William & Mary
CHARTERED 1693

W&M ScholarWorks

Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

2018

Memories in Stone/Reconstructing the Street

Samuel C. Florer
College of William and Mary - Arts & Sciences, florersam@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation

Florer, Samuel C., "Memories in Stone/Reconstructing the Street" (2018). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects.* William & Mary. Paper 1550153826.
http://dx.doi.org/10.21220/s2-27p7-h055

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

Memories in Stone/Reconstructing the Street

Samuel C. Florer

Yorktown, Virginia

Bachelor of Arts, College of William & Mary, 2015

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of The College of William & Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

College of William & Mary
August 2018

© Copyright by Samuel C. Florer 2018, This work is made available under a
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 license.

APPROVAL PAGE

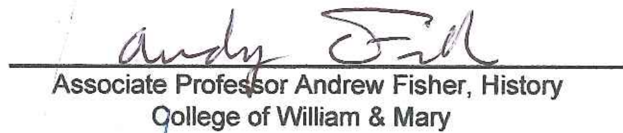
This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

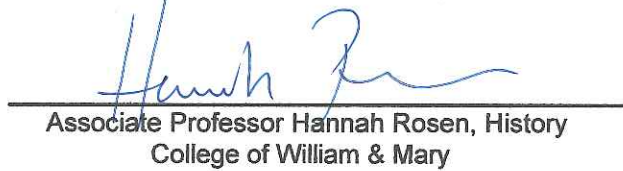
Samuel Charles Harrison Florer

May 7, 2018

Committee Chair
Associate Professor Hiroshi Kitamura, History
College of William & Mary



Associate Professor Andrew Fisher, History
College of William & Mary



Associate Professor Hannah Rosen, History
College of William & Mary

ABSTRACT

Memories in Stone: The Confederate Catawba Monument

Controversies surrounding Confederate monuments and symbols have brought increased attention to issues of Civil War memory. Often overlooked, Native Americans play an important role in the ways in which some people remember the conflict. A particularly interesting example of this role exists in Fort Mill, South Carolina. In 1900, the town unveiled a limestone monument to Catawba Indians who served in the Confederate Army. These Native people had a specific historical relationship with local and state authorities that shaped how the white ruling class formed a particular memorialization of the Catawba after the Civil War. Furthermore, the two leading local figures in the monument's creation had strong personal motivations to sponsor it. These factors combined with national trends in Civil War memorialization to make the Catawba monument a unique, yet still representative, example of Civil War memory making. Unique in that the design and message of the monument served a local purpose of permanently enshrining the white population's version of Catawba history in Fort Mill's public space, and representative in that it bolstered the ideals of Lost Cause ideology that swept the country at the turn of the twentieth century. Caught between these powerful ideas were the Catawba themselves, who utilized the beliefs represented by the monument for their own strategic goals.

Reconstructing the Street: Confrontations Over Norfolk's Public Sphere, 1862-1866

On April 16, 1866, several hundred African Americans marched through the streets of Norfolk, Virginia to celebrate the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1866. On the outskirts of town, a fight occurred between white onlookers and black marchers. Violence continued into the night, as white assailants prowled the streets of the city and killed several black people. This violence, which soon became known as the Norfolk Riot, garnered national attention. But it was not an exceptional event. Rather, it was one of many violent contests between white and black people over who had access to, and influence in, Norfolk's public spaces. Reconstruction brought irreversible changes to Norfolk's political and civic status quo. Previously excluded from or constrained within the city's public sphere, formerly enslaved and free black inhabitants seized the opportunities presented by the Civil War to exercise their demands for full access to it. However, white residents consistently resisted these claims, often resorting to organized violence. By examining several violent disputes that took place prior to April 16th, the Norfolk Riot can be contextualized as but one of a series of similar battles between the city's white and black communities centered around control of Norfolk's civic arena.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ii

Intellectual Biography 1

Memories in Stone: The Confederate Catawba Monument 6

Bibliography 39

Reconstructing the Street: Confrontations Over Norfolk's Public Sphere, 1862-1866 41

Bibliography 78

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Hannah Rosen and Dr. Andrew Fisher, under whose direction these papers were written. Their patience, guidance, and criticism throughout the process pushed me to ask deeper questions and write clearer explanations. I am indebted to Dr. Carol Sheriff for her support throughout my academic career and belief in my abilities as a scholar. Her kindness and professionalism is a model for anyone entering academia. I would also like to thank Dr. Leslie Rowland at the University of Maryland for her willingness to help me in my research when I was working under a frighteningly short deadline. Providing me access to and guiding me in the Freedmen and Southern Society Project's materials proved invaluable to my work.

I cannot give enough thanks to my family, without whose encouragement I would not be where I am in life. Their constant support, both tangible and moral, has allowed me to follow my passion, and for that I am forever grateful. Lastly, I cannot express enough gratitude to Jacob. You put up with and got me through existential crises and late-night stresses; nourished me with delicious meals; kept me focused; and, most of all, told me "you can do it."

Intellectual Biography

Over the course of this year's Masters program, I have explored two topics related to the aftermath of the Civil War. Both have helped me come to a deeper understanding of the complex and often overlooked ways in which Americans dealt with the changes brought on by the conflict. Additionally, I believe the themes I have investigated, principally the meaning of monuments and the ways in which urban residents interact in community spaces, are applicable to better understand modern American society.

My paper idea for Andrew Fisher's Settler Colonialism course did not come easily. Having no previous experience with the concept of Settler Colonialism and a very basic understanding of American Indian history, I was uncertain how to tie them in with my general interest in the Civil War and Reconstruction. At first I had hoped to write about Virginia's Pamunkey Indians and their service in the Union Army. However, I quickly found that primary sources related to the Pamunkey were hard to access, especially in the limited time I had. I then considered writing a more broadly centered study on the various allegiances of indigenous people in southern states that joined the Confederacy. This proved to be too broad of a subject that did not have a clear central thesis.

While reading a general history about the involvement of Indians in the Civil War, I came across the case of the Catawba people of South Carolina. The chapter on the Catawba discussed how all of the tribe's men volunteered to join the Confederate Army and that in 1900 local residents of Fort Mill, South

Carolina, erected a monument to their service. Especially in light of the nationwide discussion over the future and meaning of Confederate monuments, it seemed like the perfect topic to explore. And, on a personal level, my previous job working at the American Civil War Museum meant issues related to Civil War memory had recently been part of my everyday life. Additionally, the few pieces of scholarship that mention the Catawba monument only discus its physical features, with very little written on the intent or deeper motivations of those who erected it.

My research discovered that the imagery of Catawba Indians, who had a long history of friendly relations with the region's white inhabitants, was used for two dual, and equally important, purposes. Firstly, the two men who led the efforts to erect the monument (Samuel White and James Spratt) were leaders of the town's Confederate veterans association that had already erected monuments to memorialize other groups that vindicated the Confederate cause; these included statues honoring Confederate soldiers, southern women, and 'loyal' slaves. Therefore, adding Indians to this memorial landscape made the Confederacy seem even more inclusive and righteous.

Additionally, both Spratt and White were businessmen involved with the industrialization of Fort Mill. The Catawba monument, with its imagery of stereotypical Indians and pastoral scenes of untouched wilderness, served as a reassurance to the people of Fort Mill that they would always have a connection to a 'simpler' more 'primitive' past in their memories. The monument also heavily focuses on the friendly relationship between the Catawba and an ancestor of

Spratt, one of the original white settlers in the area. Thus, Spratt was trying to invoke his own native-ness and legitimize his desire to change the town's physical and social landscape in order to open his new textile mills.

I plan on reworking this paper in order to publish it as an article. I believe the Catawba monument incorporates elements common in the histories of many other Confederate and Civil War statues and can be used as a particularly interesting example to highlight the confluence of national and hyper local interests that define the process of memory making. Additionally, I believe it adds to the discussion of how Native American imagery and history has been appropriated and abused by white people in order to further policies aimed at erasing Indians from contemporary society. Therefore, this case study speaks to prominent trends in both Civil War memory studies and Indigenous studies scholarship.

My second semester research topic for Hannah Rosen's Histories of Race seminar also came to me relatively late in the semester. I entered the class knowing I wanted to write about violence during Reconstruction era Virginia. This topic has always interested me, as many of the histories on Reconstruction that I have read downplay the existence of violence in the state and I knew there must be more to explore. However, I was unsure on what aspect to focus on or how to narrow down my broad interest. I spent several weeks simply scrolling through microfilm records of Freedmen's Bureau offices from across the state. While I found some very interesting material, perhaps for use in a future project, I did not

see a common, researchable theme emerge for me to tackle in the limited time I had.

While searching through secondary literature on the topic, I came across an article about the Norfolk Riot of April 1866. Occurring before the well-known riots in Memphis and New Orleans that same summer, the Norfolk event was deemed one of the rationales behind Congress passing the Military Reconstruction Acts in 1867. This seemed like the perfect case study to dive into. Additionally, Dr. Rosen was kind enough to connect me with Dr. Leslie Rowland at the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland. After visiting their archives, I found an abundance of primary source material with which to examine the meaning of violence in the Tidewater, Virginia region during Reconstruction.

My initial plan was to focus on the Norfolk Riot and examine the testimony of African American witnesses and participants to the event, providing a more nuanced account of what happened than what has previously been written. However, only two weeks before the paper's due date, I discovered a PhD thesis where someone had spent over fifteen pages doing just that. Forging ahead, I decided to investigate other acts of violence that occurred before the Norfolk Riot, hoping to place it in context. Unfortunately, my thesis felt too broad and I worried that I was not making a significantly original contribution to the scholarship.

Luckily, after reading my first draft, Dr. Rosen offered some immensely helpful suggestions for how to better focus my argument. This led me to zero in

on the existence of struggles between white and black people over who had access to public spaces in Norfolk during and immediately after the Civil War. By exploring how the violent acts I discovered illuminate racial contests over civic inclusion and ideas of citizenship, I feel like my paper adds to the literature examining urban areas during Reconstruction and contributes a new interpretation of the Norfolk Riot. After some tweaking, I also hope to publish this paper. Working with Dr. Rosen has helped me think more critically about how to write about violence and the importance of not sensationalizing violent acts. I now feel better equipped to analyze violent acts for their deeper social and political discursive meanings.

These two papers connect over their shared exploration of how various groups of people expressed their interpretations of what the Civil War meant to them. Whether it was immediately after the war in Norfolk, Virginia or forty years later in Fort Mill, South Carolina, the fighting that occurred between 1861 and 1865 defined how white, black, and Native American people saw themselves and each other for years to come. We are still dealing with these issues today, as evidenced by national discussions over the future of Civil War monuments, police brutality, and mass incarceration. Therefore, a better understanding of the historical forces at work in modern society will help correct factual misconceptions of the past and hopefully lead to permanent resolutions for the future.

Memories in Stone: The Confederate Catawba Monument

Monuments to the American Civil War appear throughout the American landscape. Across small towns and large cities, rural countryside and suburban sprawl, in the East, West, North and South, stand innumerable permanent reminders of the nation's most turbulent four years. However, permanency can be a subjective status. Thousands of these stone and bronze markers arose after the war to commemorate various aspects of the defeated Confederate cause, a cause dedicated to the continuance and growth of the institution of slavery. In recent years, in reaction to tragic national events such as the Emmanuel AME Church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, and white nationalist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, localities across the country have begun to reassess the meaning and future of their Confederate relics.

Most Americans perceive this reassessment as principally occurring among whites and blacks, especially because Confederate monuments hold extremely emotional and conflicting meanings for the descendants of enslaved people and those who fought to preserve their enslavement. This oversimplifies the complexity that defines Civil War memory. As thousands of Native Americans participated in the conflict and currently live in communities with Civil War monuments of all kinds, the ways in which they experience and shape Civil War memory need to be considered.

Unfortunately, historical scholarship regarding Indigenous participation in issues of Civil War memory is lacking. American Indian involvement in the war

itself remains an understudied field, let alone the ways in which memories of Native peoples' experiences during the war manifest themselves. When historians do discuss the role of Native people in the Civil War, they tend to limit their studies to the various members of the Five Civilized Tribes living in Indian Territory (modern-day Oklahoma), as they had the largest native populations participating in either the Union or Confederate armies. However, and just as importantly, the lives and stories of the thousands of Indian people living in the Southeastern region of the country during the war need to be more deeply explored. Ever since the forced removal of large numbers of Southeastern natives in the mid-nineteenth century, historians have largely stopped writing about those who remained. While many anthropologists and archaeologists have contributed meaningful studies, especially of Appalachian Indian communities, historians have lagged far behind.

When it comes to studies of memory in relation to Southeastern Indians, scholars principally focus on the Removal period or Native peoples' involvement in the institution of slavery prior to the war. Prominent among these are Andrew Denson's *Monuments to Absence* (2017) and R. Halliburton's *Red Over Black* (1977), respectively. Other than a few sentences or paragraphs in works focused on Civil War memory, one might think that Native peoples did not play any role at all in remembrance or commemoration activities. Kirk Savage briefly refers to the racialized way in which artists, specifically sculptors, represented Native Americans in the nineteenth century in *Standing Soldier, Kneeling Slave* (1997). Similarly, the ways in which emerging state historical and educational institutions

used Indian imagery as a component of Social Darwinist teachings in the late 1800s only momentarily enters W. Fitzhugh Brundage's *The Southern Past* (2005). David Blight's *Race and Reunion* (2001), considered the seminal text on Civil War memory, does not even list Indians or Native Americans in the index. However, Native peoples continue to play an important role in how some people remember the Civil War.

A small town in South Carolina contains a particularly fascinating example of this importance. Located in the northeast part of the state, Fort Mill stands on the ancestral land of the Catawba Indians. By the time of the Civil War, the Catawba's population had been reduced to barely more than one hundred members. Nonetheless, when fighting broke out in 1861 a majority of their military-age males volunteered to fight in local Confederate infantry regiments. Other than periodic petitions to the state government for financial aid or inclusion in newspapers' historical summaries of the area, the Catawba stayed out of the headlines. A remarkable exception to this rule occurred in the summer of 1900. Spearheaded by two prominent white civic leaders, Fort Mill unveiled a limestone monument to Catawba Indians who served in the Confederate Army.

The complexities and variations in how the role of Indians in the Civil War influenced issues of memorialization can be seen through an examination of the Catawba people's experience. This group had a specific pre-Civil War, Civil War, and post-Civil War relationship with local and state authorities that shaped how the white ruling class formed a particular memorialization of the Catawba after the conflict. The unique social and economic environment in which Fort Mill

existed also played an influential role in the monument's creation. Furthermore, the two leading local figures in its creation had strong personal motivations to sponsor it. All of these factors combined with national trends in Civil War memorialization to make the Catawba monument in Fort Mill, South Carolina, a unique, yet still representative, example of Civil War memory making. It is unique in that the design and message of the monument served a local purpose of permanently enshrining the white population's version of Catawba history in the public space, and representative in that it bolstered the ideals of Lost Cause ideology that swept the country at the turn of the twentieth century. Caught between these powerful ideas were the Catawba themselves, who utilized the beliefs represented by the monument for their own strategic goals.[1]

After interacting with Spanish explorers in the mid-1500s, the Catawba people quickly adapted to the permanent presence of English colonists in the seventeenth century by becoming masters of trade. Rapidly becoming economically dependent on the colonists, this close trade relationship broke only

---

[1] This argument relates to the emerging theory known as Settler Colonialism. Based on the assumption that certain examples of colonialism are structures, rather than events, this idea examines the ways in which settler societies continuously take steps to eliminate Indigenous people from the land. For brevity and the thematic purpose of this paper, I will not be directly engaging with Settler Colonial Theory (SCT). However, I understand the importance of SCT when writing a Native American-focused study, especially its role in memory making. Memories are in themselves structures, rather than events, and the ways in which they are created and extended are often used for eliminatory purposes. I plan on adding SCT to this work in the future to strengthen my arguments and increase its relevance. For more on SCT see Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387-409; Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Lorenzo Veracini, "Introducing, Settler Colonial Studies," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1-12.

a single time, during the 1715-1716 Yamassee War. More than just economically connected, the political ties between South Carolinians and their native neighbors became evident during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Occupying the western frontier of South Carolina, the Catawba formed a natural buffer against raids from Indians aligned with the French, and later the British. This buffer status resulted in heavy loss of life among the Catawba. In conjunction with outbreaks of smallpox, the group's population plummeted by more than two-thirds by the late 1700s.[2] While decimated by these losses, the Catawba's continual alliance with their neighbors ingratiated them in the collective memory of South Carolinians; as historian James Merrell states, "Long after the fighting ceased, Americans celebrated what had been the most significant experience in their lives. Serving alongside and suffering with the American forces made Catawbas part of that experience and part of its celebration."[3] Similar issues of remembrance manifested themselves in the Catawba monument, erected following another significant experience for Americans, the Civil War.

However, gratitude for wartime service did not feed Catawba families or negate white peoples' demands for increasingly desirable frontier land. Established in 1763 by colonial authorities, a fifteen square mile reservation aimed to prevent theft and abuse by local settlers. In reality, this protection did

[2] Charles Hudson, *The Catawba Nation* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1970), 195.
[3] James H. Merrell, *The Indian's New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 217.

little to abate illegal white settlements. In the nineteenth century, as they faced increasing pressures, the Catawba's perception by white authorities change as well. Due to the decline of hostile Indian threats and the popularity of romantic historical novelists, such as James Fennimore Cooper, "The image of the Catawbas changed from the fierce but loyal savage to the noble but childlike savage."[4] This thinking rationalized the belief that the Catawba did not deserve their land, as they lacked the skills necessary to cultivate it to its fullest potential. The Catawba eventually caved to demands to part with their land in the 1840 Treaty of Nation's Ford. Promised annual cash payments and a place to live in North Carolina, the Catawba received neither and their people scattered to various places, both near and far.[5]

Nonetheless, the Catawba's connection to their homeland remained strong. By the 1850s, many had returned to a small tract of land, barely 630 acres, located on the west bank of the Catawba River. The state of South Carolina's agent for the Catawba purchased this land, later known as the "Old Reservation," on their behalf shortly after the 1840 treaty was signed.[6] A decade later, the area served as the nucleus for the Catawba's return to, at least part of, their ancestral land. By the eve of the Civil War, in spite of South Carolina's and their white neighbors' best efforts, approximately 100 Catawba remained where they had always lived.[7]

[4]Ibid., 62.
[5] Ibid., 250.
[6] Ibid., 252.
[7] Ibid., 256-257.

The first white man credited with beginning efforts to permanently settle on Catawba land was Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt, who arrived sometime between 1755 and 1760. While the specifics are unclear, Spratt began renting land from the Catawba.[8] Other settlers followed quickly in Spratt's tracks, and by 1785 the area's non-Indian population increased enough for the South Carolina General Assembly to establish York County. Moving into the 1800s, cotton quickly became the primary crop grown in the region, bringing more farmers and increasing numbers of their enslaved workers. However, it was the arrival of the tracks of the Charlotte, Columbia, and Augusta Railroad in 1852 that truly spurred growth. William Elliott White, owning much of the land surrounding the railroad, began selling parcels for businesses, homes, and warehouses, creating the first formal infrastructure in what is modern-day downtown Fort Mill. By the time of the Civil War, the village numbered a few hundred prosperous individuals.[9]

When the Civil War broke out, a total of seventeen Catawba eventually joined the Confederate Army.[10] This number represented a majority of the military age men then living on the Old Reservation. While no written records exist that specify why so many Indians would join a cause to support a government and people that had consistently cheated them, scholars have posited several theories. As volunteers, all soldiers qualified for a $50 enlistment

---

[8] William R. Bradford, *Out of the Past: A History of Fort Mill, South Carolina* (Bradford Publishing Co., 1980), 29.
[9] Ibid., 12.
[10] Thomas J. Blumer, "Record of Catawba Indians' Confederate Service," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96, no. 3 (July 1995): 224, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27570098.

bounty in 1861, a hefty sum for the struggling Catawba.[11] Furthermore, traditional Catawba culture revolved around the mourning-war cycle common to many eastern Native Americans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These wars ended when the United States government and westward moving settlers decimated or removed all rival tribes after the Revolution, depriving Catawba men opportunities to prove themselves in battle. Historian Laurence Hauptman concludes, "Thus, for Catawba, as well as for many white southerners, combat was a proving ground for manliness."[12] However, Catawba Confederate soldiers must have had deeper motivations than money and manliness to compel such an immediate and durable support for the Southern cause. Increasingly during the nineteenth century, as anthropologist Charles Hudson maintains, the Catawba "were members of a plural [plantation slavery] society that was theoretically stable, but was actually troubled by many internal conflicts and contradictions."[13] Unable to highlight their Indianness by acting as fierce frontier warriors or vital trading middlemen any longer, and attempting to avoid conflation with African Americans, the Catawba aligned themselves with the white ruling class, with some even owning slaves.[14] Thus, similar to the majority of soldiers in the Confederate Army, the Catawba's involvement was "indicating their agreement

---

[11] Timothy E. Fenlon, "A Struggle For Survival and Recognition: The Catawba Nation 1840-1890" (master's thesis, Clemson University, 2007), 56.
[12] Laurence M. Hauptman, *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 92.
[13] Hudson, *The Catawba Nation,* 67.
[14] James H. Merrell, "The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians," *The Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 3 (Aug., 1984): 380, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2208567.

with white ideology."[15] Whatever the causes may be, the men who fought did so with distinction and bravery, as evidenced by service records and diaries of fellow soldiers.[16]

The white population of York County, including Fort Mill, enthusiastically supported the Confederacy.[17] As with their Indian neighbors, the majority of military-age men volunteered for the army. As a result, the Fort Mill area embraced a strong connection to the memory of the Confederate cause.

Following the War, Reconstruction state governments attempted to adjust the balance of power throughout the South by providing economic and political protection to African Americans and white Republican voters. However, this attempt failed spectacularly with the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in 1868. The dominance of the KKK in York County cannot be overstated. As historian Jerry West explains, "the Klan reigned more completely and supremely in York than it did in any other southern county and nowhere could the term 'reign of terror' be more aptly applied."[18] Klan membership reached upwards of two to three thousand individuals (roughly a fifth of the county's white population), representing every level of society.[19] By 1871, the Klan had achieved its goal:

---

[15] Hudson, *The Catawba Nation*, 67.
[16] For a full list of the Catawba's service records and mentions of Catawba by their fellow soldiers see Blumer, *Bibliography of the Catawba*.
[17] Douglas Summers Brown, *A City Without Cobwebs: A History of Rock Hill, South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 92.
[18] Jerry L. West, *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865-1877* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 5.
[19] Ibid., 41.

reassertion of political and social control by the Democratic Party elite.[20] This strong endorsement of conservative political and cultural values by Fort Mill white elites manifested itself two decades later through the creation of public monuments to the Confederacy.

Shortly after tensions in the region began to subside, Fort Mill heartily embraced the move towards industrialization that swept the South in the last decades of the 1800s. Samuel Elliott White, son of the William Elliott White mentioned above, led this drive by opening the first textile mill in the area in 1886. Known as the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company, the factory provided jobs that more than doubled the population of the town by 1900.[21] Coupled with the continued business of the railroad and its proximity to the bustling city of Charlotte, North Carolina, small town urban prosperity marked Fort Mill's entry into the twentieth century. The comfort of economic security allowed the town to turn its attention to leisurely pursuits, including the creation of public commemorative spaces.

A principal sponsor of the Catawba monument, Samuel Elliott White, occupied one of the most prominent public roles in Fort Mill. Descended from several of the original white settlers of the area, he inherited considerable wealth from his father.[22] White served with distinction in the Confederate army, ending the war as a captain. While no evidence has been found to implicate him directly

---

[20] Ibid., 109.
[21] Bradford, *Out of the Past*, 18-19.
[22] Louise Pettus, "If Fort Mill had a Founder," *Oxford Place, Fort Mill, SC* (blog), accessed December 1, 2017, http://www.collinsfactor.com/oxfordplace/history/fortmillfounder.htm.

in Klan activity during Reconstruction, an 1871 report of arrests in the *Yorkville Enquirer* lists James White and John White as being imprisoned.[23] Samuel was one of five brothers, with both John and James being older brothers. No direct evidence exists to prove that the John and James listed in the paper were Samuel's relatives, but his innumerable business and social connections suggest that he must have been somewhat involved. Although the Fort Mill Manufacturing Company served as White's most influential addition to the local economy, he also served as a president of the local savings bank, a private school, and served as an occasional local representative to Democratic Party meetings.[24] Fort Mill was a White-dominated town, in more ways than one, and White embodied the social and political beliefs of the conservative white elite.

White's local importance extended beyond business. On December 23rd, 1889, the first meeting of the Jefferson Davis Memorial Association (JDMA) convened at the Mason's Hall in Fort Mill and elected White as their first president.[25] With membership eligibility open to all former Confederate soldiers and their direct relatives, the organization aimed to maintain a positive and nostalgic recollection of the conflict in the public's consciousness, as explained by its constitution:

> Whereas the old soldiers of the community realizing the fact that they were fast growing old and rapidly passing from the historic scenes of this

---

[23] "Arrests Of Citizens," *The Yorkville Enquirer*, October 26, 1871, 2.
[24] *The Fort Mill News,* June 15, 1892, 4; *The Fort Mill News*, September 2, 1891, 3.
[25] Meeting Minutes, Jefferson Davis Memorial Association (JDMA), December 23, 1889, Accession #2540, Jefferson Davis Memorial Association Records, 1889-1906, South Caroliniana Library Archives, University of South Carolina Libraries, 9.

> generation: and first wishing to preserve the history of the past, and to perpetuate the affection and esteem formed around the camp fires of the war.[26]

The group primarily focused on decorating soldiers' graves on Memorial Days and coordinating parades and speakers for the annual community-wide occasions. However, in 1891 the JDMA took a leading role in the creation of the first Confederate monument in Fort Mill. This local organization, along with like-minded national groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the United Confederate Veterans, took the lead in establishing and then perpetuating Lost Cause ideology in the Fort Mill area. This ideology, as historian Gaines Foster states, "developed out of and in turn shaped individuals' memory of the war, but it was primarily a public memory, a component of the region's cultural system, supported by the various organizations and rituals."[27] When it came time to erect a monument to the Catawba in 1900, White possessed a great deal of authority and experience in commemorations.

However, Samuel E. White did not act alone when he erected the Catawba monument. James McKee Spratt, a distant relative and business protégé of White, followed closely in the footsteps of his successful associate. Locally, the Spratt name carried arguably even more weight than that of White, as James's great-grandfather was none other than Thomas "Kanawha" Spratt, the original settler. Stories of adventures with the Catawba in the wilderness and heroic exploits against the British during the Revolution turned the elder Spratt

---

[26] Meeting Minutes, JDMA, January 7, 1890, JDMA Records, 1.

[27] Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5.

into somewhat of a mythical frontier figure (along the lines of Daniel Boone or Davey Crocket) in Fort Mill.[28] However, the younger Spratt missed his opportunity to continue the family's heroic wartime exploits. Sixteen in 1865, he was apparently on the verge of enlisting when word of Lee's surrender reached him.[29] As with White, there is no direct evidence that Spratt had anything to do with Klan activity during Reconstruction. However, he fled the state for two years beginning in 1871 as a result of "the indiscriminate manner in which the United States government was arresting certain citizens of the Fort Mill neighborhood."[30] As a well-connected young man deprived of military service, involvement with a clandestine and "noble" cause such as the KKK seems more than likely.

Following Spratt's return to Fort Mill, he quickly became a successful businessman. His financial investments ranged widely; he served as an owner of the Spratt Machine Co. (a building material and contracting company), a real estate agent, the cashier and later director of the local savings bank, the town's clerk and vice president of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Co.[31] Although he was unable to officially join the ranks of the JDMA due to missing the war, the association's minutes make it clear that Spratt attended meetings anyway. He even conducted important work on behalf of the group, such as reporting the estimated costs of the Confederate soldier monument.[32] In June of 1893 Spratt

---

[28] Bradford, *Out of the Past,* 29-34.
[29] J.C. Garlington, *Men of the Time: Sketches of Living Notables: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Contemporaneous South Carolina Leaders* (Spartanburg, S.C.: Garlington Publishing Co., 1902), 399.
[30] Ibid., 399.
[31] *Fort Mill News,* September 2, 1891, 2; *Fort Mill Times,* March 21, 1900, 3.
[32] Meeting Minutes, JDMA, September 26, 1891, JDMA Records, 18.

donated several valuable Confederate documents, including two signed by Jefferson Davis, to the association. This generosity finally proved enough, as the group approved a motion the same day "that hereby elects him an honorary member of the same [association] with all the rights and privileges of the same."[33] Now, Spratt possessed formal access to the levers of commemorative power in his hometown. Between the two, James McKee Spratt and Samuel Elliott White dominated Fort Mill, both fiscally and socially.

When the Catawba monument arrived at Confederate Park in 1900, it added to an already well-established public commemorative space. Samuel E. White created the park, using land he donated, for the purpose of housing the first Fort Mill monument. The small triangular plot sat in the middle of downtown on Main Street. Occupying such a prominent location, the space "provided Fort Millians with a semi-sacred spot in which they can take both pride and pleasure."[34] Besides meeting commemorative needs, the park played a practical role as a place to relax, as noted by a newspaper article shortly after benches for the park arrived: "There is no use for you to drop about the streets any longer with your tired body, the rustic seats for Confederate Park have come and are ready for you to drop your tired frame on them and be refreshed."[35] Serving dual roles of remembrance and relaxation, White's park would be seen by the people of Fort Mill as both the spiritual and physical heart of town.

---

[33] Meeting Minutes, JDMA, June 24, 1893, JDMA Records, 26-27.
[34] Bradford, *Out of the Past,* 38.
[35] *The Fort Mill News,* June 15, 1892, 2.

Additionally, White assumed the principal role in filling the town's newest public gathering point with appropriate icons, beginning in 1891. While the JDMA enthusiastically supported this initiative, it was ultimately White who first "made a forcible speech advocating for the erection of a monument at Fort Mill … to the Confederate Soldiers of the township."[36] Additionally, while providing a large percentage of the funds himself, he proposed eliciting donations from the general public in order to instill locals with a "stronger interest and a deeper feeling of pride" in the project.[37] White continued his commemorative venture four years later with the addition of monuments to Confederate women and "faithful" slaves. These two statues, both completely financed by White, were reportedly the first in the country commemorating either group. Both representations embodied the dual, and contradictory, goals of Lost Cause sentimentality then sweeping the nation: reconciliation and Southern partisanship.[38] The obelisk to faithful slaves proclaimed that enslaved African Americans worked "With matchless Devotion, and with sterling Fidelity."[39] The other claimed Confederate women should be considered heroines as they "perpetuate their noble sacrifices on the altar of our common country."[40] White eliminated all negative moral and racial attributes from the Confederate cause while concurrently proclaiming the true patriotism and righteousness of Southerners by presenting enslaved workers as happy and

[36] Meeting Minutes, JDMA, May 9, 1891, JDMA Records, 15.
[37] Bradford, *Out of the Past,* 38.
[38] David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 258.
[39] "Monuments at Fort Mill," *Confederate Veteran*, May 1899, VII (5), 210.
[40] Ibid., 210.

helpful and by making Confederate women's sacrifice a universally noble American trait.[41] These commemorative efforts played an important and new role in Southern memorialization of the Civil War; historian Kristina Dunn Johnson maintains, "Before any discussions of American multiculturalism, the Fort Mill monuments recognized the efforts of different categories of local citizens and imposed political meaning on their wartime efforts ... South Carolinians began to honor groups outside of the traditional Confederate soldier."[42] It was with these beliefs in mind that White joined with Spratt to erect a monument to local Indians.

On July 31st, 1900, a large crowd convened in Confederate Park to witness the unveiling of the Catawba monument. Ten and a half feet tall, the statue consists of a limestone Catawba warrior placed on top of a rectangular stone pedestal. The shirtless and feather headdress-wearing Indian crouches behind a tree stump with bow and arrow drawn, preparing to shoot his game or enemy. Panels of text discuss a brief history of the Catawba people, a list of prominent historical tribal leaders, and a description of the connection between White and Spratt to the first settlers of the region. These panels are accompanied by two carved images: one of a buffalo running through a meadow, the other of wild turkeys in a forest.[43]

---

[41] For a deeper examination of Lost Cause ideology see, Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*; Brundage, *The Southern Past*; Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy.*
[42] Kristina Dunn Johnson, *No Holier Spot of Ground: Confederate Monuments & Cemeteries of South Carolina* (Charleston: The History Press, 2009), 110.
[43] See Figure 1.

Figure 1. Catawba Indian Memorial. 1900. Source: Michael Sean Nix, Fort Mill, South Carolina. November 25, 2009, Digital Image. Available from: https://www.hmdb.org/PhotoFullSize.asp?PhotoID=87078.

Interestingly, the importance of the Catawba's Confederate service is downplayed on the statue's inscriptions, with only one inscription out of four

listing "Some of the Catawbas Who Served in the Confederate Army."[44] The monument's understated connection between the Confederacy and the Indians seems strange. Even Ben Harris, a Catawba descendant of a Confederate soldier who gave a speech at the monument's dedication, stated, "'Love prompted White and Spratt to build a monument to the Confederate Indians.'"[45] Additionally, a newspaper reported that the Indians present at the dedication "were all here as descendants of Confederate soldiers."[46] This is coupled with the fact that the monument was located in a public space named *Confederate* Park next to other explicitly *Confederate*-themed statues. Therefore, it is easy to assume everyone present at the ceremony understood the Confederate origins of the Catawba statue. The reasoning behind the monument's lack of Confederate imagery lies in the contradictory rhetoric of the Lost Cause; as historian Kirk Savage states, "The commemoration of the Lost Cause sought to span the old and the new, to integrate history and progress."[47] By focusing on the distant past of the Catawba while still connecting them to the recent struggle for Southern nationhood, White and Spratt achieved this goal.

Additionally, this depiction of the Catawba in the distant past reflects a common white view of Native people as stuck in the past. Images of Native Americans throughout the nineteenth century almost always incorporated

---

[44] Robert S. Seigler, *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina: Passing the Silent Cup* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997), 340.
[45] "Monument to the Catawbas," *The Yorkville Enquirer,* August 4, 1900, 2-3.
[46] "The Indian Monument Dedicated," *Fort Mill Times,* August 1, 1900, 4.
[47] Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 130.

stereotypical representations of how white people imagined Indians looked before European contact or in the early days of the colonial period. The inability to represent Indians in the present reflected the belief that Native peoples lacked "civilization" and thus were the opposite of the forward-marching, progressive white culture. Therefore, as historian Robert Berkholfer, Jr. maintains, "Since Whites primarily understood the Indian as an antithesis to themselves, then civilization and Indianness [*sic*] as they defined them would forever be opposites. Only civilization had history and dynamics in this view, so therefore Indianness [*sic*] must be conceived of as ahistorical and static."[48] Placing this image of the Catawba in the middle of the modernizing town of Fort Mill reminded the area's white residents about the progress and supremacy of their culture. This added an extra layer of justification for the Confederate cause, one based on the concept of white supremacy.

Furthermore, the Catawba warrior atop the monument represents a common, contemporary trope of the Noble Savage: shirtless, armed with a bow, and wearing a feather headdress. This representation of the Noble Savage developed very quickly after European exploration of North America and categorized Native peoples as either "good" or "bad." With the Catawba's long history of friendly relations with their white neighbors, they fell into the former category. The "good" Noble Savage, according to Berkhofer, "Along with handsomeness of physique and physiognomy went great stamina and endurance. Pride in himself and independence of other persons combined with a

---

[48] Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), 29.

plain existence and wholesome enjoyment of nature's gifts."[49] The shirtless and muscled Catawba statue demonstrated plain existence and physical strength. Additionally, kneeling behind a tree stump and holding a bow at the ready connected the warrior to nature. This connection was strengthened through the carved images of wildlife in their pristine habitat on the pedestal.

However, the Catawba who fought in the Confederate Army did so in regular volunteer infantry regiments; their uniforms and equipment would have been indistinguishable from any other South Carolinian soldier. The statue aims to represent the Confederate Catawba not in reality, but in their ideal dimension as "courageous and independent, a symbol of a vanished or vanishing American antiquity."[50] This misrepresentation was no accident, as the highly restrictive genre of sculpture required meanings to be carefully construed. [51] White and Spratt used this imagery to reinforce popular notions of Southern rebelliousness and bravery. According to the Lost Cause, the war was not about slavery, but about "States' Rights," and the only reason the Confederacy lost was because superior Northern numbers and resources overwhelmed its armies.[52] This juxtaposition of Indian independence and courageousness with Southern States' Rights and the strength and endurance to continue fighting in the face of daunting odds strengthened the Confederate sentimentality of Fort Mill in ways many other Southern towns could not achieve.

---

[49] Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian,* 28.
[50] Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*, 15.
[51] Ibid., 66.
[52] Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 37.

In addition to a message of independence and strength, the Catawba monument embodies a strong sense of loyalty, continuing the trend of Lost Cause contradictions. As part of the historical summary of the Catawba, an inscribed panel reads, “The Catawba Indians, although a war-like nation, were ever friends of the white settlers.”[53] Similarly, the local paper focused heavily on the aspect of Catawba loyalty shortly before the arrival of the monument:

> The Catawbas who went into the Southern Army are said to have done good and faithful service. Their action was voluntary, and therefore was the purest patriotism. It is eminently fitting that their faithfulness should be testified to by a monument near their reservation and when this shaft is erected Fort Mill will have the distinction of poses-ing [*sic*] two monuments which are entirely unique – that to the faithful slaves and that to the Catawba Indians.[54]

These two statements demonstrated not only a longstanding history of the loyalty of Fort Mill’s Indian neighbors, but also a recent and memorable demonstration of it during the Civil War. Therefore, the Catawba joined the ranks of faithful slaves, another group with a similar history, at least as perceived by the Southern white elite. In their eyes, even though both enslaved African Americans and Indians did not fully belong to antebellum Southern society, they chose to support that society when war occurred. This reinforced the righteousness of the Confederate cause. By using the language of faithfulness, these claims expanded upon the Lost Cause notion of the Confederacy as a multicultural and accepting society, one that did not base itself on slavery or racial inequalities. Alongside the brave Confederate soldier, the sacrificing Confederate woman, and the faithful

---

[53] Seigler, *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina*, 340.
[54] “Praise for Captain White,” *Fort Mill Times,* March 28, 1900, 3.

Southern slave, the loyal Catawba Indian rounded out how Samuel White and James Spratt portrayed the memory of their Confederate-era town.

The monument even further strengthened Lost Cause sentiments of a justified defensive war based on States' Rights as it drew positive connections between the town's white population and the land's original inhabitants, the Catawba. As part of an effort to "indigenize" the entire town of Fort Mill, the monument's creators presented a longstanding happy history of white-Indian relations. This imagery connected the legitimacy of white ownership of the land to their positive Catawba relations, when in reality many of the original white settlers acquired Catawba land through deceit and theft. Historian Andrew Denson draws similar conclusions when analyzing sites of Cherokee memory making by stating, "Remembering Cherokee history, then, strengthened white residents' ties to a land their people conquered. It helped them possess this place as a home."[55] This same principal applied to the Catawba monument. By asserting a stronger connection to the land itself, Fort Mill's white elite believed even more in the righteousness of defending it and their way of life (the institution of slavery) from Northern invasion.

Especially for Samuel White, who played the leading role in the creation of all four Fort Mill monuments, Confederate Park's commemorations cemented his place as the town's social leader, as demonstrated by the same newspaper article above:

---

[55] Andrew Denson, *Monuments To Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest Over Southern Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 108.

> Nowhere in the State of South Carolina is there to be found a more devoted ex-Confederate or a truer-hearted man than Capt. S.E. White, of Fort Mill. He loves everything that bears on the glorious history of the South in the Civil War and he has not hesitated to spend his money in order that features of that struggle neglected by all others might be suitably commemorated.[56]

This adulation by the (white) citizens of Fort Mill served White more than just symbolically. Endorsement of his leadership allowed him to easily expand his own business interests and fully embrace the move towards industrialization then sweeping the South. Opening his textile mill in 1887, White continually expanded the factory throughout the 1890s and early 1900s. By providing an opportunity for Fort Mill's residents to effectively commemorate the past, historian Thomas Brown maintains, "White made Confederate Park a commemorative extension of the corporate paternalism imposed in the mill town. The nostalgic promise of community continuity was a familiar pattern."[57] As thousands of local farmers abandoned their families' agricultural traditions to work in White's plant, the reassurance of a comfortable past allowed them to accept an unfamiliar industrial future. The Catawba monument played an important role in this sense of nostalgia.

In similar fashion as his business partner, James Spratt had personal and financial interests in evoking nostalgic feelings through the creation of the Catawba monument. As a vice president and founding member of the Fort Mill Manufacturing Co., Spratt shared White's concerns for keeping their workers focused on the past instead of their radically changing present and future.

---

[56] "Praise for Captain White," *Fort Mill Times,* 3.
[57] Thomas J. Brown, *Civil War Cannon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 115.

However, Spratt involved himself in another major regional project in which he had even greater personal reasons to invoke Native imagery and his connections to Fort Mill's Native past. As part of the industrial wave sweeping the area, a plan to build a hydroelectric dam on the Catawba River gained momentum in the spring of 1900. In April, a newspaper editorial extolled the importance of the dam:

> And now comes the cheering news from Neely's Ferry that actual preliminary work has been commenced upon the dam and power plant that are to harness the Catawba River at that point and direct to commercial purposes its enormous energy that has wasted for so many years. That branch of modern civilization known as science is again permitted to be the means of depriving nature of her virgin beauty and substituting industry, and where the red man was wont to roam in all his wild and romantic freedom or indolently yielding to the sedative influence of the bouncing riffles is to be sacrificed to the demands of the new era of progress that seems to be encroaching upon every remote corner of the South, and especially South Carolina. The last of the many misty rumors that have been afloat during the past two years concerning the prospects of this projected enterprise has at last been dispelled and we are seemingly confronted with the happy reality.[58]

The newspaper struck a sentimental, yet deterministic tone when describing the industrial changes about to occur to the area where Indians used to "indolently" live. Several months later, it was announced, "On Saturday morning the contract for the erection of the power house and arches of the dam of the Catawba Power Company was awarded the Spratt Machine Company of Fort Mill."[59] As an owner of this company, James Spratt had a strong interest in instilling locals with a positive perception of the project. In the same issue, only a few paragraphs down from the announcement of the contract to his company, Spratt "informs The Times that the Catawba Indian monument, which is to be erected in Confederate

[58] "Opportunities Face Fort Mill," *Fort Mill Times*, April 25, 1900, 3.
[59] "Fort Mill Mélange," *Fort Mill Times,* July 25, 1900, 3.

park by himself and the Capt. S.E. White, will arrive this week."[60] The arrival of the monument, which had been anticipated for some time, and the announcement of the dam project contract during the same week might be coincidental, but considering his high social standing and business and political connections in the region, it seems more likely Spratt orchestrated both as part of a coordinated publicity campaign.

As mentioned in the April newspaper editorial, not everyone in the area enthusiastically embraced the idea of a dam. As with their reluctance to quit farming in order to work in factories, locals hesitated to flood considerable tracts of land they viewed as having "virgin beauty" and encourage the construction of a power plant, an even greater sign of the area's conversion from ideal pastoralism to industrial urbanism. This reflects the dichotomy that historian Brian Dippie says "was basic to American thought. The settlers of the New World … could never escape the fact of the wilderness. As they destroyed it, they mourned it."[61] Spratt helped the people of Fort Mill mourn this loss though the erection of a monument to the Catawba Indians, the people whose ancestral lands would soon be underwater and who inspired the English name for the river and the dam itself. The pastoral scenes on the monument, of buffalo and turkeys in their natural habitat, would remind locals that Spratt valued the "virgin beauty" that characterized the area for so long (until he played a leading role in its destruction). Now that the memory of these beautiful lands existed permanently

---

[60] Ibid.

[61] Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 23.

in stone in the middle of town, the people could more easily accept their submergence.

Furthermore, panels of text on the monument contain two references to Spratt's great-grandfather. The south facing panel reads:

> Erected to the Catawba Indians by Sam'l [*sic*] Elliott White and John McKee Spratt. The latter is a descendant of Thos. 'Kanawha' Spratt and the former a descendant of Wm. Elliott (A kinsman of Kanawahs [*sic*] two of the first settlers in this portion of the Indian Land, 1755-60).[62]

The west side of the monument lists prominent Catawba leaders, including:

> Peter Harris. The latter being made an orphan by the smallpox scourge, was raised by 'Kanawha.' He received a pension for services in the Revolution of 1776. At 70 years of age, he died at the Spratt homestead and at his own request was buried in the family graveyard.[63]

By directly reminding the townspeople about his family's role in founding Fort Mill, Spratt legitimized his desire to alter the town's landscape and society. He knew what was best for the community because of his family's original involvement with its development. Furthermore, the invocation of his family's longstanding cordial relations with the Catawba Indians suggests Spratt was implying his own "indigeneity." As evinced by highlighting the Catawba's embrace of his great-grandfather and the Catawba chief buried in his family's graveyard, Spratt portrayed himself as a virtual member of the tribe. By reminding the local white population of his connection to the region's original landowners, Spratt claimed the authority to alter the land as he saw fit.

The Catawba monument not only reinforced Lost Cause sentimentality and the personal financial interests of its sponsors, but also the skewed white

[62] Seigler, *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina,* 339.
[63] Ibid., 340.

interpretation of the Catawba's history and present condition. The way white residents of Fort Mill viewed the Catawba can be distilled into three general themes; as the anthropologist Charles Hudson lays out, "(1) the Catawbas are descended from Indians; (2) the Catawbas were friends of the colonists; and (3) the Catawbas are the remnant of a once great nation."[64] These three assumptions clearly manifest themselves in the monument. As stated earlier, the Indian statue on top of the pedestal embodies the image of the stereotyped Noble Savage. The inscription summarizing the Catawba's history reads:

> The Catawba Indians, although a warlike nation, were ever friends of the white settler. They aided and fought with the Americans in the Revolution and the Confederate in the Civil War. Tradition says, they immigrated to this portion of South Carolina from Canada about 1600, numbering some 12,000. Wars with the Cherokee, Shawnees, and other nations, together with the small-pox [sic] depleted their numbers greatly. In 1764, the province of South Carolina allotted them 15 miles square in York and Lancaster districts. About 1840 a new treaty was made, the state buying all their land, and afterwards laying them off 700 acres on the west bank of the Eswa Tavora (Catawba River) 6 miles south of Fort Mill, where the remnant, about 75, now live receiving a small annuity from the state.[65]

This message prominently highlights the Catawba's service to and friendship towards the white population. By listing an original population of 12,000, the monument implies the former power and coherence of the "Nation."

Additionally, these representations reflected the popular white view of Indians as the "Vanishing Americans." This view of America's indigenous people grew in popularity during the early nineteenth century as the country rapidly expanded westward. As American "civilization" accompanied this expansion, policy makers and scholars viewed Indians as culturally and biologically unable

---

[64] Hudson, *The Catawba Nation*, 106.
[65] Siegler, *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina,* 340.

to adapt to the environmental and societal changes occurring around them. This belief helped fuel justification for mass removal of Southeastern Indians in the 1830s; as historian Brian Dippie states, "Nothing directly could be done to save the Indians in the East, but they might at least have the opportunity to pass their final years in comfort, far from that civilization which, rapidly bearing down on them, would soon destroy them where they were."[66] By the end of the 1800s, new cultural and academic attitudes towards Native people altered the Vanishing American theory to reflect two major conclusions: "the Indians were not vanishing of innate necessity, but *would* vanish in the near future unless something was done to ameliorate their condition; and while the Indians would continue to exist as individuals and even increase in numbers, they were moving to certain cultural extinction."[67]

The Catawba's white neighbors had long held this view. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the white population of Fort Mill assumed the Catawba were on the verge of extinction.[68] This belief grew more certain during the 1800s. When the Catawba lost their original reservation in the 1840 treaty, South Carolinian authorities eventually allowed them to return to the area partly because they held "the expectation 'that they would soon die out and disappear and settle the trouble that way.'"[69] More than half a century later, and only a year after the dedication of the Catawba monument, the local newspaper reported, "The most pathetic figures in the south [*sic*] are the Catawba Indians, with no

---

[66] Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 44.
[67] Ibid., 138.
[68] Merrell, *The Indians' New World*, 134.
[69] Ibid., 257.

history and no hope for the future of their people."[70] While doomed to extinction, the article believed the Catawba's long history of loyalty to their white neighbors "ought to make us willing to help the Indians and make them more comfortable."[71] A perfect example of how to properly help them was "Capt [*sic*] Samuel White of Fort Mill, S.C. [who] has most generously erected a monument to the Catawba Indians and has had the names of the brave warriors who fought in the Confederate war placed on the monument."[72] Therefore, the white elite believed, instead of providing land, schools, or financial assistance, preserving the memory of their past loyal deeds was the best way to help the futureless Catawba.

While the monument embodied this skewed white interpretation of the Catawba's history and future, the Catawba themselves capitalized on these misguided beliefs for their own advantage. Since the arrival of enslaved people in the mid-eighteenth century, the Catawba had adopted prejudicial cultural practices to avoid being conflated with African Americans. Following Reconstruction, the South Carolina legislature began passing Jim Crow legislation meant to reassert control over the state's black population. Caught in the middle were Fort Mill's Indians. Neither white nor black, and with the status of enslavement no longer a firm marker of difference, the Catawba had an even greater need to distinguish themselves as Indian; as historian Mikaëla Adams states, "By setting up strict racial boundaries, the Catawbas attempted to

---

[70] "The Catawba Indians," *The Fort Mill Times,* July 24, 1901, 2.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

preserve their separate Indian identity at a time when whites threatened to lump them into the category of 'colored.'"[73] During the period when Jim Crow began to most forcefully take hold, the Catawba signaled their endorsement of African American discrimination through their participation in the monument's dedication ceremony. Ben Harris, the son of a Catawba Confederate soldier, proclaimed to those gathered, "'Much thank [*sic*] to people for love shown us. My forefathers show love by fighting and give life; I show love try [*sic*] to make a speech. All Indians grateful. Long remember this day.'"[74] This forceful pledge of thanks reminded the local white population of the Catawba's past commitment to the antebellum social status quo (i.e. slavery) and their continued support for the new status quo (i.e. Jim Crow). Furthermore, the monument's stereotypical Noble Savage imagery reinforced the notion that the Catawba were distinctly Indian and not to be conflated with African Americans. Through these pledges and depictions, the Catawba hoped to avoid some of South Carolina's most restrictive racial laws.

In addition to reinforcing their distinctive racial status and loyalty to the white-dominated society, the Catawba utilized the dedication ceremony to gingerly, yet publicly, shame local authorities for past neglect. Ben Harris continued in his dedication speech, "Love prompted White and Spratt to build a monument to the Confederate Indians. Much thank them good men Indian love them. If white man had done Indian justice like White and Spratt good many of

[73] Mikaëla M. Adams, *Who Belongs: Race, Resources, and Tribal Citizenship in the Native South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 64.
[74] "Catawba Indians Will Be Remembered," *The State*, August 1, 1900, 2.

them would have been educated and able to make good speech."[75] When state and local authorities consistently ignored their repeated requests for a school, the Catawba took it upon themselves to build one in 1897. Even when they had a schoolhouse, they lacked teachers. It took several years for a pair of Presbyterian missionaries to arrive and start teaching classes.[76] By stressing his people's gratitude towards White and Spratt, who also happened to be the town's social and business leaders, while at the same time reminding the local population about their refusal to provide tangible support for his people, Harris took advantage of his public platform to renew requests for assistance. This combination of praise and criticism allowed his message to be received by a sympathetic, instead of indignant, white elite.

While this study focuses on a monument to Catawba Indians, it is not the only Civil War-related Native American monument. Plaques exist in North Carolina and Oklahoma to Confederate Eastern Band Cherokee and Confederate Cherokee who lived in Indian Territory, respectively. In future work, a comparison with these other examples of Indian Civil War memorialization would add greater context to the Catawba monument specifically and generally help construct a holistic study of Civil War memory related to Native peoples. Providing firsthand Catawba perspectives and opinions would add necessary Native points of view. This would help alleviate the common problem of scholars writing about Indigenous people without asking them their thoughts on the matter. Additionally, including modern Catawba accounts related to the Fort Mill

[75] Ibid.
[76] Hudson, *The Catawba Nation,* 84.

monument would help bring the study into the more recent past. The Catawba's firsthand accounts could be combined with interviews with white and black residents and more recent newspaper accounts from the Fort Mill area to analyze if and how the meanings behind the Catawba monument have changed over time. This would prove especially relevant, as communities across the country are currently reevaluating the meanings behind their Confederate monuments in the wake of tragedies and international media attention.

Nonetheless, evaluating the historical context and meaning surrounding the creation of Fort Mill's Catawba monument allows for a deeper understanding of the role Native people played in Civil War memory making. The town's white elite used the Catawba's specific pre-Civil War, Civil War, and post-Civil War relationship with the local and state authorities to form a specific memory of Native-white history that strengthened several aspects of Lost Cause ideology. Additionally, the monument served to support the personal financial interests of its principal builders, Samuel White and James Spratt, as they sought to exploit the rapid trend of industrialization then sweeping the South. These dual motives combined to enshrine a skewed white elite interpretation of the history of the Catawba. However, the Catawba used the stereotypical and public use of their imagery to their own advantage by maintaining their Indian identity and calling for greater access to local and state assistance.

Shortly after the erection of the monument in 1900, the "noble" Catawba warrior adorning the limestone base lost his arms and bow. While sources disagree over the true culprit (some claim rowdy local teens, others say a

particularly violent thunderstorm), it is undisputed that the damages were never repaired. No one speculates as to why, but Fort Mill's lack of care or respect for it tells us almost as much about the relationship between white residents and their Catawba neighbors as the statue's creation in the first place. While the stone monument stands silent in the town's square, the memories embodied by it speak loudly to the importance of Native peoples to the history of the Civil War and its aftermath.

Bibliography

Adams, Mikaëla M. *Who Belongs?: Race, Resources, and Tribal Citizenship in the Native South.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Berkhofer, Robert F., Jr. *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978.

Blight, David W. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.

Blumer, Thomas J. *Bibliography of the Catawba*. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1987.

———. "Record of Catawba Indians' Confederate Service," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 96, no. 3 (July 1995): 221-229. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27570098.

Bradford, William R. *Out of the Past: A History of Fort Mill, South Carolina.* Bradford Publishing Co., 1980.

Brown, Douglas Summers. *A City Without Cobwebs: A History of Rock Hill, South Carolina.* Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1953.

———. *The Catawba Indians: The People of the River*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1966.

Brown, Thomas J. *Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Denson, Andrew. *Monuments to Absence: Cherokee Removal and the Contest over Southern Memory.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

Dippie, Brian W. *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy.* Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1982.

Fenlon, Timothy E. "A Struggle For Survival and Recognition: The Catawba Nation 1840-1890." Master's Thesis, Clemson University, 2007.

Foster, Gaines. *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865 to 1913.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Garlington, J.C. *Men of the Time: A Biographical Encyclopedia of Contemporaneous South Carolina Leaders*. Spartanburg, South Carolina: Garlignton Publishing Co., 1902.

Hauptman, Laurence M. *Between Two Fires: American Indians in the Civil War.* New York: The Free Press, 1995.

Hillyer, Reiko. *Designing Dixie: Tourism, Memory, and Urban Space in the New South*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Hudson, Charles M. *The Catawba Nation.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1970.

Jefferson Davis Memorial Association Records, 1889-1906. Accession #2540. South Caroliniana Library Archives, University of South Carolina Libraries.

Johnson, Kristina Dunn. *No Holier Spot of Ground: Confederate Monuments & Cemeteries of South Carolina.* Charleston: The History Press, 2009.

Merrell, James H. *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

———. "The Racial Education of the Catawba Indians." *The Journal of Southern History* 50, no. 3 (Aug., 1984): 363-364. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2208567.

Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Seigler, Robert S. *A Guide to Confederate Monuments in South Carolina: Passing the Silent Cup.* Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997.

West, Jerry L. *The Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan in York County, South Carolina, 1865-1877.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002.

Reconstructing the Street: Confrontations Over Norfolk's Public Sphere, 1862-1866

The Norfolk Riot

On April 16th, 1866, several hundred freedpeople, including at least a dozen armed army veterans, marched through the streets of Norfolk, Virginia. Carrying banners associated with local black political associations, including the Colored Monitor Union Club, the marchers remained orderly and dignified as a group of local white men threw bottles and bricks into their midst. These white agitators eventually stopped their provocations as the procession ended in a field on the outskirts of town. The crowd gathered around a speaker stand, erected days earlier for the event, to hear a series of speeches by prominent members of the black community in support of the recently passed Civil Rights Bill. The passage of the act prompted the celebration, as it provided federal protection for black people in the face of racially discriminatory state laws, known as Black Codes, enacted the previous fall.[77]

Just as the first speaker began to read the bill to the crowd, a series of gunshots broke the festive atmosphere. A detachment of Union army soldiers quickly moved in to restore the peace, and when the dust settled one white man was dead while his mother lay mortally wounded. The commotion died away, the speeches continued, and the gathering eventually peacefully dispersed. Not long

---

[77] Tomas Parramore with Peter Stewart and Tommy Bogger, *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 224-225.

after, as participants went back to their homes, rumors of white retribution began to spread throughout the city.

That night, an organized group of at least fifty armed white men, some wearing grey uniforms, marched throughout the city attacking any black person they came across. When the local Union army commander rode out to investigate, the band fired a disciplined volley at him and his aide. They both survived and returned to headquarters to coordinate patrols sent out to arrest the assailants, but the soldiers always arrived after the attackers had moved on to another part of the city. This militia-like party – reportedly the same organization that recently manned Confederate defenses outside of Richmond – killed at least two black men and wounded numerous others. This violence, which soon became known as the Norfolk Riot, garnered national press and political attention.[78] It was not an exceptional event. Rather, it was one of many violent contests between white and black people over who had access to, and influence in, Norfolk's public sphere. Through a detailed investigation of these conflicts and the rhetoric surrounding them in Norfolk, I will explore struggles over the meaning of civic participation and inclusion that occurred in numerous Southern cities during Reconstruction.

Conflict Over Public Space

By the spring of 1866 the Union army had occupied the region surrounding Norfolk for over four years. Tens of thousands of enslaved people

---

[78] Ibid.

crowded into the area during the war itself after news spread that the actions of local military commanders and the passage of the Confiscation Acts of 1861 and 1862 prevented enslaved persons who made their way to Union army lines from being returned to their owners. The army put these freedpeople to work on government run farms, Norfolk's wharfs, or, following the Emancipation Proclamation, invited them to enlist as soldiers in United States Colored Troop units.

Immediately following the arrival of the Union army, black people began to test the meaning of freedom. These acts involved simple deeds previously prohibited under slavery, including congregating on the city's street; attending local amusements such as the circus; opening their own social establishments like bars and dance halls; and owning and openly carrying firearms. Even more boldly, they staged public processions in support of federal actions aimed at protecting their rights. The act of demonstrating in Norfolk had long been a white-only activity. By demanding access to these previously exclusive realms, as historian Kathleen Ann Clark explains, "African Americans, la[id] claim to full membership within the communities – local, regional, and national – in which they lived."[79]

Prior to occupation, thousands of local white residents either joined the Confederate army or fled westward to avoid Federal rule. Those who returned to their homes in the summer of 1865 quickly found that the pre-war social order

---

[79] Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 32.

had been turned on its head. Although demoralized, most eventually came to accept the facts of military and political defeat. This acceptance did not extend to the forceful public demands for civil equality that black residents of Norfolk and the surrounding area quickly embraced. In response, the white community quickly sought to reestablish the antebellum status quo by reconstituting their own civic organizations and violently attacking public expressions of black people's new status.

It was within this political and social atmosphere that multiple battles over Norfolk's communal urban spaces occurred. Prior to April of 1866, three additional violent disputes that were also labeled 'riots' centered on similar issues. Thus, the Norfolk Riot should be seen as one of many continuous contests in which black public demonstrations in support of their political and civil rights were met with organized, violent white responses to them.

For the purposes of this study, I bring together two trends in Reconstruction literature focusing on civic participation and violence. Mary P. Ryan's *Civic Wars* explores the origins of and changes to American democratic public life in nineteenth century cities.[80] Ryan grounds her study in the notion of the public sphere. She defines the public sphere by combining Jürgen Habermas's ideas of a broad, non-state bounded realm of public discourse with Alexis de Tocqueville's focus on the primacy of democratic associations within

---

[80] Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997).

American democracy.[81] Her examination of local conditions, as opposed to broad national trends, allows her "to discover how people actually defined themselves as political actors and recognized one another."[82] Kathleen Ann Clark follows in a similar vein, but focuses her analysis on African American urban commemorations and their role in the formation of black political culture during and after the Civil War. Crucially, she concentrates on how "commemorative celebrations became critical forums for constructing collective African American identities for both black and white audiences."[83]

There have been several regionally based studies recently published that focus on post-Civil War struggles between white and black people in the South's public spaces that have inspired my analysis. Kate Masur examines the ways in which black residents of Washington D.C. "demanded recognition of their own, autonomous institutions, both as a perquisite of freedom and as confirmation of their equal civic stature."[84] Hannah Rosen explores similar themes in Memphis, Tennessee and the state of Arkansas and how "new versions of race and

---

[81] Both Habermas's and Tocqueville's concepts warrant their own separate, and voluminous, historiographies. To examine their own work on these ideas see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Richard D. Heffner (New York: Mentor, 1956). For more on Mary Ryan's theoretical conceptions of the public and democracy see Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 4-9.

[82] Ryan, *Civic Wars,* 12.

[83] Clark, *Defining Moments*, 3.

[84] Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8.

citizenship were being forged in … public spaces."[85] Finally, Justin Behrend's analysis of the origins of a new and racially diverse grassroots democratic system in the black belt of Mississippi and Louisiana looks at the ways ex-slaves used their "social networks formed while under bondage in order to establish churches, schools, and labor associations that would become the foundation for a new democratic polity."[86] These studies provide me with a framework in which to place events that occurred in Norfolk in conversation with regional wide trends that swept the South during Reconstruction.

Additionally, several historians who concentrate on the study of Reconstruction era violence underscore the relationship between conflict and the formation and expression of political identity. Hannah Rosen advocates scholars to use "the details of violent encounters as a window onto the political culture and conflicts of their time."[87] In *Beyond Redemption,* Carole Emberton highlights the key role violence played in Reconstruction era community making. Following the Civil War, she states, "Reconstruction revealed how images, symbols, and languages of violence, as well as its methods, informed the very definition of

---

[85] Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 24.
[86] Justin Behrend, *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015), 8.
[87] Hannah Rosen, "In the Moment of Violence: Writing the History of Postemancipation Terror," in *Beyond Freedom: Disrupting the History of Emancipation*, ed. David W. Blight and Jim Downs (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2017), 146.

what it meant to be an American."[88] For these reasons, I see the formation of Norfolk's Reconstruction era public sphere and the violence that accompanied it as inextricably linked. Examining the details of black people's political action in public and white people's violent reactions will allow for a deeper understanding of Norfolk and the wider Tidewater region's place in the nationwide struggle over definitions of citizenship and political identity that occurred following the Civil War.

Origins in War

Encompassing the site of the first permanent English settlement at Jamestown, the Tidewater region established itself as an agriculturally based society centered on the large-scale production of tobacco.[89] Planters quickly adopted chattel slavery as the preferred labor system following the first importation of African slaves to the area in 1619. Enslaved people were central to the region's economy, consisting of at least forty percent of the population by 1860.[90] The onset of the Civil War soon threatened the fundamental structures of this slave society.

---

[88] Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 8.

[89] To be clear, the term tidewater refers to any region whose waterways are affected by the tides. For the purposes of this study, I will be using the 'Tidewater' descriptor to specifically mean the southeastern part of Virginia that borders the harbor of Hampton Roads. This region includes the mid-nineteenth century counties and cities of Newport News, Hampton, Isle of Wight, Smithfield, Nansemond, Suffolk, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Princess Anne.

[90] U.S. Bureau of the Census (USBC), *1860, Population*, 519.

The region's relative economic success and ability to diversify led to the steady growth of the nearby port of Norfolk, first established in 1680.[91] However, while expanding modestly in size throughout the 1800s, the city never made meaningful links to European markets that made cities such as Baltimore and New York City so successful. Norfolk's stagnating economy led to increased racial tensions by the eve of the Civil War. While the city's population in 1860 consisted of only 1,046 (7%) free people of color and 3,284 (22%) enslaved people, "blacks annoyed some whites by their very presence."[92] White workers resented the lower wages that African Americans, whether free or enslaved, worked for, going so far as to demand the banning of free blacks from all trades in 1851.[93] Strains between the city's white and black population only grew worse once war broke out.

These strains increased exponentially as upwards of 20,000 formerly enslaved men, women, and children seized their freedom by making their way to the Norfolk area following its capture by the Union army on May 10th, 1862.[94] The Union's capture of the largest urban center in the area elicited an outpouring of joy from African Americans. The city's black residents, along with thousands of formerly enslaved freedpeople from the countryside, gathered on city streets that night, demonstrating their contempt for a long-standing curfew. A public day of

---

[91] Rogers Dey Whichard, *The History of Lower Tidewater Virginia* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1959), 1:366.
[92] USBC, *1860, Population,* 519; Parramore, *Norfolk*, 183.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Debra Jackson, "A Black Journalist in Civil War Virginia: Robert Hamilton and the 'Anglo-African,'" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no. 1 (2008): 61.

thanksgiving was celebrated the next day, culminating in a parade of approximately five thousand black people, at least a thousand more people than the pre-war black population (both free and enslaved) of Norfolk.[95] This massive demonstration only a year into the war loudly represented Norfolk's growing black community's entry into the city's public sphere. The shock to the white population of an event of this scale can be gauged by prior reactions to African Americans participating in public processions. Only three years earlier, white residents of Norfolk denounced a popular former mayor for having *thirty-six* black torchbearers lead a nighttime procession of his militia company.[96]

Black public celebrations took on even more overt political meanings following the news that the Emancipation Proclamation would come into effect January 1st, 1863. While the technical terms of the Proclamation did not result in the immediate end of slavery, especially in Union occupied territory like Norfolk, its symbolic meaning was clear. Thousands of African Americans from both the city and surrounding countryside celebrated by marching through Norfolk's streets on the day of the Proclamation's enactment. Black soldiers, recently recruited under the provisions of the Proclamation, led the parade, which included a cart containing two women ripping up and trampling a Confederate flag. The procession ended at the local fairgrounds where an effigy of Confederate President Jefferson Davis was burned and buried.[97] The timing of both of these demonstrations was significant, as historian Kathleen Ann Clark

[95] Parramore, *Norfolk*, 207.
[96] Ibid., 183.
[97] Clark, *Defining Moments,* 17.

states, “At a moment when the fate of the war … was as yet unsettled, African Americans in Norfolk took to the streets to assert their vision of the Confederacy’s defeat … and enacted their own rebirth into liberty.”[98] Precisely, it was in the streets where they could fully express the deeper meanings they saw as being brought on by the war. This relates directly to what Mary Ryan sees as the discursive power of processions, examples of when “Americans claimed and exercised ceremonial citizenship. Interrupting their everyday … activities, they entered public time and space to represent themselves in a profusion of custom-made identities.”[99] By physically destroying symbols of the Confederacy and highlighting the service of African American soldiers, black people defined themselves as militantly free members of Norfolk’s community.

One of the first and most highly publicized violent reactions by white people to these startling new sights in their city’s streets occurred during the summer of 1863. A prominent white doctor named David Wright “issued an almost involuntary ‘exclamation of disgust’” at Lieutenant Anson Sanborn, a Union officer commanding a United States Colored Troop (USCT) detachment marching through town.[100] When Sanborn ordered his arrest, Wright mortally wounded the officer by pulling out a gun and shooting him in the chest. Wright was apprehended, tried by a military court, and sentenced to death. Abraham Lincoln even took an interest in the case, requesting the details of the trial before the local commander carried out the sentence. However, Wright never received

---

[98] Ibid., 19.
[99] Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 59-60.
[100] Parramore, *Norfolk,* 209.

any presidential reprieve and was hung in October.[101] Seen as a martyr by local whites, Wright's case provides convincing evidence that even so called 'respectable' upper class white residents saw violence against black people, and those that supported them, as a legitimate tool to oppose the display of African Americans' militaristic public identities. This revelation is important to keep in mind, as later instances of white on black violence were often condemned by the white elite as uncivilized expressions of anger by lower class white people.

"Be Up and Active"

Tidewater's black community quickly formed political organizations to demand rights on the national level and Norfolk, as historian Vincent Harding proclaims, became "a major center of … visionary activity and leadership."[102] Three prominent community leaders participated in the National Negro Convention held in Syracuse, New York in October of 1864, sharing their ideas among such notables as Frederick Douglas.[103] On April the 4th, 1865, only two days after the capture of Richmond by the Union army, the region's first black political organization was created, known as the Colored Monitor Union Club.

---

[101] Cassandra Lynn Newby, "'The World Was All Before Them': A Study of the Black Community in Norfolk, Virginia, 1861-1884" (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1992), 49.
[102] Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, Publishers, 1981), 295; For an in depth examination of the social, political, and economic lives of Norfolk's black community before, during, and after the Civil War see Tommy Lee Bogger, "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk, 1775-1865." (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1976) and Newby, "'The World Was All Before Them.'"
[103] Bogger, "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk," 309.

The Club's constitution dually emphasized their desire for suffrage and the importance of inserting themselves into the public sphere:

> Promote union and harmony among the colored portion of this community, and to enlighten each other on the *important subject of the right of universal suffrage* to all loyal men, without distinction of color, and to memorialize the Congress of the United States to allow the colored citizens the equal right of franchise with other citizens, *to call frequent meetings, and procure suitable speakers for the same, to form auxiliary clubs throughout the Eastern District of Virginia, to give publicity to our views all over the country*, and to assist the present administration in putting down the enemies of the government, and to protect, strengthen, and defend all friends of the Union [emphasis added].[104]

By placing political rights and the call to civic organization side by side, the Club demonstrated that they, as Mary Ryan identifies as a nation wide trend, "defined themselves … by the political status of citizen and by a range of partisan affiliations. [T]hese partisan public events were a direct exercise of political citizenship and brought into play the doctrine of popular sovereignty, a title to rights, and a token of power."[105] These calls show the remarkable nature of the Club's actions, as they well preceded any discussion by state or federal authorities to legally recognize or protect the citizenship rights of African Americans. Additionally, the Club's invocation of militant language, "to protect, strengthen, and defend all friends of the Union," emphasizes that they realized they were entering contested ground. As nineteenth century politics "put urban heterogeneity to an extreme and decisive test. It was a declaration of civic war."[106]

---

[104] As quoted in Ibid., 310-311.
[105] Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 95.
[106] Ibid.

The Colored Union Monitor Club believed in more than just speeches. In local elections held in May of 1865, hundreds of black voters placed their names on a special contested-vote list in one of the city's wards and hundreds more cast ballots at a polling place the Club set up inside the Bute Street Methodist Church.[107] While none of the ballots were ever counted, their actions forced authorities, on both the state and federal level, to recognize and address the controversial issue of African American voting rights, even if it was to deny them. Just as they brought to the forefront the importance and meaning of emancipation with the January 1863 demonstration, black people now used similar tactics in regards to the issue of citizenship and voting rights.

The Club quickly followed up on this success on June 5, 1865, by directly addressing the issue of African American suffrage and civil rights in a twenty six-page pamphlet entitled: "Equal Suffrage. Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States. Also an Account of the Agitation Among the Colored People of Virginia for Equal Rights. With an Appendix Concerning the Rights of Colored Witnesses Before the State Courts." Recognizing that the realization of their platform would not be easy, the pamphlet's authors urged black Virginians to "*be up and active*, and everywhere let associations be formed having for their object *the agitation, discussion and enforcement* of your claims to equality before the law, and equal rights of suffrage. Your opponents are active; *be prepared, and organize* to resist their

---

[107] Harding, *There Is a River,* 295-296.

efforts [emphasis added]."[108] The Colored Union Monitor Club printed over five thousand copies of the pamphlet and it reportedly made its way to President Andrew Johnson and members of Congress.[109] The pamphlet's rhetoric repeatedly focused on the significance of public action. Additionally, the language of "resistance to opposition" and "be prepared" further demonstrates that the black community understood the confrontational nature of the public sphere into which they were demanding entry. This message surely reached the hands of conservative white leaders in the area who were just as determined to bar African Americans' access and just as willing to utilize violence to do so. Embracing their own civic associations, white residents prepared to meet African Americans for battle in the streets.

By the summer of 1865, just as the Union Monitor Club's pamphlet warned, white people began to violently resist the formerly enslaved and free black community's actions after witnessing months of their increasingly vocal political organizing. A particularly notorious example occurred in late June. *The Norfolk Post*, a moderately conservative local paper, reported on June 22nd, 1865, a number of relevant national and state political developments. The paper, a strong supporter of President Johnson's polices, included his proclamations calling for the quick restoration of southern state governments and the ending of

[108] Colored Citizens of Norfolk Virginia, "Equal Suffrage. Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States. Also an Account of the Agitation Among the Colored People of Virginia for Equal Rights. With an Appendix Concerning the Rights of Colored Witnesses Before the State Courts." (Norfolk: 1865), 7, accessed April 19, 2018, http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/563.
[109] Bogger, "The Slave and Free Black Community in Norfolk," 312.

trade restrictions in the former Confederacy. These actions signaled the President's desire for a short and non-intrusive Reconstruction program. The day before, the Virginia legislature had passed a bill overturning all voting restrictions for former Confederates in statewide and national elections.[110] This can be seen as a preparation to counter the possibility of black people's entry into the electorate. Moreover, these two articles signaled to Tidewater's conservative white population that neither the federal nor state authorities planned on significantly interfering with local affairs. [111] On the same page as these two announcements, the paper reported that city elections were to be held two days later. Also on the same page, it was announced that a large meeting was held at City Hall the evening before "for the purposes of organizing a party in Norfolk to advance the cause of negro suffrage."[112] Within this environment of heightened political activity, the stage was set for a violent racial confrontation.

---

[110] This legislature, known as the Restored government, was formed immediately following Virginia's secession from the Union in April of 1861 by state lawmakers representing mainly western, non-slaveholding counties. After the creation of the state of West Virginia in 1863, Governor Francis Pierpoint and a handful of legislators continued to represent the counties of the state then occupied by the Union army. In February of 1863, the Restored government adopted a new state constitution that, among other provisions, disenfranchised virtually all Confederate officials and civilians. This constitution went into effect throughout the state following the surrender of Confederate armies in April of 1865. During a special session in June of 1865, the legislature overturned the disenfranchisement clause, allowing virtually all white Virginians to vote in upcoming state and congressional elections. For more on the wartime and immediate postwar politics of Virginia see Richard Lowe, *Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-1870* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991), 6-49.
[111] *The Norfolk Post*, June 22, 1865, 2.
[112] Ibid.

On the 24th of June, the local Freedmen's Bureau agent, Lieutenant John Keatley, reported to the head of Virginia's Bureau, Col. Orlando Brown, about "a serious riot" that took place over the preceding two days.[113] Therefore, occurring the same days as the events reported in *The Norfolk Post* discussed above. According to Keatley, tensions had been "brewing for several days" and finally came to a head after drunken Union army soldiers and local white civilians began assaulting black men near the visiting circus the night of the 22nd. These men quickly responded. Retreating to arm themselves with bats and pistols, they "came down Grandby [*sic*] Street and a collision took place."[114] This demonstrates the willingness of black residents to answer force with force of their own. The fighting started up again the next night and resulted in several people being wounded on both sides. Additionally, the white assailants destroyed several African American operated bars and dance halls.[115] Unsurprisingly, *The Norfolk Post* downplayed the events simply as a "Noisy Night" that consisted of a "disagreeable feud … between some of the soldiers and the discontented portion of the colored population."[116] This is evidence of the press's attempt to remove the city's white residents from the narrative of the event. However, the actions of the white assailants point directly to the regionally specific meaning of the violence.

---

[113] Lt. John H. Keatley to Col. Orlando Brown, June 24, 1865, Unregistered Letters and Telegrams Received (ser. 3799), Virginia Assistant Commissioner, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7457].
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] *The Norfolk Post,* June 24, 1865, 2.

That the fighting began around the circus is significant. Centers of city amusement had a long nineteenth century history of "court[ing] a wide and various, truly public clientele."[117] Angered by the assertiveness of African American political organizations and perhaps stirred up by the campaign rhetoric of the local election, white men saw their opportunity to forcefully prevent the inclusion of black residents in a communal event. Furthermore, the creation of independent social buildings on antebellum city streets, such as dance halls or bars, signaled the "social integrity" and entry into the community of specific ethnic or racial groups.[118] Thus, the destruction of these buildings by the white crowd proclaimed their rejection and attempted removal of African American public existence.

Orlando Brown believed the event was serious enough to warrant his own personal investigation. Reporting directly to the overall head of the Freedmen's Bureau, General O.O. Howard, Brown identified the political motives of the white attackers when he stated, "some Federal soldiers in company with returned rebel soldiers and civilians were carousing in a low rum hole, when the subject of the Freedom of the Negroes was discussed, all parties agreeing that the 'Negroes put on airs.'"[119] What exactly 'putting on airs' meant is impossible to know, but the multiple contemporary examples of freedmen demonstrating their desire to be included in the civic and social spaces of Norfolk provides a logical answer.

---

[117] Ryan, *Civic Wars,* 38.
[118] Ibid., 37.
[119] Col. Orlando Brown to Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, June 29, 1865, B-30 (1865), Letters Received (ser. 15), Records of the Commissioner, Washington Headquarters, RBFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7457].

As Kathleen Ann Clark states, these expressions "redefined black identities and called on whites to respect the full range of rights to which black people were due."[120] The events of June 1865 show that Norfolk's white residents sought ways to reject this redefinition.

Additionally, the city's white populace began to reform their own formal organizations, disbanded due to the war, to counter African American's demands for access to the public sphere. On June 27th, only four days after the battles previously described, *The Norfolk Post* favorably reported on the formation of local militias: "We understand that a number of citizens have formed themselves into companies … to assist in protecting the city against all comers. We want such an organization of quiet and peaceable citizens … in order to conserve the peace of the city."[121] The importance of these groups to nineteenth century civic city life is underscored with Mary Ryan's statement that "urban associations" were "essential determinants of who would become visible, honorable, and powerful in public life."[122] The Colored Union Monitor Club had claimed this space in Norfolk for several months without having a serious white counterpart to challenge it. Now, using the violence they instigated as a rationale, the white community could turn to their own organizations to assist in their efforts to end black participation in the city's communal spaces.

Even though both Keatley and Brown clearly saw evidence of the involvement of local white people in the June 22nd and 23rd assaults, including

---

[120] Clark, *Defining Moments,* 33.
[121] *The Norfolk Post,* June 27, 1865, 2.
[122] Ryan *Civic Wars*, 74.

ex-Confederates, the Norfolk press continued to place all of the blame on Union soldiers for the uptick of violence against African Americans. *The Norfolk Post* went even further on July 3rd when they stated:

> The people here have no animosity against the colored race, and are ready to protect them, as they have always done, against outrage. They know the simple-mindedness of the race, and the ease with which they can be governed and kept in order, and if the soldiers would but let them alone, and cease to agitate and excite them by acts of unprovoked violence, all would be well. The citizens have no fears or apprehensions so far as they themselves are concerned of any conflict; for they know the colored man, if left to himself, will remain subordinate to authority, and peacefully and quietly pursue the even tenor of his way.[123]

This article highlights common themes related to white-black race relations in nineteenth century Virginia. Extolling antebellum notions of paternalism towards their African American population, the paper's editors used racist conceptions of black people's temperament to convince themselves that any political or social action on the part of freedpeople must have been the fault of outside agitators. It also reinforced their belief that freedpeople lack the maturity or capacity for public sphere participation.[124] This rhetoric directly contradicts the language of the Colored Union Monitor Club's call to "be up and active" only a few weeks earlier.[125] These competing discourses clearly reveal the confrontation over Norfolk's public sphere.

---

[123] Ibid., July 3, 1865, 2.

[124] For more on representations of African Americans and white women as childlike as means of excluding them from political power see Corinne Field, *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[125] Colored Citizens of Norfolk Virginia, "Equal Suffrage," 7.

This is not to absolve Union army soldiers for their participation in violence against black people. Racist attitudes were not limited to the South in 1865, as a well-educated Illinois soldier described in his diary, "the soldiers, generally have a bitter enmity towards the negroes. Any, that plead for even the most common rights of the negro, do so at the risk of their popularity with their comrades. This is true, not of any particular regiments only, but generally so far as my observation extends, which has by no means been limited."[126] Furthermore, many Union soldiers blamed African Americans as the primary cause of the war. This belief, combined with a prevalent conviction that black people lacked the same capacity for emotions as white people, often led soldiers to treat formerly enslaved people with, as historian Leon Litwack notes, "the same capacity for sadistic cruelty which they thought they had left behind them on the plantations and farms."[127] These widespread opinions made federal soldiers stationed in the Tidewater region susceptible to local white people's recruitment efforts in their campaign to confront black civic participation.

Nonetheless, *The Norfolk Post's* claim that whites believed African Americans to be naturally peaceful and subordinate did not reflect white people's actions during the remainder of 1865. Reporting on the year's most notable cases, Fort Monroe Freedmen's Bureau agent Captain C.B. Wilder described an attack upon freedpeople near Hampton, Virginia on July 4th, only a day after the

---

[126] As quoted in Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011), 101.
[127] Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980), 128.

Post's article.[128] Celebrating the nation's founding provides further evidence that the Tidewater black community sought to, as Kathleen Ann Clark discusses, "dr[aw] a straight line from the Declaration of Independence to the Emancipation Proclamation, designating the historical struggle for freedom and equality as a uniquely American mission."[129] However, during their return to town, "an unprovoked assault was made on the procession, their banners torn from their hands, and but for the interference of the Pro[vost] Guard in Hampton, and a number of cavalry, would have resulted in a bloody riot."[130] Ambushing the gathering before it returned under the watchful eyes of federal authorities in town demonstrates the premeditation of the white attackers. Wilder attributed the army's intervention more to luck than a concerted effort to protect the procession. Additionally, targeting the marchers' banners conveyed a direct opposition to the overtly political meaning of the celebration.

White people not only violently responded to African Americans' efforts at political organization; they also feared the possibility of armed uprisings from their former charges. On July 5th, 1865, Col. Brown wrote to the Provost Marshall at Norfolk, General O.L. Mann, about a recent complaint he received from a Southampton County resident. Brown requested that the general immediately send Lt. Keatley to the county to organize a Freedmen's Bureau post because, "Mr. H. tells me that the Freedmen in that (Southampton) County are in a bad

---

[128] Fort Monroe was a U.S. Army instillation located across Hampton Roads from Norfolk at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula.
[129] Clark, *Defining Moments,* 33.
[130] Capt. C.B. Wilder to Capt. J. S. McEwan, December 28, 1865, Letters Received and Other Records (ser. 1272), Military District of Fort Monroe, USCC (RG 393 Pt. 2 No. 45), NARA [FSSP C-3134].

condition – He thinks it necessary that the Whites should be armed, and claims to have the authority from Gov. Pierpoint to arm a Police Force."[131] Describing the freedpeople in the county as "in a bad condition" while requesting permission for armed protection suggests that the complainant was concerned about the widespread increase in black people stealing from their former masters. Historian Leon Litwack attributes these thefts as practical steps taken by hungry and poorly clothed freedpeople so soon after the end of slavery. False charges of stealing are also a distinct possibility. Furthermore, former slaves often viewed what white people considered thefts as simply "long-overdue payments for past services."[132]

The state government's lenient polices towards former Confederates in the summer of 1865 supports Mr. H's claim that the governor did approve his request to form an armed police for the implicit reason of protecting white residents from the depravities of the county's large African American population. Fears of armed black insurrection dated back to slavery days, especially poignant in the county where Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion occurred. These anxious feelings clashed with representations, as expressed in the July 3rd *Norfolk Post* article, of the loyal and gentle nature of black people. Nonetheless, historian George Rable maintains that, "even those whites who scoffed at the reported plots and ridiculed those fainthearted souls who believed in them

---

[131] Col. Orlando Brown to Bvt. Brig. Gen. O.R. Mann, July 5, 1865, Norfolk Assistant Subassistant Commissioner, Letters and Orders Received, 1865-1867, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA, microfilm roll 148, www.familysearch.org.
[132] Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 142.

advised vigilance and preparation for any contingency."[133] Uneasiness over African Americans' potential for violence and access to arms only increased as Reconstruction continued.

"They had as much right there as white men"

Throughout the summer of 1865, rumors circulated across the South centering on the uncertainty of federal land policy. Freedpeople hoped that Congressional talk of land redistribution would be realized. Conversely, many white people feared a pending race war.[134] Both sides looked to late December, particularly between Christmas and New Year's Day, as the time when these hopes/fears would come to fruition.[135] As President Johnson began to order the return of ex-Confederates' confiscated land during the fall of 1865, white people, while pleased, now feared that, as historian Steven Hahn states, "disappointed freedpeople [would] take matters into their own hands by the only means left available: concerted violence."[136] While Hahn focuses his discussion on the feelings of rural southerners in the winter of 1865, by examining the South's cities

---

[133] George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 26.
[134] Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 128.
[135] African Americans associated the season with the increased independence and relaxed supervision that occurred during slavery, part of the planters' attempts to fulfill what they believed to be their paternalistic duty. This also led to the unintended consequence of numerous antebellum slave rebellions, as enslaved people had greater freedom of mobility and communication. For more on the reasoning behind the Christmas season rumors see Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 128-148.
[136] Ibid., 146.

we can see how these thoughts merged with conflicts over access to community spaces.

These tensions were forefront in residents' minds when another citywide confrontation erupted on Tidewater area streets, this time in Norfolk's sister city of Portsmouth. On December 31st, 1865, Capt. A.S. Flagg, commander of the 1st District (encompassing several counties around Norfolk) of the Freedmen's Bureau, sent a report to Col. Brown in Richmond describing a disturbance that occurred on Christmas Day. The fighting closely resembled what occurred in June, as Flagg reported:

> … returned rebel soldiers were pretty extensively mixed up in them, they, setting the quarrelsome parties on, whenever opportunity offered, & the 20th New York Troops failed to make arrests as should have been done at the outset … I think the true cause of the Riotous proceeding was Rum [*sic*]. The negros, between the two parties, of soldiers & returned rebels, fared pretty roughly … becoming the object of attacks on all sides. I think it was a plan deliberately continued to disarm the Blacks [*sic*] & arm the Whites.[137]

The attackers' concerted plan to remove weapons from African Americans with the aim of preventing the possibility of an armed uprising is clear when Flagg also stated, "All is now quiet & no outbreak as was feared, showing to my mind, that there was at no time any meditated rising [*sic*] among the Freedmen."[138] While the seizure of arms played a critical role in distinguishing this event from the June attacks, it still shared many of the same characteristics that highlight the

---

[137] Capt. A.S. Flagg to Col. Orlando Brown, December 31, 1865, J-41 (1866), Registered Letters Received (ser. 3798), Virginia Assistant Commissioner, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7673].
[138] Ibid.

continued contests over public spaces in the Reconstruction era Tidewater region.

Evidence of these contests can be gleaned through the examination of participants' testimonies. A local policeman, Officer James Harrison, recalled a boisterous Christmas morning as he witnessed a crowd of around forty people drinking on the sidewalk. It seems the group was segregated, as he stated, "I first spoke to a white man who told me to disperse the Negros also. I then turned to a colored man and ordered them also to disperse. One Harrison Sheppard (colored) was very drunk and imprudent."[139] Unwilling to allow the African American group sole access to the street, the whites made sure if they had to leave, so did the black people. After Officer Harrison turned to disperse another gathering across the street, the two crowds he had just spoken to reconvened and began to fight. As he was trying to break it up, "Jim Gordon and another colored man rushed across the street, and the latter fired a pistol directly at me. Gordon threw a brick at the Mayor, who had arrived on the ground."[140] Whether the two men intentionally targeted the policeman and the mayor, symbols of the city's white authority, is hard to tell, as Officer Harrison painted a chaotic scene and "saw pistols in the hands of both whites and coloreds."[141] Gordon and his partner could have simply been trying to assist their comrades in the brawl when Officer Harrison and the mayor happened to be in the way. Regardless, based on

---

[139] Statement of James H. Harrison, n. d, enclosed in Charles E. Johnston to Capt. A. S. Flagg, January 1, 1866, J-41 (1866), Registered Letters Received (ser. 3798), Virginia Assistant Commissioner, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7673].
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.

Officer Harrison's statement it is apparent that the two crowds saw the street itself as a place worth fighting over, matching Mary Ryan's characterization that "streets of nineteenth century cities were preeminently places of promiscuous public sociability."[142]

Local Freedmen's Bureau agent Charles Johnston took sworn statements from additional white and black witnesses to the event. Although two wildly conflicting stories are told, contestation over access to the street emerges as a common theme. Albert Booker (black) recalled, "Officer Harrison cleared the side walk, when the col'd [*sic*] men said they had as much right there as white men, who were not troubled. A white man then knocked down Harrison Sheppard and another one shot him."[143] Booker's recollection makes plain that black people, both verbally and physically, asserted their equal claim to the public sphere of Portsmouth's streets. Perhaps Harrison Sheppard articulated this avowal, the same man Officer Harrison described as imprudent in his report, and was then almost murdered for it. Similarly, George Lash (white) highlighted that, "About one hundred Negros were on the corner. One of them run [*sic*] his head in my face. I was struck by some of the Negros. I did not recognize any of the col'd [*sic*] people, they seemed to be strangers."[144] Lash's assertion that there were hundreds of non-resident African Americans on the street corner, taunting and assaulting him, connects white people's fears of insurrection to the ongoing

[142] Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 40.
[143] Testimony of witnesses to riot, n.d., enclosed in Charles E. Johnston to Capt. A. S. Flagg, January 1, 1866, J-41 (1866), Registered Letters Received (ser. 3798), Virginia Assistant Commissioner, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7673].
[144] Ibid.

battles over the city's common areas. As Steven Hahn discusses, white fear of insurrection, "came at a time of heightened tensions and anxieties, of political division and social unrest; it implicated outsiders."[145]

Further statements, particularly from black witnesses, shed light on the disturbance's central role in white people's plan to disarm African Americans. John Vrile (black) described how, "Baker Moland (white) came out and drew a revolver – and asked colored men if they had revolvers – no one answered immediately but some one soon replied yes, we [?] them – The Whites then wanted to fight the col'd [*sic*] men and said we are young Confederates and don't fear any one in the City." [146] Vrile's statement provides a view on the white strategy used to try to carry out black disarmament. By first asking, and then waiting for confirmation from the African Americans themselves to prove that they were armed, the white attackers set up the opportunity to blame the violence they instigated on the armed black crowd. Furthermore, this account reinforces the report by Capt. Flagg that put ex-rebels at the center of the attack. Whether they coordinated with these men before hand or simply fell for the deception, Union army soldiers began fulfilling the white attackers' desires, as George Lash remembered, "… the soldiers took from them [the black people] several sticks and pistols."[147]

Several statements made by black victims and recorded by Charles Johnston on a separate sheet of paper labeled as a "Second Disturbance" add

---

[145] Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet*, 146.
[146] Testimony of witnesses to riot.
[147] Ibid.

further weight to the notion that Union soldiers and white residents coordinated their actions. Randall Hodge (black) swore:

> that on Christmas he was sitting in his house quietly, a soldier came in and asked if he had any fire arms he said yes he had a gun, which was demanded of me. I would not give it up unless he showed his authority; there were two citizens with them – They left the house for half an hour, They came back and asked me to open door, I refused, and I was asked to come to Mayor's Office tomorrow, some 20 or 30 citizens come no soldiers with them, I shot at the first man who entered the house – I lost $30 in money besides furniture.[148]

Several other black people who lived in the same house confirmed Hodge's testimony. Additionally, Samuel Robinson (black) stated that he was not home when the interaction first began, but "went back to the house after the third time and one soldier with 20 or 30 citizens were at the house. They seized me and took me to the Mayor's Office. Officer Parker arrested me."[149] These events, occurring away from the rough and tumble street fight across town, reveal much more clearly the alliances and tactics at play that Christmas Day. The initial departure of the party after Hodge demanded proof of authority shows that the solider did not have official orders from his superiors. Instead, he returned with a more intimidating form of authorization, a crowd of local white men. Not only did they then break into Hodge's home to take his gun, they threatened him with arrest by the police and looted all of his possessions. The complicity of local authorities in these actions is clear, as affirmed by what happened to Samuel Robinson. The events of December 25th, 1865, highlight the multiple sophisticated tactics white people in Tidewater, Virginia used to try to suppress

---

[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

the civic and personal rights black people claimed in the aftermath of slavery. In the face of these attempts, Portsmouth's black inhabitants fought back to the best of their ability.

More than simply fearing an armed rebellion by black people, whites' determination to disarm African Americans represented an additional way to oppose their demands for rights. Historian Carole Emberton maintains that, "Not surprisingly, freedpeople viewed gun possession as a symbol of freedom and independence. Firearms accentuated the meaning of freedom for the newly free."[150] Additionally, the importance of gun ownership to black southerners was closely linked to their embrace of quasi-military companies. Providing a form of social organization and collective security, these groups also represented "Freedpeople's eagerness to perform the militarized rituals historically reserved for white men [and] propelled a desperate effort to disarm them."[151] It is not a coincidence then that only two days following the Portsmouth Christmas Day assaults the city's black community demonstrated their refusal to submit to physical coercion. In an article entitled "Colored Firemen's Parade" *The Norfolk Post* reported, "The Vigilant Fire Company of Portsmouth, paraded the streets of this city yesterday afternoon, headed by a band of martial music. Their apparatus presented a neat appearance, and the uniform of the members were a deep red,

---

[150] Emberton, *Beyond Redemption,* 147-148.
[151] Ibid., 149; For a more in depth examination of the activities of black militias and military organizations see Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet.*

trimmed with blue. Nineteen men only manned the rope."[152] Following the organized attack on their right to gather in the street and bear arms, the area's black population publicly demonstrated that they would not be intimidated by showcasing their own organized, martial abilities. The paper's mention that "only" nineteen men marched as members was perhaps an effort to soothe the concerns of its white audience. However, tensions only increased in the Tidewater region as hundreds of African American soldiers began returning home.

Homecoming

Out of the nearly 6,000 black Virginians who served in the Union army during the Civil War, the vast majority came from the Tidewater region.[153] The federal government raised five regiments in the region and recorded 266 men as having enlisted from the city of Norfolk, with hundreds more hailing from neighboring counties.[154] Initially continuing to serve following the end of hostilities in April and May of 1865, most black units began to muster out by the spring of 1866. The return of former black soldiers caused considerable uneasiness among the area's white residents. Most white southerners during the war believed that "black soldiers exercised a subversive influence on the recently

[152] *The Norfolk Post*, December 27, 1865, 3.
[153] Ira Berlin, Joseph Reidy, and Leslie Rowland, eds., *The Black Military Experience*, ser. 2, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982), 116.
[154] Newby, "' The World Was All Before Them,'" 62.

freed slaves."[155] Armed and enjoying the protection of the federal government, soldiers regularly challenged pre-war discriminatory practices and encouraged black civilians to do the same. For these very reasons, black veterans faced a hostile homecoming, as Leon Litwack depicts, "To many whites, at least, he was a traitor and more than likely a potential troublemaker. As a soldier, he had been feared; as a civilian, he seemed no less dangerous."[156] Additionally, returned black soldiers bolstered the efforts of local black communities, as they "served as [a] source of inspiration, protection, and direction as they made their way in the new world of freedom."[157]

Norfolk's white residents wasted no time in their efforts to oppose the potentially strengthened black community and their claims to the city's public sphere. In his monthly report for March, Charles Johnston reported to Col. Brown that:

> In the early part of the month fears were entertained by the Civil Authorities of an outbreak among the freedmen. Large numbers of colored soldiers had been discharged, and many of them were reported to be armed. On the night of the 6th of March a number of whites attacked a bar room on Wide Water Street kept by a freedman named Baker, and after destroying every glass in the building, broke open the door, and in a few minutes made a complete wreck of all the property within their reach.[158]

By relating the city's fears of an armed rebellion involving returned black soldiers next to the report of a white mob's destruction of a black owned bar, Johnston implied that the two were linked. Local papers made the connection much more

---

[155] Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 269.
[156] Ibid., 272.
[157] Berlin, et al., eds., *The Black Military Experience*, 737.
[158] Charles E. Johnston to Col. Orlando Brown, April 1, 1866, Narrative Reports of Conditions of Bureau Affairs (ser. 3802), Virginia Assistant Commissioner, BRFAL (RG 105), NARA [FSSP A-7426].

clear. On March 6th, 1866, the Norfolk *Day Book,* a radically conservative paper, reported on a fight that had occurred the previous evening, March 5th, "Last night … a fight occurred on Wide Water street, at a dance house called Canterbury Hall, and kept by two colored men named Reed and Wheaton. It appears the ball had been given by the proprietors of the house to the returned colored soldiers."[159] According to the rest of the article, someone threw a brick at the hall's windows, which touched off a battle between whites, including policemen, and black patrons. The next day's issue described in detail the events of March 6th. According to the editor's:

> The principal object of their [rioters] rage was the Norfolk Saloon. No. 49 Wide Water street … No. 10, Nebraska street, was also visited and served [destroyed] in like manner. It is generally reported that Firemen were at the head of the affair, this we emphatically deny. It is more than probable that some firemen might have been led towards the scene of the riot, from curiosity, but with no desire to take a hand in any such disgraceful affair.[160]

Directly beneath this account, the *Day Book* published an article discussing returned black soldiers and stated, "But no excuse can be found for the outrages nightly perpetrated by them."[161]

As demonstrated on the nights of March 5th and 6th, 1866, black soldiers' return to the city sparked fear and fury in white residents. White assailants targeted centers of African American public life and then blamed them for the violence. Similarly to the June 1865, event, dance halls and bars were not just attacked, but completely destroyed in an attempt to permanently remove black

---

[159] *Day Book* (Norfolk, VA), March 6, 1866, 3.
[160] Ibid., March 7, 1866, 3.
[161] Ibid.

civic and social symbols from the city's streets. Furthermore, the *Day Book's* admittance that white firemen were at the scene of the riot clearly demonstrates that these attacks did not consist of only street 'rabble,' as was often characterized, but of members of the city's 'respectable' civic associations. Historian Mary Ryan identifies nineteenth century firemen as "the archetypal public servant" that represented the confluence of citizens, communities, and civil authority.[162] Even if they were drawn to the riot "from curiosity" as the paper claimed, the fact that the firemen did not help restore order or protect black people's private property shows they did not view the victims as members of the community they volunteered to protect.

Riot Reconsidered

It was within this environment, one of repeated bouts of organized and deliberate violent acts by white people against the public expressions of black social and political rights, that Norfolk's most well known confrontation occurred. What soon came to be known as the Norfolk Riot garnered national press attention and a federally mandated investigation. Unlike the events already discussed, a handful of scholars have scrutinized the April 16th, 1866, event.[163] Most significantly, Cassandra Newby's analysis highlights the testimony of African American witnesses and participants and uses their recollections to add

[162] Ryan, *Civic Wars*, 103.
[163] See John Hammond Moore, "The Norfolk Riot: 16 April 1866," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90, no. 2 (April 1982): 155-164; Parramore, *Norfolk*, 224-228; Thomas Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1931), 257-258.

an additional layer of context to the event that prior historians who primarily relied on army officers' reports and the conservative local newspapers did not address.[164] However, a direct juxtaposition of the Norfolk Riot with the examples of black public demonstrations of the preceding years calls into question whether it should be seen as such a extraordinary occurrence after all.

The parade by the African American community in celebration of the Civil Rights Bill in April of 1866 was not the first or even largest example of such an event in Norfolk. The procession the day after the city's capture by the Union army in 1862 and the parade in support of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st, 1863, had thousands, as opposed to hundreds, of participants. Nor was the April 1866 event notable for the overt political message the crowd was sending. The Emancipation Day march in January of 1863 embraced various observable signs of their hostility to the Confederacy, burning an effigy of Jefferson Davis left little room to miss their intent, and the July 4th, 1865, celebration in Hampton included politically themed banners and speeches. Furthermore, it was not the first time armed African American soldiers marched through the city's streets and showed their support for the community's public political expressions. As evidenced in the June 1865 and March 1866 attacks on black owned bars, especially ones that celebrated the return of black veterans, the local white community had a long history of targeting centers of African American public life with destruction. Repeatedly, these attacks were well organized and coordinated with the police, local paramilitary associations, and

---

[164] Newby, "'The World Was All Before Them,'" 164-178.

even white Union army soldiers. Therefore, why did the Norfolk Riot garner such widespread federal attention? The only major difference was the direct attack by local whites against a *white* Union army officer. This demonstrates a potential threshold that federal authorities deemed unacceptable behavior in the South. An examination of other Reconstruction era 'riots' in the South that triggered federal intervention could test this hypothesis.

Additionally, these comparisons suggest a possible reconsideration of the use of the term 'riot' to describe what was occurring in Norfolk during the early period of Reconstruction. This word implies disorganization and chaos in today's vocabulary. However, in the mid-nineteenth century the phrase carried different connotations, as Mary Ryan posits, "a riot was a species of political action not entirely unlike a public meeting. It was a congregation in open space to publish the collective opinion of a distinctive group. It was, like a partisan election, an act of civil warfare."[165] Newspapers and Union army officers describing the events in Norfolk as riots in 1865 and 1866 knew their readers would understand the implicit message that the violence was related to community wide political conflicts. But, for modern audiences, the violence in postwar Norfolk should more accurately be described as battles, attacks, or fights in a war to decide who belonged in the city's public sphere.

Conclusion

---

[165] Ryan, C*ivic Wars*, 131.

Although the events explored in this study illustrate the civic conflict occurring in Norfolk in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, similar struggles continued throughout the rest of 1866 and into 1867. Incorporating these later confrontations with what I have already explored would add greater weight to my depiction of the city. Additionally, an important gendered aspect of Norfolk's public sphere remains to be analyzed, as black women asserted their right to independence and communal representation through huckstering and prostitution. The records of the Freedmen's Bureau and US Army that have provided a large bulk of the primary source material for this study are extensive. Given more time, it would prove necessary to track down more details, especially testimonies of black participants and witnesses, related to the various Reconstruction era battles between white and black residents of Norfolk.

The Civil War brought irreversible changes to Norfolk's political and civic status quo. Previously excluded from or constrained within the city's public sphere, formerly enslaved and free black inhabitants seized the opportunities presented by the war to exercise their demands for full access to it. However, white residents consistently resisted these claims, often resorting to organized violence. White conservatives would have had no need to turn to such forceful tactics if Norfolk's black community did not consistently assert their own version of what that sphere looked like. This they did with parades, speeches, bars, dance halls, and, when challenged, force. The most conspicuous example of these confrontations occurred on April 16th, 1866, known as the Norfolk Riot. However, by examining several violent disputes that took place prior to April 16th,

the Riot can be contextualized as but one of a series of similar battles between the city's white and black communities centered around control of Norfolk's civic arena. Doing so helps to re-center the discussion of Reconstruction era conflicts, moving away from a tendency to sensationalize or rank violent acts. Instead, it allows historians to see the centrality of public spaces during Reconstruction, in both their physical and symbolic iterations, to both black and white communities. This lens of analysis, as evidenced by Norfolk's example, can help reevaluate previously studied Reconstruction era conflicts to better understand how contemporary participants viewed their lives.

Bibliography

Abbreviations in Notes

BRFAL – Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands

RG – Record Group

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

FSSP – Freedmen and Southern Society Project

USCC – Records of the United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920

Primary Sources

Colored Citizens of Norfolk Virginia. "Equal Suffrage. Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States. Also an Account of the Agitation Among the Colored People of Virginia for Equal Rights. With an Appendix Concerning the Rights of Colored Witnesses Before the State Courts." Norfolk: Virginia, 1865. Accessed April 19, 2018, http://coloredconventions.org/items/show/563.

Day Book (Norfolk, VA)

Norfolk Post

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.* https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html.

U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, RG 105.

———. Records of United States Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, RG 393.

Secondary Sources

Behrend, Justin. *Reconstructing Democracy: Grassroots Black Politics in the Deep South after the Civil War.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015.

Berlin, Ira, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds. *The Black Military Experience*. Series 2. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867.* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982.

Bogger, Tommy Lee. "The Slave and Free Black Community In Norfolk, 1775-1865." PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1976.

Clark, Kathleen Ann. *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Emberton, Carole. *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South after the Civil War.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

Field, Corinne T. *The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age, and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Gallagher, Gary W. *The Union War.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*. Translated by Thomas Berger. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

Hahn, Steven. *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

Harding, Vincent. *The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981.

Jackson, Debra. “A Black Journalist in Civil War Virginia: Robert Hamilton and the ‘Anglo-African,’” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no. 1 (2008): 42-72.

Kerr-Ritchie, Jeffrey R. *Freedpeople in the Tobacco South: Virginia, 1860-1900.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Litwack, Leon F. *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1980.

Lowe, Richard. *Republican and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-1870.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1991.

Masur, Kate. *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle Over Equality in Washington, D.C.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Moore, John Hammond. “The Norfolk Riot: 16 April 1866.” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90, no. 2. (April 1982): 155-164.

Newby, Cassandra Lynn. “’The World Was All Before Them’: A Study of the Black Community in Norfolk, Virginia, 1861-1884.” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1992.

Parramore, Thomas, with Peter Stewart and Tommy Bogger. *Norfolk: The First Four Centuries.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994.

Rable, George C. *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984.

Rosen, Hannah. "In the Moment of Violence: Writing the History of Postemancipation Terror." In *Beyond Freedom: Disrupting the History of Emancipation*, edited by David W. Blight and Jim Downs, 145-159. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2017.

———. *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Ryan, Mary P. *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1997.

Saville, Julie. *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860-1870.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Edited by Richard D. Heffner. New York: Mentor, 1956.

Wertenbaker, Thomas. *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port.* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1931.

Whichard, Rogers Dey. *The History of Lower Tidewater Virginia.* Vol. 1. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1959.