avoiding the "stagnation that must be avoided at all costs." Inevitably, however, winners, not losers, became key cultural markers in the postwar United States. And all veterans who were observed begging on the street, lurking in a saloon, scheming for a bigger pension, or lounging idly in a soldiers' home exemplified failure, identifying themselves as the sort of men Sandage calls "misfits of capitalism." Expectations about men's personal behavior had also changed. Richard Stott's recent book on male culture shows that the drinking, gambling, and fighting that had characterized men's society in antebellum America had largely been squeezed

out of the acceptable boundaries of manhood in most of the country by shortly after the Civil War. Not incidentally, some of the same qualities were applied to the least savory groups of veterans during the Gilded Age.[43]

Indeed, at the level of popular culture, Civil War veterans were trapped in a developing notion of manhood shaped by a raft of self-help books that taught eager young men how to succeed in a society characterized by both opportunity and intense competition. Even the causes for which veterans had fought, the issues that had animated prewar politics and inspired wartime enlistments, had been replaced. "Success and failure—not slavery and freedom—became the quintessential American axis," writes Sandage. One of the leading authors of Gilded Age advice books, Samuel Smiles, provided a nutshell description of what was expected of men in the subtitle to *Duty: With Illustrations of Courage, Patience, and Endurance*. Like most authors in the genre, Smiles, who also wrote books titled *Character* and *Thrift*, focused on creating long-term goals, accepting delayed gratification, and displaying courage in the face of adversity. Borrowing liberally and selectively from the lives of great men from all occupations and generations, Smiles included only a few chapters on prominent military men, but even they seemed to reflect the same qualities of perseverance and skilled management as did successful civilians. Military men's successes tended to come after their military service, although Smiles suggested that military service might even have helped poets, authors, and scientists become better men. "It may be that the obedience, drill, and discipline which are the soul of the soldier's life, possess some potent and formative influence upon the character, and develop that power of disciplined concentration which is so essential to the formation of true genius."[44]

But few other authors mention surviving combat or belonging to the closed military society as particular models for developing manly qualities. Some writers used military and battle metaphors and even illustrations of battle scenes, but only to impart color and dramatic effect. Military service was presented less as a career option or the experience of typical men and more as an example of manly accomplishment that most men would never enjoy. "The call to battle," argues one historian, "was a call for revitalization, to resist effeminacy and weakness bred by prosperity and to stave off the feared decline and fall of an overdeveloped civilization." It was a call not to actual battle but to symbolic battle against personal weakness, demoralizing passivity, socialistic labor unions, and a weak foreign policy. The meaning of Gilded Age manhood ultimately came to exclude martial abilities. If the end result of military service and combat was the loss of self-control, the

adoption of poor moral habits, the decline of initiative, and the weakening of the work ethic—all characteristics perceived to plague returning soldiers in 1865 and in some instances veterans throughout the Gilded Age—then military service could hinder the development of manhood. In fact, the terror and tumult of combat, the subjection of most soldiers to orders they only partially understood, the degrading living conditions, and the bad habits and poor health that often came with military service seemed to contradict the sorts of experiences that could build up a country of men. One of the lone books to offer the Union soldier—the common soldier, rather than the generals—as a manly example was published just after the war and was written by Edwin Percy Whipple, a member of the circle of New England intellectuals led by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Among the many qualities necessary to manhood were those demonstrated by Union soldiers, who passed through "the baptism of fire and blood" to save the Union from "the insolent domination of a perjured horde of slave-holders and libertines." But these men's martial defense of the country really represented just an extension of their patriotism and commitment, their political ideals and their reform-minded values. Military service, with its temporary setbacks, its challenges to good order and Christian ideals, simply constituted an exaggerated version of the sturdy, determined manhood expected of any northern man. In other words, serving in the military did not necessarily provide different challenges than did civilian life, just more extreme versions of the obstacles that all men had to surmount.[45]

For Gilded Age advice writers, success and manhood were virtually interchangeable and were really quite simple. "Young man," wrote H. A. Lewis in *Why Some Succeed while Others Fail*, "two ways are open before you in life. One points to degradation and want, the other, to usefulness and wealth." In the confident duality that echoed antebellum temperance reformers who illustrated good and evil with the "Tree of Life," advice writers created linear paths to success that entailed accepting responsibility, coming to deserve the trust and respect of others, and perhaps acquiring wealth. The stark simplicity of this all-or-nothing point of view did not mesh easily with the ambivalence of many veterans' lives.[46]

Although many individual veterans succeeded in their postwar lives by following just such a course, veterans as a class were not expected to be particularly successful. Indeed, it is not hard to read between the lines of the advice books—especially in the context of common stereotypes about the negative effects on a man's character of serving in the military—to see that veterans who succeeded did so despite rather than because of their

military service. The notion that one either succeeds or fails, that fame and wealth come not in a flash of daring or inspiration but in a well-planned, calm campaign of steadfast competence, that only the constant application of genius and energy would lead to happiness and success suggests that demonstrating bravery and loyalty for a battle, a campaign, or even an entire war was not enough to prove one's manhood, which could really be verified only through perseverance and constancy and gradually increasing levels of success over a whole lifetime. The "lives of eminent men" that illustrated William D. Owen's *Success in Life, and How to Secure It*, featured businessmen, politicians, professionals, and others who applied discipline to their lives, but this discipline was shaped by their decisions and values or by institutions such as churches and universities rather than by discipline imposed by an autocratic government or especially the military.[47]

Simply put, many, perhaps most, old soldiers, did not fade tastefully away, become titans of industry, or become the kind of men described in the advice books—men who, when the veterans' great-grandsons came of age, would wear gray flannel suits.

### *"Veteranizing"*

Veterans realized that fame could be based on passing wealth or passing sensationalism rather than patriotic accomplishment, that material gain could outweigh duty fulfilled, and that the dramatically successful could overshadow the steadily obedient. Such knowledge led to an often-justified but nevertheless self-righteous attitude about wartime service. No one who had not been on a firing line; in a smoky, malodorous camp; on a bitterly cold picket outpost; in a wretched hospital—no one who had not heard the bullets clipping the branches above them, endured endless nights on guard, or known men whose bodies had been shredded by shrapnel—could begin to understand the meaning of being a veteran. The war became a centerpiece of veterans' lives that they could never have imagined as boys and could not imagine having missed as men. The qualities the war brought out or taught differed from civilian qualities.

A few veterans used those differences to rise in the world, waving "bloody shirts" to win votes and influence and to improve their lives. An exceedingly cynical version of such a man was Cyrus Trask, the father of one of the main characters in John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. Cyrus spends a few months in the Union Army and half an hour on a battlefield, where a bullet shatters his leg. He comes home with one leg and a case of venereal disease that even-

tually kills his wife. He begins to exaggerate the number of battles in which he has fought, to write letters to soldiers' papers and magazines, and to become a self-taught "expert" in military affairs. He becomes active in the GAR and eventually accepts a sinecure as a general secretary in the organization, traveling the country and advising the secretary of war and president on military matters. "I wonder if you know how much influence I really have," he brags to his son, Adam, who holds his father in quiet contempt. "I can throw the Grand Army at any candidate like a sock. . . . I can get senators defeated and I can pick appointments like apples. I can make men and I can destroy men."[48]

Of course, most veterans had neither the inclination nor the cynicism to conduct themselves in such a way. Yet on a smaller scale, they too could become professional veterans, drawn by failures or limitations in other parts of their lives to focus more on the past than the present. Writer Sherwood Anderson's father, Irwin, had served in the Union Army and was enthusiastic in his "veteranizing," which included marching in GAR parades and telling usually fictional accounts of his own war service. In his memoirs, Anderson offered an unsparing and impatient portrait of this irresponsible father and irrepressible comrade. Yet the younger Anderson also wrote with some empathy of Irwin's realization that after leaving the army and starting a family, "he would never be a hero again" and that "all the rest of his life" would never measure up to those few years of his youth. The war, "that universal, passionate, death-spitting thing," would have to last a lifetime, and given the elder Anderson's profound inability to make a consistent living, that experience was the only thing elevating him above a semiemployed laborer.[49]

Despite his best efforts, Irwin Anderson could not force his view of himself into a reality. And in a sense, all veterans lost control of their legacies. They certainly remained relevant to most Americans during the two generations following the war, but that relevance applied to only a small portion of veterans' lives. And the extent to which they were remembered solely for what they did for a few years in their youth was the extent to which they became both more and less than real men.

Before the Civil War, most Americans did not know anyone who had served in the military, let alone in deadly combat. Only .2 percent of the U.S. population had served in the Mexican-American War or the War of 1812. But after Appomattox, virtually everyone had a relative or neighbor or friend who had served in the Union or Confederate army. Union veterans alone made up just under 6 percent of the population in 1865; twenty-five years

later, they remained 2 percent of the population. And although Revolutionary War veterans had been honored, especially during the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the decentralized and disjointed nature of military service during that war reduced the chances that anyone would be recognized mainly for his service to the new country.[50]

But being aware of Civil War veterans differed from understanding them. And doing so became more difficult as veterans grew older and began to withdraw from the larger community. "The 'old soldier' slowly eliminates himself from the mass," Charles Dudley Warner wrote in 1893, "and begins to take, and to make us take, a romantic view of his career. There was one event in his life, and his personality in it looms larger and larger as he recedes from it." In addition to their physical separation in veterans' organizations, soldiers' homes, and the pension system, veterans emotionally separated themselves from the rest of society, thus creating a specific set of images. "The past centres about him and his great achievement, and the whole of life is seen in the light of it." Although members of the veteran's generation have moved on, and although the current generation "looks upon the hero as an illustration in the story of the war, which it reads like history," the war remained very much alive and living in the veteran's memory and perceptions. Although Warner had been of military age during the war, he had worked instead as a Hartford newspaperman. Perhaps because he could have but did not serve, Warner clearly perceived the tension between veterans and nonveterans in Gilded Age America that lies at the center of this book.[51]

The central questions that explore that tension are simple: How did white veterans of the Union and Confederate armies reinsert themselves into civilian life? How did Americans perceive veterans—not as somewhat abstract heroes and representations of patriotic values but as men? Gilded Age Americans witnessed many versions of veterans and developed many ways of thinking about them. *Sing Not War* considers the old soldiers beyond the GAR and UCV halls and the holiday parades and sentimental songs, examining the public expectations of Civil War veterans and the ways in which veterans met or failed to meet those expectations. The last third of the nineteenth century was the first era in which veterans comprised a visible, assertive cohort in American culture. Exploring the ways in which veterans and the idea of veterans were most present in American life reveals that "veteran" is not a single concept but a social construction with multiple meanings and uses.

*Sing Not War*

The chapter titles for this book are borrowed from Walt Whitman's poem "A Carol of Harvest, for 1867," which was published in the *New York Galaxy* in September 1867. Whitman revised and renamed the poem "The Return of the Heroes" for the 1881–82 version of *Leaves of Grass*. The poem begins and ends with Whitmanesque celebrations of America's bounty—"Fecund America! Today . . . Thou grown'st with riches"—but a number of stanzas urge the "returning heroes" to leave war behind, to immerse themselves in hard work, to plow and plant and harvest so that they create rather than destroy. Yet Whitman recognized that not all of the men would march easily or successfully from the battlefield to wheat or cotton fields. Although the title change from celebrating America's capacity to absorb the wages of war to commemorating the returning soldiers might be part of the sentimentalization of Civil War soldiers that characterized the 1880s and 1890s, Whitman recognized the irony in the fact that many of those "heroes" would hardly have heroic lives.[52]

> When last I sang, sad was my voice;
> Sad were the shows around me, with deafening noises of hatred,
>     and smoke of conflict;
> In the midst of the armies, the Heroes, I stood,
> Or pass'd with slow step through the wounded and dying.
>
> But now I sing not War,
> Nor the measur'd march of soldiers, nor the tents of camps,
> Nor the regiments hastily coming up, deploying in line of battle.
>
> No more the dead and wounded;
> No more the sad, unnatural shows of War.
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> For an army heaves in sight—O another gathering army!
> Swarming, trailing on the rear—O you dread, accruing army!
> O you regiments so piteous, with your mortal diarrhoea! with your
>     fever!
> O my land's maimed darlings! with the plenteous bloody bandage
>     and the crutch!
> Lo! your pallid army follow'd!
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

I saw the return of the Heroes;
(Yet the heroes never surpass'd, shall never return;
Them, that day, I saw not.)
. . . . . . . . . .

I saw the processions of armies,
Streaming northward, their work done, they paused awhile in
clusters of mighty camps.

No holiday soldiers!—youthful, yet veterans;
Worn, swart, handsome, strong, of the stock of homestead and
workshop,
Harden'd of many a long campaign and sweaty march,
Inured on many a hard-fought, bloody field.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

A pause—the armies wait;
A million flush'd, embattled conquerors wait;
The world, too, waits—then, soft as breaking night, and sure as dawn,
They melt—they disappear.
. . . . . . . . . . .

Melt, melt away, ye armies! disperse, ye blue-clad soldiers!
Resolve ye back again—give up, for good, your deadly arms;
Other the arms, the fields henceforth for you, or South or North, or
East or West,
With saner wars—sweet wars—life-giving wars.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Toil on, Heroes! harvest the products!
Not alone on those warlike fields, the Mother of All,
With dilated form and lambent eyes, watch'd you.

Toil on, Heroes! toil well! Handle the weapons well!
The Mother of All—yet here, as ever, she watches you.