

# ‘HISTORY IN BRONZE’

## Reshaping National Narratives of Civil War Memory through Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery, 1868-1914

*This paper explores the history of Confederate memorial at Arlington National Cemetery from 1868 to 1914 and its role in sectional reconciliation in the half century following the Civil War. It argues that Arlington served as a symbolic arena in which former Unionists and Confederates negotiated their postbellum political relationship through acts of Confederate memorial, beginning with the conduct of Decoration Days and culminating in the construction of the Confederate Monument at Arlington in 1914. It further argues that this process of negotiation had implications for national narratives surrounding reconciliation that developed in the early nineteenth century.*

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“On fame’s eternal camping ground their silent tents are spread, And glory guards with solemn round, the bivouac of the dead.”<sup>1</sup> So reads the inscription over the McClellan Gate, the original entrance to Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>2</sup> Remembered today as a “hallowed ground” and “a national shrine,” Arlington’s Civil War origins could hardly be characterized as dignified or respectful; in reality, the cemetery was a bitterly politicized arena during and after the war.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1868, Arlington’s inherent symbolism and the cemetery’s growing national prominence positioned it as a microcosm of bitter sectionalism, and later, of reconciliation; in a sense, it began to hold not just the bodies of the war’s dead, but the political sentiments of its survivors.

Within Arlington’s grounds, former adversaries negotiated their postbellum relationship and advanced their respective narratives of the war through burial and memorial. From 1868 to 1898, commemoration through Decoration Days would reflect the sectionalism besetting the nation and its slow cession to the beginnings of reconciliation. From 1898 to 1914, the construction of the Confederate section and Confederate Monument at Arlington would transform the cemetery into a nationally significant arena for grappling with reconciliation. Rather than just mirroring national debates, as in the case of pre-1898 Decoration Days, negotiating the terms of Confederate memorial at Arlington would shape, reflect, and legitimize emerging political, racial, and historical narratives of the Civil War. This process of narrative creation would culminate with the construction in 1914 of a Confederate Monument at Arlington—“a pro-southern textbook illustrated in bronze”—at the heart of a Union cemetery, in an event at which the country’s first Southern-born president since the Civil War would “declare this chapter in the history of the United States closed and ended.”<sup>4</sup>

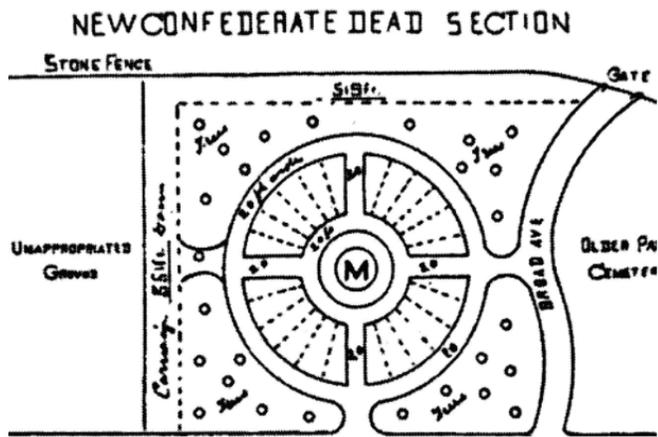
This paper seeks to analyze how former Confederates and Unionists negotiated sectional reconciliation through the



Unveiling of Confederate Monument, Arlington Cemetery, VA (June 4, 1914)

Source: Library of Congress, National Photo Company Collection

arena of Confederate memorial at Arlington from 1868 to 1914, and how those negotiations reflected and legitimized new narratives of Civil War memory. It will argue that white former Confederates and Unionists alike accepted the Confederate Monument at Arlington because it provided an arena in which both sides could advance their postbellum narrative of choice: for the Union, that of a country reunited and moving forward, and for the Confederacy, that the Civil



Layout of Confederate Section

Source: *Monuments to the Lost Cause*, 151.

War had been a noble cause, fought for conviction in the Constitution and not over the right to own slaves. Because the focus of this paper is public memory of the Civil War as constructed through public events, its analysis will primarily utilize press coverage in major newspapers of the time from both the North and South, as well as the *Confederate Veteran* and *National Tribune*, the most prominent Confederate and Union publications, respectively, in the nation. This approach differs from previous scholarship, which has disproportionately concerned itself with the Confederate perspective on memorial at Arlington and focused more on the Monument itself than the events surrounding its creation. The paper will begin with relevant background on Arlington and explain why Civil War veterans ascribed such significance to it, discuss Decoration Days from 1868 to 1898 and sectionalism at the cemetery, and conclude with a discussion of the development of the Confederate Monument at Arlington from 1898 to 1914 and its role in shaping national memory of the Civil War.

### THE HISTORY OF ARLINGTON: OWNERSHIP AND SYMBOLISM

The emotion surrounding death naturally makes any cemetery significant to the relations of those buried in it, but Arlington, even in its early years, was differentiated from other national cemeteries by the significance former Union and Confederate soldiers ascribed to it. While Arlington would become emotionally meaningful with time, given the large number of soldiers buried there, its initial significance at the war's end and even prior was symbolic and rooted in the estate's history and location. Arlington was originally developed into an estate by George Washington Parke Custis, George Washington's adopted son, and in 1857 was inherited by the wife of Robert E. Lee and became his home.<sup>5</sup> The estate sits on elevated ground overlooking the Potomac River and, by extension, Washington, D.C.; in the modern landscape, it lies directly across the Potomac from the Lincoln Memorial.<sup>6</sup> The symbolism of the estate's location on the line dividing the United States and the Confederacy, its proxim-

ity to the national (federal) capital, and its association with the Lee family, and by default, the Confederacy, would affect conceptualizations of Arlington after the war—including, eventually, perceptions of the importance of a Confederate monument at Arlington. For these reasons, the new cemetery “served as a symbolic battlefield” after the war.<sup>7</sup>

In practical terms, Arlington's location was also important to federal forces during the war. Arlington was “not only a choice piece of real estate but also one essential to Washington's defenses”; its proximity and elevation endangered the capital, including the White House.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, Virginia's secession was immediately followed by federal seizure of Arlington, from which the Lees had already fled.<sup>9</sup> Three years into its occupation, Arlington began serving as a cemetery, at first unofficially as Brig. Gen. Montgomery Meigs buried dead Union soldiers at Arlington without authorization, and continuing after Secretary of War Edwin Stanton accepted Meigs' proposal that Arlington serve as a national military cemetery.<sup>10</sup> This arrangement served the Union's need for burial space and satisfied Meigs' “personal spite” toward Robert E. Lee for his choice to side with the Confederacy.<sup>11</sup> Meigs' tactic—burying as many enemy dead as possible on beloved family grounds, some literally in the garden—was effective.<sup>12</sup> The Lees, despite their best efforts, would never return to Arlington.<sup>13</sup> Their continuing claims to ownership were, however, vindicated by the Supreme Court in 1882, when the Court ruled that the federal government's seizure had been illegal and the Lees were the rightful owners of the estate.<sup>14</sup> Though Arlington's use as a cemetery did not change—the Lee heirs agreed to sell the property to the federal government, securing its ownership—it is worth noting that “the debate [over Arlington's legal ownership] helped to elevate Arlington's status” to “a ground hallowed in the national imagination.”<sup>15</sup>

### DECORATION DAYS AND SECTIONALISM, 1868-1898

After the war, honoring the dead logically followed burying them. The first “Decoration Day” (the precursor to Memorial Day) was celebrated on May 1, 1865, by newly-freed blacks in South Carolina.<sup>16</sup> Beginning in 1868, Union veterans who were members of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) followed suit and began honoring their dead at Decoration Days, on which veterans held ceremonies and decorated the dead's graves, usually with flowers, in late May.<sup>17</sup> Confederate Memorial Day, a separate event initially held more disparately throughout the South between late April and early June, began in 1866.<sup>18</sup> Though a seemingly innocuous act, for both sides, grave decoration was a deeply emotional act of mourning, made political by the nature of death in a civil war.<sup>19</sup> As *The New York Times* put it in 1875, “[Decoration Day] ceremonies [were] intended not simply to denote the admiration which the survivors cherish...but also to denote attachment and affection for the cause in which they laid down their lives.”<sup>20</sup>



Confederate monument "The New South" in Arlington  
Source: *Library of Congress*, c. 1912-1930

### Sectionalism and Decoration Days at Arlington

Unsurprisingly, Decoration Days at Arlington initially served as an instrument of Union exclusion of Confederates. Though most of the dead at Arlington were Union soldiers, a small number of Confederate dead had been buried there in graves marked only by wooden headboards reading "rebel."<sup>21</sup> The federal government, supported by the G.A.R., initially prohibited any decoration of these graves, before deciding several years later to allow Confederates to decorate their graves on a different day than Unionists.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary press coverage in the first decade following the war makes clear that former Confederates not only resented the prohibition on decoration, but regarded it as a proxy for more general Union attitudes toward, and rejection of, reconciliation. Indeed, Louisville's *Courier-Journal* was forced to make a habit of decrying former Unionists on Decoration Days, often on its front page, repetitively describing the prohibition as "something more than human malignity...absolutely devilish," "an opportunity for the usual display of malignity," a "petty piece of malignity," and indicative of "who it is that wants to bury the bitter memories of the war."<sup>23</sup> Nashville's

*Republican Banner* similarly denounced the Unionists as "mean-spirited scoundrels who war only with the dead" in 1870.<sup>24</sup> G.A.R. members gained coverage throughout the South in that year for removing decorations that had been placed on Confederate graves at Arlington by Confederate women and threatening to arrest the women for any further attempts at decoration.<sup>25</sup>

This treatment was intentional, and Unionists loathed Confederates in equal measure. David Blight has written that "Memorial Day rituals did their part in helping many Northerners become early believers in reunion, at least its ultimate necessity," but in their early years, Decoration Days at Arlington were bitterly sectional and actively conducted to exclude Confederates.<sup>26</sup> The G.A.R. members who made headlines in 1870, for example, could hardly have accidentally removed the decorations honoring Confederates. In 1869, *The New York Times* provided an illustrative example of the animosity felt in the North:

Considerable bitter feeling and animosity appears to have been aroused by the distinction made between the Union dead and the rebel dead in the solemnities of yesterday and to-day. . . Rev. Mr. NEWMAN, Chaplain of the Senate, in his oration yesterday, held that the representatives of this nation could never sanction the decoration of the Confederate soldiers' graves until it had been first decided by the Christian Church to pay honors to Judas Iscariot, and until we had ourselves agreed to commemorate BENEDICT ARNOLD...at Arlington yesterday a few flowers were thrown on rebel graves. In more than one instance the military interfered and ordered them to be removed.<sup>27</sup>

The comparison between the Confederacy and some of history's great traitors—Judas and Benedict Arnold—speaks to the venom that remained between the former adversaries.

Even after Confederate grave decoration was permitted, Unionists resented the notion that Confederates would be allowed to decorate their graves on the same day, describing it as "an insult...too gross to be quietly overlooked."<sup>28</sup> In short, Decoration Day was a tense event. But by the 1880s, "[t]he fervor with which Americans practiced the rituals of Memorial Day began to fade."<sup>29</sup> At Arlington, even though Decoration Day was no less passionate, sectionalism was giving way to displays of reconciliation as the focus of commemoration shifted to "the realm of sentiment" and "the soldier and his sacrifice" rather than the causes of the Civil War.<sup>30</sup> An early indicator of this was the G.A.R.'s decision in 1883 to begin to decorate Confederate graves on Decoration Day, a practice news coverage "believed [would] not be abandoned."<sup>31</sup>

### The Role of the Spanish-American War in National Reconciliation

Though many historians attribute reconciliation to the Spanish-American War in 1898, David Blight more accurately captures the relationship: the war "solidif[ied]" but did not

create the reconciliationist sentiments that already existed.<sup>32</sup> Press coverage in the decade prior to the war was already singing the praises of reconciliation. In 1887, *The Washington Post's* Decoration Day coverage reported that “Past animosities were forgotten, and where they lay side by side, the grave of the soldier who wore the gray was decked with flowers no less beautiful than those placed by the hands of the comrades on the grave of him who wore the blue.”<sup>33</sup> Such sentiments would be common throughout the 1890s. By 1894, the *Courier-Journal's* front page coverage of Decoration Day noted that “Whatever of bitterness may have been the inheritance from the war seemed to have been forgotten.”<sup>34</sup> An 1895 article in the *Journal* on national cemeteries noted that nationally, the “custom of the joint decoration of Union and Confederate soldiers’ graves [was] growing more frequent every year.”<sup>35</sup> In 1897, a year before the Spanish-American War, the focus and title of *The Washington Post's* article on Decoration Day was “Bitterness Engendered by the War Has Passed Away.”<sup>36</sup> And most tellingly, in 1900, two years after the war, coverage in the Unionist *National Tribune*

### ‘HISTORY IN BRONZE’: CREATING THE CONFEDERATE SECTION AND MONUMENT, 1898 TO 1914

Compared to the period from 1898 to 1914, the pre-1898 era of memorial at Arlington was simple: it was limited largely to Decoration Days and reflected a broader national shift away from sectionalism rooted in lingering resentments. In contrast, as the nation began to move toward reconciliation and the South in particular generated new narratives of the Civil War’s causes, the creation of the Confederate section and Confederate Monument at Arlington would both reflect and legitimize emergent narratives of the war and reconciliation. Ultimately, the Confederate Monument at Arlington would embody the South’s new narrative of the Civil War as a brave battle for constitutional and states’ rights, rather than slavery. In permitting the Monument to be placed at Arlington, former Unionists tacitly accepted this narrative and assured it a physical and symbolic place in the national landscape, in exchange for which they could advance their own narrative of complete national reconciliation.

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**“The Confederate Monument itself would reflect how reconciliation was ‘achievable in the end only through new regimes of racial subjugation.’”**

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described the Spanish-American War’s role in reconciliation as destroying “a remnant of sectional bitterness.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the war could more accurately be described as an event whose significance for reconciliation was providing a political stage for proponents to argue the nation was reunited and take steps to make that claim a reality, as, most significantly, William McKinley would.

On the whole, the press offered positive commentary on Decoration Day events that clearly viewed mutual decoration as an important step in reconciling North and South, in contrast to the resentful commentary of the 1870s that perpetuated sectionalism. However, it is important to note that while Arlington was a particularly significant burial ground to both sides and often the focus of national attention on Decoration Day, it was not unique in its commemorative practices, except perhaps for the passion with which they continued to be held for decades. Nashville’s *Daily American*, for example, describes similar commemorative practices across the country in 1884.<sup>38</sup> But in contrast to post-1898 memorialization at Arlington, which was nationally covered and more politically complex, Arlington’s Decoration Days, though conducted in a nationally prominent setting, were typical acts of national memorialization.

#### Reconciliation, Arlington, and the McKinley Presidency

William McKinley’s presidency would prove to be a turning point in the treatment of Confederate memorial at Arlington and national reconciliation more broadly. Elected in 1896 on an “economic and emotional appeal for reconciliation as protection against the [populist] ‘mob,’” McKinley’s interest in reconciliation was rooted in political necessity and his own personal convictions.<sup>39</sup> A Civil War veteran himself, “[h]e had experienced war and never wanted to see it again.”<sup>40</sup> As a result, “the furthering of sectional reconciliation was one of the President’s explicit war aims.”<sup>41</sup> More broadly, and of consequence for Confederate memorial at Arlington, McKinley served at a time when it was becoming clear that postbellum memory would take the form of “white supremacist memory combine[d] with reconciliation.”<sup>42</sup> The Confederate Monument itself would reflect how reconciliation was “achievable in the end only through new regimes of racial subjugation.”<sup>43</sup>

Whereas before memorial had been limited to individual and transient acts of commemoration on Decoration Days, McKinley’s actions would lead to the creation of a permanent Confederate section within the cemetery and subsequently, the development of the section’s Confederate monument. This process began in 1898 not with the Spanish-American War itself, but with McKinley’s post-war Peace Jubilee speech in Atlanta in December. The message was oversimplified, but direct: “Sectional lines no longer mar the map of the United

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States. Sectional feeling no longer holds back the love we bear each other."<sup>44</sup> In turn, McKinley called for the federal government, "in the spirit of fraternity," to bear responsibility "in the care of the graves of the Confederate soldiers."<sup>45</sup> The sentiment was widely lauded by Confederate veterans and in the Northern press.<sup>46</sup> *The Los Angeles Times* went so far as to title its coverage of the speech "The Death of Sectionalism."<sup>47</sup> Within a year, the process of reintering every dead Confederate in the Washington, D.C. area began.<sup>48</sup> Testifying to Arlington's national status, this process would pave the way for "a national effort to identify and appropriately mark the graves of [all] Confederates buried in the North."<sup>49</sup> In June 1900 Congress passed a bill to authorize and fund reinterment, and by October 1901 the Confederate section, the new resting place of 264 Confederate soldiers, was complete.<sup>50</sup>

The creation of a Confederate section was undoubtedly a weightier act of memorialization than Decoration Days had been. The section was naturally permanent, and Southern opponents' reactions to the proposal suggests that the prospect of the Unionist federal government handling Confederate corpses was still emotionally fraught.<sup>51</sup> As a consequence, the section's creation was politically contentious among Confederates and exposed the remaining vestiges of sectionalism in public debate, though notably, the G.A.R. did not object to the section's creation.<sup>52</sup> Central to the debate was whether allowing Confederates to be buried in this manner—in Arlington, but in their own section—was, from different perspectives, too sectionalist, or too reconciliationist. While some, like McKinley, viewed reinterment as an act of reconciliation, others disagreed. *The Washington Post*, for example, wrote that while it generally thought Confederates should be buried in the South, the Arlington proposal was unobjectionable and "contain[ed] no hint of that ridiculous and offensive 'reconciliation' with which the professionals of both sides continually vex the ears of serious men."<sup>53</sup>

Some simply didn't wish to compromise; several women's monuments associations opposed the section.<sup>54</sup> These women, representing the Daughters of the Confederacy and a memorial association in Richmond, apparently regarded the Confederate Veterans as "too accommodationist" of Republicans and feared that the G.A.R. wanted to reinter the Confederate dead in order to defile their graves.<sup>55</sup> More pragmatically, they were also concerned for their own continuing relevance.<sup>56</sup> These concerns speak to the degree of emotion that remained in remembering the war and the ways memorial could be leveraged to suit personal needs and ideologies—in this case, as a political outlet for Confederate women. In contrast, pragmatism also motivated some supporters of the section more than concerns for reconciliation. These supporters argued that gathering these dead in one place would make their graves more accessible, presumably for honoring them.<sup>57</sup> Others noted the resources at the federal government's disposal to care for the graves.<sup>58</sup> Supporters would win the day, and the section was completed.

## Creating the Confederate Monument

The section itself carried political and symbolic significance as a location for Confederate dead in a historically Union cemetery, but Confederate memorialists were not yet finished. The graves of the new Confederate section had been arranged in concentric circles around an empty center, and within several years of the section's completion former Confederates would seek to erect a monument in this space.<sup>59</sup> Secretary of War William H. Taft approved the United Daughters of the Confederacy's request to do so in 1906.<sup>60</sup> The Daughters would undertake extensive fundraising efforts that underscored the importance of the monument to them, making appeals that explicitly addressed the attractive symbolism of placing a monument at Arlington.<sup>61</sup> Appeals in the papers often noted Arlington's proximity to the national capital, the visiting tourists the monument could reach, and Arlington's history as Robert E. Lee's home.<sup>62</sup> Underscoring the monument's importance, fundraising reports were regularly published in the *Confederate Veteran* for years, reporting to all subscribers who had donated and how much.<sup>63</sup>

Fundraising proceeded steadily, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy would hold their 1912 convention in Washington specifically for the laying of the Confederate Monument's cornerstone; in the spirit of reconciliation, perhaps, this event was advertised as their first convention outside the South, even though this was not the case.<sup>64</sup> The complete monument would be unveiled on June 4, 1914.<sup>65</sup> These events themselves, as well as the press coverage of them, reflected and advanced new narratives about the war. Beyond lauding reconciliation, the "perpetual national unity" that had been achieved, and the Monument's role as "emblematic" of that unity, these events publicized new and nobler narratives about the causes of the Civil War.<sup>66</sup> In this sanitized and de-racialized retelling, the South had fought not for slavery but for the just cause of sovereignty; it had stood for "constitutional rights that had been conceded by the fathers," testing the legal right of secession.<sup>67</sup> Southerners had fought not as "rebels" but as patriots, "who fell in defense of what they felt was right, and in defense of their homes."<sup>68</sup> Consequently, the laying of the cornerstone and unveiling of the Confederate Monument reflected narratives of the war in which "white supremacist memory [had] combine[d] with reconciliation" and legitimized them by serving as occasions to proffer these narratives at an important national event and symbolically, entrench them at the heart of Arlington—which Confederates now focused on not as a Union cemetery, but as the former home of Robert E. Lee.<sup>69</sup>

Given the narratives surrounding the Monument and Confederate excitement for its unveiling, its design should come as no surprise. Titled "New South," the thirty-two foot bronze monument presents a visual narrative that lauds Southern agriculture in a context that ignores slavery and celebrates the Confederate dead.<sup>70</sup> It is topped by the figure of a woman meant to represent the South and its agricultural history,



The Southeast Corner of the Frieze on the Confederate Monument (2011)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

with one hand offering a wreath and the other touching a plow; the press covered it as a symbol of peace.<sup>71</sup> Below this figure is a frieze with Minerva at its center, holding a shield inscribed with “The Constitution.”<sup>72</sup> Confederate soldiers, bold, heroic, their chests outthrust, “walk determinedly toward the front lines of battle.”<sup>73</sup> Though honoring Southern agriculture, the only slaves depicted are a “body servant” and “black mammy,” both “faithful” and unharmed by slavery.<sup>74</sup> Both are examples of a central element of the Lost Cause narrative, “the image of the faithful slave,” and thus represent the warped version of racial history the monument presented.<sup>75</sup> The monument has two inscriptions of note that directly express its version of history: the first, “They have beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks,” and the second, “Not for fame; not for place, or for rank; not lured by ambition or goaded by necessity; but in simple obedience to duty as they understood it, these men suffered all, sacrificed all, dared all—and died.”<sup>76</sup> In every regard, the monument thus inaccurately portrays the antebellum South and the nature of the Civil War, but perfectly captures the new narrative of Confederates as courageous constitutionalists to whom slavery was unimportant beyond the legal questions it raised.

### The Confederate Monument’s Implications for Civil War Memory

“[N]o less than a pro-southern textbook illustrated in bronze,” the Confederate Monument’s design obviously reflected the new narratives Southerners were generating of legal and deracialized causes of war.<sup>77</sup> But it also legitimized them by placing them at the heart of Arlington—and by allowing the Monument to be constructed in Arlington, the federal government, still associated with the North, tacitly condoned those narratives. Technically, on a ceremonial and symbolic level, the United Daughters of the Confederacy had

presented the Arlington monument to the American government, and the president had accepted it.<sup>78</sup> In exchange, former Unionists gained their own opportunity to advance the politically-advantageous narrative of reconciliation that remained as useful as it was during McKinley’s time. To quote David Blight, in the years it took to create the monument, “[i]nvo[ki]ng images of the Blue and Gray [reuniting] provided a kind of mantra for anyone who needed to serve the political or business interests of sectional comity and social cohesion.”<sup>79</sup> Wilson’s proclamation at the Monument’s unveiling that “this chapter in the history of the United States [is] closed and ended” was hardly true; he was, after all the same man who just days earlier had sparked outrage by initially refusing the G.A.R.’s invitation to speak at its Memorial Day ceremony but accepting the Confederates Veterans’ invitation to speak at theirs.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, though G.A.R. leaders attended the Monument’s unveiling and engaged in reconciliationist rhetoric, the *National Tribune* had curtly noted just five years earlier that “There is no monument in Arlington to the Union dead.”<sup>81</sup> What the G.A.R.’s attendance and federal approval for the Monument did signal, if not true reconciliation, was the willingness of former Unionists to accept the South’s narrative of constitutionalism because politically placating and cooperating with the South fit the Union’s narrative of a reunited nation.

Wilson could thus use the unveiling to wax poetic about the virtues of democracy and a united nation even as Southerners celebrated the sanitized monument as “history in bronze,” as he himself engaged in an “increasingly aggressive program of racial segregation in federal agencies,” and as black Americans across the South continued to be subjected to racial violence and political and social oppression.<sup>82</sup> More accurately, then, the Confederate Monument served the political needs of both white sides. As much as it symbolized white former Union and Confederate adversaries reconciling to their mutual political advantage, the Monument also symbolized that the nation’s reconciliation had been “achiev[ed]...through new regimes of racial subjugation.”<sup>83</sup> It is small wonder that the process of creating the Monument, an enterprise stretching across nearly a decade, was rarely, if ever, covered in the black press; the *Afro American Ledger* of Baltimore, for example, so close to Washington, made no mention of the monument’s unveiling in its pages.<sup>84</sup> Two days after President Wilson lauded the monument’s unveiling as a pivotal moment in American history, the *Washington Bee* broke its pattern of silence and published a scathing op-ed that made no mention of the monument, but was a clear reaction to it, asking directly: “Has It Come To This?”<sup>85</sup> Striking at the discordance between the Civil War’s true origins and the version of history offered by political leaders, and between the war’s promise for African Americans’ rights and the continued denial of them half a century later, the writers stripped bare the reconciliationist rhetoric of the new white narrative of the Civil War: “There may be unity on the subject of physical bravery, but we seriously question the unity of the ‘spirits

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of men.”<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, of course, they would have to wait half a century more for the federal government to defend their rights.

### **CONCLUSION**

First through Decoration Days and later through Confederate memorial, Arlington National Cemetery would provide an arena unique by virtue of its history and symbolism in which former Unionists and Confederates could grapple with remembering and memorializing the Civil War. Decoration Days would prove an effective instrument of sectionalism, but by the 1880s practices at Arlington and around the country hinted at the weakening sectionalist fervor through-

out the nation. By 1898, reconciliationist rhetoric was sufficiently powerful and Arlington so nationally significant that there national leaders could publicly and symbolically legitimize new narratives of the war. Though the Confederate Monument itself is undeniably pro-Confederate and ahistorical, simultaneously accepting its narrative of the war in Arlington's physical landscape and in the national political landscape suited a reconciliationist Northern narrative that could coexist with new Southern narratives of the war. The price, of course, was the white North's forfeiture of the fight for racial equality and national normalization of a false narrative, the consequences of which would reverberate far beyond the hills of Arlington. 

## Endnotes

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- [3] Robert M. Poole, *On Hallowed Ground: The Story of Arlington National Cemetery* (New York: Walker & Company, 2009), 5; "Mission and Vision," *Arlington National Cemetery*, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/About/Mission-Vision>; Laurie Burgess, "Buried in the Rose Garden: Levels of Meaning at Arlington National Cemetery and the Robert E. Lee Memorial," in *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape*, ed. Paul A. Shackel (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 160.
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- [5] Poole, *On Hallowed Ground*, 11.
- [6] *Ibid.*, 22.
- [7] Burgess, "Buried in the Rose Garden," 160.
- [8] Poole, *On Hallowed Ground*, 22.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 25-26.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 58-61.
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- [12] Burgess, "Buried in the Rose Garden," 162.
- [13] Poole, *On Hallowed Ground*, 81-83.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 92-93.
- [15] *Ibid.*, 82-83, 92-93.
- [16] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 65.
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- [18] *Ibid.*, 77.
- [19] *Ibid.*, 78.
- [20] "Decoration Day," *New York Times*, May 25, 1875.
- [21] "The Confederate Dead: A Simple Memorial Service at Arlington—The Floral Offerings," *Washington Post*, June 14, 1878.
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- [23] "Desecration," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), June 1, 1869; "Decoration of the Confederate Graves at Arlington Today Forbidden," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), May 21, 1873; "Front Page 4 – No Title," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), May 21, 1873.
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- [26] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 73.
- [27] "Decoration Day—The Erlanger-Armand Suit—Cuban Matters," *New York Times*, May 31, 1869.
- [28] "Decoration Day at Arlington—The Back-Pay Congress Allowing Indians to Starve—The Vienna Commission," *New York Times*, May 20, 1873.
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