

# Memory of War

*A New Lens on the War Between the States—and Its Aftermath*

“Before bodies were riddled by bullets . . . before men returned home maimed and crippled, the American people were captivated by the idea of a quick and glorious conclusion to the Civil War,” writes historian Peter S. Carmichael in the new National Park Service publication, *The Civil War Remembered*. Editors John Latschar and Robert Sutton ask, “Didn’t that generation—like others—have to learn that war, once launched, is difficult to control, has a tendency to become ungovernable, refuses to be managed logically, takes turns that no one anticipates?”

This April marked the 150th anniversary of the Civil War’s opening shots. While the conflict itself is well-documented and understood, what is not is the “why,” the passion that accounted for killing on such a scope that it changed society forever. With essays by leading scholars, *The Civil War Remembered* frames a context for the more than 75 Civil War battlefields and sites immortalized in the National Park System.

While slavery’s moral aspects are often discussed, its economic dimensions are not. In 1861, four million African Americans were in bondage. Senator James Hammond of South Carolina cast their value as capital that would not be willingly relinquished: “Were ever any people, civilized or savage, persuaded by argument, human or divine, to surrender voluntarily two thousand million dollars?”

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Historian James McPherson writes of “two socioeconomic and cultural systems” vying for dominance. The industrial, free-labor North seemed to have the edge, but that was by no means clear at the time. For most of the years from 1789 to 1861, southern slaveholders were president, McPherson writes, and two-thirds of the Speakers of the House were southerners. Most Supreme Court justices were from the South as well. And when the South did secede, it was not only because it feared the end of slavery. A prosperous, dynamic Confederacy was eager to expand into new territory: Cuba, and possibly Mexico and Central America, in addition to the American West.

**ABOVE:** The only known photograph of an African American soldier with his family. **RIGHT:** Girl in mourning dress with picture of her father, a cavalryman.

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**web** *The Civil War Remembered*, published by Eastern National, can be purchased for \$10.95 in national park bookstores and online at <http://civilwar.eparks.com>.

Far from the carnage, profound economic repercussions were taking shape. When Southern democrats abandoned Congress, Republicans, with Lincoln’s help, pushed through laws stalled for years by Southern opposition. “Many of these bills set the course for the United States to emerge by war’s end . . . poised for a massive and rapid



westward expansion,” writes National Park Service historian Benjamin T. Arrington, positioned “to establish and dominate America’s industrial and economic future.”

While the idea of a sovereign Confederacy died at Appomattox, its ideology carried over through the Civil Rights Era, and in arguments today about states’ rights. Though we are a century-and-a-half removed from a war that claimed over 600,000 lives, we continue to cherish—and debate—the principles that brought bloodshed. *The Civil War Remembered* examines the war’s profound reverberations throughout society: how it changed ideas about death and spirituality, its impact on women, how Reconstruction came to an end, how it transformed our conceptions of race and freedom.

Like the fading outline of entrenchments in the woods at Fredericksburg, the war is at once distant and immediate. It was a cataclysm that touched every American, and continues to make itself felt today. It calls across time to be reckoned with.

