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## The Sensory Environments of Civil War Prisons

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# THE SENSORY ENVIRONMENTS OF CIVIL WAR PRISONS

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Neither the sound of bells, nor the smell of privies, nor the feeling of lice factored into my imagined dissertation when I matriculated at the University of South Carolina in 2010. The Civil War, however, had always loomed large. As a child, my mother often took me metal detecting in the woods, fields, and streams of middle Tennessee in what became our shared hobby. An early lesson in sensory history occurred one summer in a cow pasture (with owner's permission) along the Nashville and Decatur Railroad. We discovered a Union garrison's hearth and recovered discarded fragments of melted lead, railroad iron, buttons, chess pieces whittled from bullets, and hundreds of copper percussion caps for muskets. While I was the stereotypical relic hunter interested in finding more "stuff," my mother pushed both of us to think about what these small pieces meant to the people who had last touched them. She hypothesized that the occupants had amused themselves by throwing percussion caps into the fire to hear them "pop," which I now know others did, including some of the prisoners at Andersonville. In many ways this was my first exposure to sound history.

I lucked into several fine mentors at the University of South Carolina. A scheduling conflict in 2010 meant that I had to switch teaching assistantships from Japanese history to Walter Edgar's history of South Carolina. It was indeed good luck. More than anyone else my first year in graduate school, Edgar cut to the chase about doing history and surviving academics. He also gave me an office at the Institute for Southern Studies and set the precedent of, as he put it, "not evicting" me. At the Institute

for Southern Studies I have had the opportunity to learn from a diverse and interdisciplinary crowd, including Bob Brinkmeyer, Mindy Spencer, Tim Williams, Walter Liniger, Melissa Cooper, Courtney Lewis, Todd Hagstette, and the late Phil Grose. Bob Ellis, the assistant director, has been as important of a mentor as anyone else. He has read more drafts, entertained more ideas, and talked me down from more rooftops than anyone else at USC.

Edgar also introduced me to Mark Smith who became my dissertation advisor. I do not have space enough to express my gratitude to him for accepting me as a student and pushing me in the direction of sensory history. Dr. Smith's early advice gave me the confidence to explore what I wanted to study. Seeing his book in manuscript form in 2014 reminded me of the similarities but also the differences in our research and interpretations, and gave me the final push needed to glide through a year of anxiety and uncertainty as thoughts became words and notes turned into chapters.

It was also fortuitous that I stumbled upon the public history program. In 2010, Bob Weyeneth, encouraged me to consider a master's degree in public history along the way to the PhD. Choosing this route meant more work, especially in the first two years of coursework, but it helped clarify what was important to me about studying the past. The public history program has also given me a broader cohort of historians to admire and learn from. I feel lucky to have had benefited from projects, conversations, and discussions with Sarah Conlon, Jennifer Betsworth, Justin McIntyre, Rebecca Bush, Katie Fauth, Katherine Klein, Caitlin Podas, Caitlin Mans, Jessie Childress, Kat Allen, Tim Hyder, and too many more to name. The public history program also led me to meet Tracy Power when I was as an intern at the South Carolina Department of Archives and

History. Tracy has been endlessly generous with his thoughts and good questions. Three years after he served on my master's thesis committee, I still grapple with insightful questions Tracy raised about the lives of "Johnny" and "Billy."

Five years in graduate school is long enough, especially as I saw friends from Centre College move from school to careers and families, often in new and exciting places. What seemed like a lifetime commitment in 2010 would have been much longer were it not for the good role models I found in the graduate students at USC. David Dangerfield, Allen Driggers, Mark Evans, Ramone Jackson, Rob Haulton, David Prior, Tyler Parry, Caroline Peyton, Jay Richardson, Beth Sherouse, Sarah Scripps, Tara Strauch, and Michael Woods were among those whom I sought to emulate during the early months and years of graduate school. These fine scholars helped knock down the pedestal and remove the veil surrounding coursework, comprehensive exams, and the dissertation.

This project has benefited from wide support within and outside the University of South Carolina. The Society of Colonial Dames, the University of South Carolina, the Institute for Southern Studies, the Friends of Andersonville Organization, Kentucky Historical Society, Virginia Historical Society, and the Filson Historical Society all provided grants and fellowships in support of research and travel. The National Park Service regrettably has only one site devoted to prisoners of war, but Andersonville National Park is a gem of a site. This dissertation benefited from conversations with Eric Leonard, Christopher Barr, Stephanie Steinhorst, Alan Marsh, and James Culpepper and I have immense respect for the challenging and complicated place they are charged with

interpreting. My knowledge of prisoners of war, let alone Andersonville, will never match their individual and collective expertise.

While financial support made research trips possible, there were occasionally gaps in lodging along the way. Filling those gaps were new and old friends, colleagues, and family friends. Roger and Marion Pickenpauh not only let me into their home, they also let me peruse Roger's extensive compilation of prisoner diaries and letters. Alex Waldrop, Gera de Villiers, Alex and Yinghao Riffie, Jeff Kaplan, Jacob Raderer, Justin Roush, Jody and Jamie Noll, Andrew and Katie Fauth, Katherine Klein, Adj Wiley and Tony Giarnelli, Frank and Rose Drislane, Travis Weaver, and Jeff Buckhout all made the process of traveling a lot more fun. And when I had a couple (fruitless) interviews at the American Historical Association in January 2015, the Noll clan kindly allowed me to tag along on their family vacation.

It would be impossible to name all the individuals who have read papers or chapter drafts over the years in official and unofficial capacities. I am grateful that Don Doyle, Lacy Ford, and Steven Berry all agreed to read my dissertation in full and I am grateful for their feedback. Mitch Oxford read most of the chapters in addition to innumerable discussions over any number of drinks. On chapter drafts and conference papers, the advice of Tim Williams, John Lynn III, Dave Roediger, Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Lorien Foote, Mark Christ, Michael D. Thompson, Michael Christ, Joseph Glatthaar, Peter Carmichael, Lorient Foote, Joan Cashin, James Beeby, Barbara Gannon, Gary Sellick, Robert Green, Andrew Kettler, Brian Robinson, Chaz Yingling, Ali Nabours, Neal Polhemus, Tim Minella, and Robert Olguin were all helpful along the way.

There is a cliché warning out there to be nice to archivists they will erase you from history. Luckily most of my experiences with archivists and reference librarians have been non-hostile. Juliette Arai, Trevor Plante, and William H. Davis made it considerably easier to navigate the foreboding environment of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. The staff at the Library of Congress was first-rate as were the reference librarians and archivist at almost every university and state historical society I passed through. Francis Pollard, John McClure, and E. Lee Shepard at the Virginia Historical Society went out of their way to make my two visits comfortable and productive. Valuable guidance came from John Coski at the (then) Museum of the Confederacy, Hampton Smith at the Minnesota Historical Society, Trenton Hizer at the Library of Virginia, Paul Carnahan at the Vermont History Center, Richard J. Sommers at the Army Heritage Education Center, as well as Beth Van Allen, Patrick Lewis, and Tony Curtis at the Kentucky Historical Society. At the local South Caroliniana Library, Graham Duncan, Brian Cuthrell, and several others led me to sources I would have otherwise missed.

Those closest to me have provided the consistent loving support necessary to finish a project I often thought I never should have started. My father and my stepmother have shown support at each and every step as have Kyle, Erin, Daniel, and my grandmother Hudson. My grandmother Balloga helped me buy a reliable vehicle when I moved to South Carolina, and I regret she did not live to see the completion of the degree. My stepfather has offered advice on countless drafts on how to increase clarity and decrease repetition. My mother, in addition to encouraging me to dig up the past from an early age, is also an underpaid but dedicated editor. Fault for any residual errors



falls not on her, but on Amanda's kitten (Jasper) who likes keyboards and trouble. As for Amanda, well, I probably would have read more books and written faster on my own, but what would have been the point? It would have come at a high cost of missed opportunities and adventures. Amanda has been a source of constant stability in time of much anxiety and uncertainty. Now that this rather self-absorbing time of graduate school is over, I hope to learn to be as good to her as she has been to me.

## ABSTRACT

The dissertation explores the experiences of four hundred thousand Union and Confederate prisoners during the American Civil War. While much has been written on the overlapping experiences of soldiers, civilians, and slaves, less attention has been paid to those behind masonry walls or wooden stockades. The premise of the dissertation, borrowed from the theory and methodology of sensory history, is that while human sensory physiology changes slowly over time, perception is fluid and varies by time, place, and culture. Drawing from nearly two hundred unpublished manuscripts as well as newspapers, government records, and postwar narratives, this dissertation explores the experiences of captivity in the Civil War through the senses of smell, touch, taste, hearing, and sight. It is divided into seven chapters, each an essay devoted to either an individual sense or a multisensory theme. Focusing on the senses is important because it recovers the dark side of a war still often romanticized in popular and scholarly memory. Prisoners described captivity as not just traumatizing but deeply animalizing.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	ix
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: SENSORY ENVIRONMENTS OF PRISONERS ON THE MOVE .....	23
CHAPTER 2: “WE ‘NOSE’ THE MURDERERS”: SMELL, SPACE, AND THE LANDSCAPE OF HEALTH .....	72
CHAPTER 3: OF LICE AND MEN: THE FEELING AND VIOLENCE OF CAPTIVITY .....	129
CHAPTER 4: “I OFTEN DREAM OF YOU AND HAM & EGGS:” THE FAR REACH OF HUNGER .....	171
CHAPTER 5: ALARM BELLS AND HOMESICK PEALS: LISTENING TO THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT .....	224
CHAPTER 6: NOCTURNAL SENSATIONS .....	264
CHAPTER 7: UNSEEN, UNHEARD, UNSMELLED: ESCAPE IN THE CONFEDERATE SOUTH .....	294
EPILOGUE: A SENSE OF PLACE AND TIME .....	325
REFERENCES .....	333
APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO REPRINT .....	371

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 0.1. Principle Civil War prisons mentioned in this dissertation. ....	15
Figure 1.1. Confederate prisoners awaiting transportation to northern prisons.....	51
Figure 1.2. A Sketch of Confederate prisoners.....	58
Figure 2.1. The layout of Elmira, drawn by a prisoner, separating the prisoners' barracks from the hospital by a garden.....	87
Figure 2.2. How deodorization was supposed to look. ....	96
Figure 2.3. The visual order of the city-like prison. ....	97
Figure 2.4. As aromatic as Andersonville could be. ....	109
Figure 2.5. Calvin Bates, possibly the man referenced by the anonymous writer and Walt Whitman.....	127
Figure 3.1. The Louse. ....	137
Figure 3.2. The Richmond Prison Association Seal. ....	150
Figure 3.3. Searching for lice in clothing. ....	155
Figure 4.1. What starvation looked like.....	217
Figure 4.2. Seeing Starvation.....	219
Figure 7.1. Locations of successful prisoner escapes. ....	296
Figure 7.2. Junius H. Browne receives food and clothing from slaves. ....	310
Figure 7.3. Running white men run down with bloodhounds like black slaves. ....	321

## INTRODUCTION

In August 2013, the mechanical-sounding electronic gate closed behind me at 5 p.m. at the entrance to Andersonville National Historic Site, home to the infamous Confederate prison that operated the last fourteen months of the American Civil War. I had a peculiar feeling of elation when first arriving at the park. This sensation, similar to the rush of discovery when diving into a rich manuscript collection, also troubled me because it highlighted the distance separating me from the prisoners I study. Those who walked through Andersonville's wooden gates in 1864 were about to begin some of the worst days of their lives—even if they survived. Yet I entered the park as a guest, conducting dissertation research funded in part by the Friends of Andersonville Organization. The pleasant living conditions the National Park Service provided me increased this feeling of discontinuity between past and present. I lived in the park's guest cottage, located between the prison site and the cemetery. It rained all day and even before the handful of visitors and the staff left, the park had a palpable feeling of emptiness like that of an abandoned building, a ruin, or a ghost town. When the staff left me behind with my notes and smartphone (without reception, of course), the quietude became a penetrating and consuming silence. I was alone in Andersonville.

My time at Andersonville was its own sensory experience. The days were all planned out: research in the reading room during working hours, explore the grounds in the evening, write, sleep, and repeat. Each evening I stepped out into the endless rain and took walks, learning the topography and the park by exploring the landscape. What could

be said about the smells, sounds, sights, tastes, and touches after 149 years? How, if at all, could my own sensory experiences explain the assumptions and methodology underlying my dissertation project? What did my complete liberty to roam the park in 2013 feel like, and how can historians and public historians uncover the feelings of prisoners at Andersonville in 1864? Or any prison? Or any historical context? With these questions in mind I walked out into the field each evening and contemplated my project and its (dis)connection to past prisoners' own lived experiences.

The premise of the dissertation, borrowed from the theory and methodology of sensory history, is that while human sensory physiology changes slowly over time, perception is fluid and varies by time, place, and culture. This type of history has also been described as more of a "habit" than a field, which allows for the possibility of wandering between the rich but specialized subfields of environmental history, Civil War history, or other scholarly identities under the umbrella of social and cultural history. In framing captivity through the senses, however, it becomes clear that the study of captivity is not the singular realm of Civil War history, or environmental history, or social history. It is all of these things. When prisoners interacted with their surroundings, a myriad of entangled experiences, cultural predispositions, and social constructs embedded each perception. Focusing on sensory perception is important because it analyzes the primary mode through which people assign meaning to their lives. The senses are a nimble, contextual, and interpretive way to explore the meanings of war and captivity.

My solitary adventures were most rewarding the first evening because my perspective was fresh and my senses most keen. The prison site encompasses a stream, which bisects the open field and separates two hills that drain into it. Although the

original wooden stockade has vanished above the ground's surface, the landscape features two parallel rows of posts that recreate the original perimeter. An outer row marks the fourteen-foot wall that shaped the view of the outside world for prisoners and an inner row denotes the "dead-line" or "deadline." As so much of sensory history relies on patterns of thinking and word choice, research has instilled in me a healthy obsession with dead metaphors and an amateurish zeal for the historical context underlying etymological origins. Between the Civil War and approximately 1920, when deadline earned its modern meaning of "time limit" in the publishing world, the term "deadline" almost exclusively referred to a common feature that meant "cross this line and you will die."<sup>1</sup> The deadline visually imposed severe discipline and the spatial partitioning between faltering life and certain death. One prisoner remembered that they could not touch the deadline or even lay a finger on it. Guards at the outer wall shot dead those who did.<sup>2</sup>

Walking along the deadline, my sensory experiences at Andersonville boosted my confidence that attention to sensory perception provides historians with a way to amplify particular lessons from related fields, particularly about the relationship between humans and the natural world. The voice of nature at Andersonville in 2013 overpowered all else, except when occasionally broken by several manmade sounds—the low whirl of distant

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<sup>1</sup> On dead and dying metaphors, see George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harvest, 1968), vol. 4, 130; "deadline," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/view/Entry/47657?redirectedFrom=deadline#eid>. It was also used in angling and military fortifications. T. F. Salter, *The Angler's Guide...* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London, 1815), 125, 144; C. W. Pasley, *Course of Military Instruction...* (London: John Murray, 1817), 285, 295.

<sup>2</sup> Allen O. Abbott, *Prison Life in the South...* (New York: Harper, 1865), 61.

factory, a truck, and a train—that momentarily grabbed my ears. Rain often muffled the sound of insects, but when it lightened up, the insects produced a collective low buzz or hum. When this happened, insects were not just the backdrop; they were central to my listening, and in the case of mosquitoes, feeling. Near the southern end of the field I stumbled upon some kind of massacre. Dozens of birds swarmed after millions of tiny insects and hundreds of dragon flies. A turkey vulture perched in a tree on the western edge observing all happenings in the field. When I began listening for the natural world, its presence and magnitude became impossible to ignore.

Then there was the air, field, and stream. Alongside the sound and feeling of insects and the sights of birds, the damp air had an earthy smell and one of recently cut grass. I presume the smell of cut grass is a modern scent because it depends on the cultural desire, technology, and labor to maintain short grass. That which did *not* have a distinct odor also piqued my interest: the small, marshy tributary that served as a cistern, a bath, and a sink for tens of thousands of prisoners. Although it smelled fine, it looked less benign. Red Georgia clay, which peaks out from parts of the grassy hillside, also forms the bed of stockade branch, giving the odorless water the fleshy appearance of an unhealed wound in the landscape. Following the stream a good distance into the woods, I found the metal park boundary signs and turned around because the stream had turned into a swamp and darkness was quickly erasing the last bits of cloud-filtered daylight. As the evening sky darkened, the woods became frightening. One or two owls hooted. In the distance a dog barked and several gunshots rang out, presumably from a nearby gun club. In the dim light these sounded and felt closer, so I quickened my pace to high ground that led back to the prison site. Arriving at the cabin in complete darkness I dried off and



cooked a “historic” fare of cornbread and beans, abstaining from bacon (not in solidarity with my subjects but because I was nearing one hundred meatless days as an aspiring vegetarian).

My own sensory experiences illustrate what sensory history can and cannot do. Do my own senses bring me closer to the experiences of prisoners or farther apart? Rain drenched the skin of prisoners nearly every day in June 1864. A deadline existed in the exact same place as it was in 1864. Prisoners felt the bite of insects and heard the sounds of trains, gunshots, and dogs. And they did not get half enough to eat. Physical and chemical sensations might create the illusion of historical accuracy. However, it is inconsistent to argue that sensory perception can be experientially revived if it is so contingent on time, place, and culture. My deadlines are a linguistic vestige of a word that originated in prison violence but has left its historical context and consequences behind. Stockade branch smelled fine to my nose, but the same signs that warned me not to drink from nearby spring applied to the creek because we have a healthy fear of microorganisms as invisible to the unaided human eye as a miasma but without quite the same meaning.<sup>3</sup> The sounds of gunshots and dogs, though uniquely worrying to me in the present, did not carry me back to 1864. Although the physical sounds may have strong similarities to the past, the perception of that sound varies greatly. I cannot shed my own historical context and put on the context of a runaway slave or fugitive Union prisoner.

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<sup>3</sup> On olfaction and pollution, see Joy Parr, “Smells Like?: Sources of Uncertainty in the History of the Great Lakes Environment,” *Environmental History* 11 (April 2006), 269-299.

The best history can do is gesture to the shadow of lost worlds and try to understand it on its own terms.<sup>4</sup>

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This dissertation explores captivity during the Civil War by focusing on the ways prisoners gave meaning to the liminal experience of captivity through the five senses. A sensory history of captivity helps to restore the human cost of a conflict that is still often romanticized. Civil War prisons were the products not just of a war to preserve the Union. After the Emancipation Proclamation, African American enlistment, and the diplomatic impasse over both that led to rapid prison overpopulation, the sensory environments of captivity became the products of a war over freedom. Although often on the periphery of Civil War historiography, prisons were not a sideshow and the sensory experiences of captivity were an important part of the trauma of Civil War experience. A sensory history of captivity restores grim realism without romanticizing suffering.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> On authentic experiences or a “period rush,” see Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 9-17. One of the few sensory historians to promote recreating consumable sensory pasts is Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2, 6. On the debate over (re)producing and (re)consuming historical sensations and perceptions, see also Mark M. Smith, “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History,” *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (June 2007): 841-858.

<sup>5</sup> I do not want to overstate my claim here by casting large numbers of historians into “good war” and “bad war” camps. In many ways, however, the good war is the historiographical product of the last fifty years of social, cultural, and political history. See, for example, James Oakes *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013) and Bruce Levine, *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution that Transformed the South* (New York: Random House, 2013). In contrast, there have been calls to meditate on the context, the moral ambiguity, and the meaning of the Civil War as it was experienced, and it is in this historiographic vein that sensory history fits. See Stephen Berry, ed., *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges* (Athens:

Sensory experiences cut deep into the minds of prisoners. They expressed these experiences in what I call the *animalization* of captivity. In this dissertation, animalization is a key concept, an argument about experience and state of mind, and a broad interpretive theme to represent the darker experience of war and captivity. As a process of change, animalization refers to movement along an imagined continuum of existence between human and animal. The choice of the term animalization rather than dehumanization is intentional. Dehumanization and its derivatives imply action taken on a subject and specifically an action that treats the subject as less than the minimum that society deems humane. In many contexts, either term is suitable, but animalization can refer to a broader range of emotions and interactions within an environment that pulled the sensate, in this case, prisoners, toward thinking of their existence in animalistic terms. Unlike dehumanization, animalization required no action taken on a subject because it was ultimately more about the perceived relationship between that subject and the environment. Animalization was a tension in which prisoners came to understand existence, occasionally favorably but more often negatively, in relation to the nonhuman world. The sensory experience put prisoners in an uncertain space between animal and human.

In making the argument that captivity animalized prisoners, the following chapters apply the methodology of sensory history alongside several insights by social and environmental history. Drawing from the work of pioneering anthropologists,

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University of Georgia Press, 2012), esp. 1-12. On these questions, see also Gary W. Gallagher and Kathryn Shively Meier, "Coming to Terms with Civil War Military History," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 4 (December 2014), 487-508, esp. 491-493; Yael A. Sternhell, "Revisionism Reinvented? The Antiwar Turn in Civil War Scholarship," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 2 (June 2013), 239-256.

sensory-minded historians address the ways people in the past mediated and understood the human and nonhuman environmental through the five senses.<sup>6</sup> The theory and method operates on the premise that the senses have histories and perception changes according to time, place, and social relations. When people in the past wrote about the senses, they described more than just a physiological process because of the subjectivity of perception. This was the fundamental characteristic of sensory perception. It was not universal but wholly historical and contextual.<sup>7</sup>

Sensory history often relates the changing hierarchy or ratio of the senses over time. Some scholars argue to various degrees that the epistemological and technological changes accompanying the enlightenment elevated the rational, distal, or higher senses of sight and hearing while denigrating the emotional, proximate, or lower senses of smelling, touching, and tasting.<sup>8</sup> Without making too much of the “great divide” theory, the work of early media scholars influenced how sensory historians thought about the big histories of sensation. And to some extent, scholars’ tendency to think in visual terms is

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<sup>6</sup> Constance Classen, “Foundations for an Anthropology of the Senses,” *International Social Science Journal* 153 (September 1997), 401-412; Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994); David Howes, “Can These Dry Bones Live? An Anthropological Approach to the History of the Senses,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008): 442-451; Howes, ed., *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Howes, *Empire of the Senses; The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage, 1991) Alain Corbin, *the Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Classen, “Anthropology of the Senses,” 401; Smith, “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense,” 842; Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 174.

its own evidence of vision's success. The recent revolution in digital history makes it easier for historians to see (but more difficult to touch) their source base and suggests the high value of vision in our society and discipline. There is a professional predominance in thinking visually about the past as long as certain activities are still interpreted as naturally the realm of sight. Reading in nineteenth-century America, for example, seems by default part of the visual culture of the industrializing world, even though many consumed news by listening to it read aloud.<sup>9</sup> While this dissertation does not argue against the importance of vision, it does assert that the nonvisual senses were important to navigating daily life and giving meaning to experience.

This project follows the path charted by historians who emphasize the continued importance of the nonvisual senses in the ostensibly visual era of nineteenth-century newspapers and photography. Individually and collectively the senses helped prisoners create meaning out of their captivity. Prisoners wrote and said much about sight in prison, but the smells, touches, tastes, and sounds left a deep impression on the meaning of captivity. By moving the nonvisual senses to the forefront, this dissertation seeks to bring the totality of sensory perception to lived experience by restoring, when appropriate,

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 26; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Routledge, 1988), 78-116, esp. 79, 93-101; McLuhan, "Inside the Five Sense Sensorium," in *Empire of the Senses*, ed. David Howes (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 43-52. On reading, see David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Reading and Everyday Life in Antebellum Boston: The Diary of Daniel F. and Mary D. Child," *Libraries and Cultures* 32, no. 3 (summer 1997), 291; Zboray and Zboray, "Cannonballs and Books: Reading and the Disruption of Social Tied on the New England Home Front," in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 239-243.

intersensoriality. This is important because even though sensory historians know that the senses function together, it is still common to isolate and interpret individual senses as though each work in isolation or competition. What this dissertation lacks in change over time, it makes up for in its careful attention to how each sense, and their intersensorial sum, contributed to the lived-experience of captivity.<sup>10</sup>

Seeking to recover how prisoners used the senses to construct the meaning of captivity, the following chapters build on more established fields, especially environmental history.<sup>11</sup> Groundbreaking environmental studies by scholars such as Lisa

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<sup>10</sup> On the hierarchy of the senses, see in particular Constance Classen, "The Witches Senses: Sensory Ideologies and Transgressive Feminities from the Renaissance to Modernity," in *Empire of the Senses*, 70-84; Susan Stewart, "Remembering the Senses," *Empire of the Senses*, 59-69; Lisa Roberts, "The Death of the Sensuous Chemist: The 'New' Chemistry and the Transformation of Sensuous Technology," in *Empire of the Senses*, 106-127. On the relation of the senses, see David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Peter C. Baldwin, "How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930," *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (July 2003): 412-429; Raymond Smilor, "Personal Boundaries in the Urban Environment: The Legal Attack on Noise: 1865-1930," *Environmental Review* 3, no. 3 (1979), 25, 28, 33; Peter A. Coates, "The Strange Stillness of the Past: Toward an Environmental History of Sound and Noise," *Environmental History* 10, no. 4 (October 2005): 636-665; Christine Meisner Rosen, "'Knowing' Industrial Pollution: Nuisance Law and the Power of Tradition in a Time of Rapid Economic Change, 1840-1864," *Environmental History* 8, no. 4 (October 2003): 656-597; Rosen, "Noisome, Noxious, and Offensive Vapors, Fumes, and Stenches in American Towns and Cities, 1840-1865," *Historical Geography* 25, (1997), 49-82; Lisa M. Brady, "The Wilderness of War: Nature and Strategy in the American Civil War," *Environmental History* 10, no. 3 (July 2005): 421-447; Connie Y. Chiang, "Imprisoned Nature: Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration," *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (April 2010): 236-267; Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, 2002), esp. ch. 1; Albert E. Cowdrey, "Environments of War," *Environmental Review* 7, no. 2 (summer 1983), 155-164; Edmund Russell, "'Speaking of Annihilation': Mobilization for War against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914-1945," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 142-174; Russell, *War and Nature:*

M. Brady, Megan Kate Nelson, and Kathryn Shively Meier have examined the relationship between human and nonhuman agents and the cultural significance of physical destruction. In places, their works are sensory histories in form if not in name.<sup>12</sup> My project combines the methodological insights of sensory history with the importance of place and nature in environmental history and relates them to the experience of captivity.

While there is much work to be done in the sensory and environmental history of the Civil War, prisons in particular offer fertile soil. As a result of rekindled interest in the subfield, historians know more about Civil War prisons than they did two decades ago, but many basic questions are for the time being unanswerable. How many prisoners were there and how many died are two of the first questions projects on prisons seek to answer. The standard number is that there were 410,000 people held as prisoners of war. Of this number, at least 56,000 died in captivity. This conservative estimate combines a mostly complete accounting of the 25,976 Confederates (12 percent) who died in the

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*Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); and Brian Allen Drake, ed., *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens, 2012); Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers: Malaria, Yellow Fever, and the Course of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental Reference Guide* (Baton Rouge, 2012); Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2012), 199-227.

North with the best guess of 30,218 (15.5 percent) who died in the South. The number of Union dead in the South is knowable only to the extent that Confederate prison records and death ledgers exist.<sup>13</sup> When used by professional and avocational historians, these figures usually reveal more about the type of story one wishes to tell than the experience of prisoners, North or South. Similar death figures and rates provide a jumping off point for the argument that prisons in the South were not as bad as represented during the war or that the suffering of Confederates in northern prisons was worse because it took place in a land untouched by a policy of hard war.<sup>14</sup> As shorthand for treatment, these numbers conceal as much as they reveal. Or, put another way, they tell only what an author wishes to reveal.

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<sup>13</sup> These often-cited numbers were an estimate by Frederick Crayton Ainsworth, Chief of the Record and Pension Office, in a letter to James Ford Rhodes, June 29, 1903, in Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850...* 7 vols. (1904; reprint, New York: MacMillan, 1919), 507-508. Ainsworth warned these numbers, accurate for northern prisons, were too low for those in the South because there were no “death registers” for twelve Confederate prisons and incomplete ones for five others. Rhodes, who stated that the statistics of a 12 percent death rate in the North and a 15.5 percent death rate in the South indicate “no reason why the North should reproach the South,” also admitted, that the statistics would probably be more skewed if Confederate records were more complete. Moreover, most of the emaciated prisoners whose images shocked northern readerships, discussed in Chapter 4, died shortly after release. There is no indication those deaths were among the official prisoner dead. See James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 802-803. Timing also mattered the numbers. Union prisoners captured before July 1863 died at a rate of approximately 4 percent. In contrast, 27 percent of those captured after July 1863 perished in the South. Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, “Surviving Andersonville: The Benefits of Social Networks in POW Camps,” *American Economic Review* 97, no. 4 (September 2007), 1468.

<sup>14</sup> James M. Gillispie goes further, claiming that nearly all historians who write about northern prisons inadvertently reify a Lost Cause interpretation. *Andersonvilles of the North: The Myths and Realities of Northern Treatment in Civil War Prisons* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 51-68.



My methodology for studying sensory experiences relies heavily on texts written by prisoners during captivity. I also incorporate postwar memoirs, outsider perspectives, newspapers, and the official records when comparisons and contrasts are appropriate. Although I spent some fruitful time at the National Archives and Records Administration, I rely on those government and military records that became included in series II of the *Official Records*. These records are neither complete nor impartial, but the additional information at the National Archives is less revealing for this project than, say, for comprehensive histories of individual prisons.

Materials produced by prisoners require greater attention to *sense* than *place*. It might have been possible to write this dissertation as a microstudy or a series of case studies, but I chose not to do this for two reasons. First, northern prisons are more easily written about individually because they were nodes in a makeshift but organized prison system. Historians, therefore, have produced excellent chapters and monographs on prisons in the North with greater frequency than the South, with the notable exception of Andersonville.<sup>15</sup> The challenge of case studies in the South is that prisoners stayed in few

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<sup>15</sup> Charles E. Frohman, *Rebels on Lake Erie* (Columbus: Ohio Historical Society, 1965); Gillispie, *Andersonvilles of the North*; Michael Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001); Michael Horgan, *Elmira: Death Camp of the North* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2002); George Levy, *To Die in Chicago: Confederate Prisoners at Camp Douglas 1862-65* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1999); Benton McAdams, *Rebels at Rock Island: The Story of a Civil War Prison* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000); Roger Pickenpau, *Camp Chase and the Evolution of Union Prison Policy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007). On Confederate case studies, most are on Andersonville. Ovid L. Futch, *History of Andersonville Prison* (1968; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011); William Marvel, *Andersonville: The Last Depot* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Edward F. Roberts, *Andersonville Journey* (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street, 1998); Peggy Sheppard, *Andersonville Georgia USA* (2001; reprint, n.p.: privately printed, 2001); Robert S. Davis, *Ghosts and Shadows of Andersonville: Essays on the Secret Social Histories of America's Deadliest Prison* (Macon, GA: Mercer

places for long periods of time. Belle Island survivors often went to Andersonville, and from there to one or more prisons in Millen, Savannah, Charleston, Florence, Salisbury, or Columbia. General studies of Civil War prisons have their own challenges, most notably the tough generalizations about treatment, prisoner testimony, suffering, and policy. Recent works by Lonnie Speer, Charles Sanders, Benjamin Cloyd, and Roger Pickenpaugh, however, have created a useful narrative of changing government policies toward prisoners.<sup>16</sup> Second, the decision to organize by sense and not place seemed most reasonable because patterns of sensory perception were not unique to specific locations. Focusing on one or a few locations seemed constraining, unnecessary, and perhaps even counterproductive to the type of history this dissertation seeks to produce.

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University Press, 2006). William O. Bryant, *Cahaba Prison and the Sultana Disaster* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Lonnie Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1997); Charles Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2005); Benjamin Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Roger Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Gray: The Civil War Prisons of the Union* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009); Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue: The Civil War Prisons of the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013). In one way or another, these works all engage with the first and, for many decades, only general history of prisons. William Best Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1964);



Figure 0.1. Principle Civil War prisons mentioned in this dissertation. There were other prisons, but most accounts come from places shown here. Map by author.

In taking this thematic approach, this dissertation contributes to a trend in Civil War history that makes implicit sensory perception explicit by paying close attention to the flexibility of lived-experience and culture. Lived experience has been one of Civil War historians' goals for generations, but rarely has this evidence been contextualized within the sensory world of nineteenth-century America. For example, Bell Irvin Wiley long ago characterized the "Rebel yell" as part of Confederate "fighting equipment."<sup>17</sup> He also describes the acoustic aspects of marching and camp life, including musical

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<sup>17</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 71-72. For similar examples, see Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), (title), 2, 67, 68, 74, 85, 88, 98; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War, a Narrative* (New York: Random House, 1958), 4, 5, 28, 76, 81.

instruments, glee clubs, minstrels, and reading aloud from newspapers.<sup>18</sup> However, Wiley treats sound descriptively rather than interpretively, and he is hardly alone. Some of the best historians of soldiering have used sensory evidence, albeit indirectly.<sup>19</sup> The casual use of sensory evidence implies the senses are static, rigid, and ultimately ahistorical.

That the senses cannot be taken at face value is one of the contributions sensory history brings to Civil War studies. Craig A. Warren's cultural history of the rebel yell exemplifies this trend by demonstrating how listeners consistently disagreed about the sound and adapted its meaning. Approaching the senses with care humanizes the participants of a familiar subject without assuming universal sensory norms. The second value of the senses, alluded to above, has been in the reassessment of the human toll of the Civil War. Recent works by Drew Gilpin Faust, Mark S. Shantz, Mark M. Smith, and Michael C. C. Adams demonstrate the centrality of the senses not only in the wholesale

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<sup>18</sup> Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 150-59, 164-66, 170-71.

<sup>19</sup> Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 97-99, 122, 129-33, 165, 242, 253. See also Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought during the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (New York: New York University Press, 1985); Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Joseph Allen Frank and George A. Reaves, "Seeing the Elephant": *Raw Recruits at the Battle of Shiloh* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989); Larry M. Logue, *To Appomattox and Beyond: The Civil War Soldier in War and Peace* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1996). For a useful historiographical review of the major debates on soldiering, see Reid Mitchell, "Not the General but the Soldier," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 81-95. Earl J. Hess comes closest to discussing the role of nonvisual senses in combat, *The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 15-28, 143-157.

destruction of battle but also the cultural adaptations in a sensory revolution unleashed by unprecedented bloodshed. This new history of suffering challenges some the basic assumptions in how we remember and interpret the Civil War. Eschewing ahistorical courage, sacrifice, and sentimentalism, this emerging interpretation uses sensory perception to recover the misery of Civil War experience. Recovering this grim story is important because it provides an opportunity to weigh the human cost alongside the gains.<sup>20</sup>

Historians who specialize in Civil War prisons have an additional reason to focus on the senses because they do not agree on the meaning of captivity experience. These historians have looked at prisons with an emphasis on several specific questions: Who or what was responsible for the deaths of prisoners North and South? Did ex-prisoners exaggerate claims of daily suffering and privation after the war? And how has the historical memory of these prisons challenged or reinforced notions of American Exceptionalism? A sensory history is not necessarily divorced from these questions, but it has less reason for making them the focal point. Rather, it uses the senses as a way to explain the interaction between people and their environment, local experience and (inter)national politics, and ultimately the infusion of politics into the lives of common people. Rather than confirming or rejecting specific allegations or measuring the veracity

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<sup>20</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008); Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Mark M. Smith, *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Craig A. Warren, *The Rebel Yell: A Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014); Stephen Berry, ed., *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War's Ragged Edges* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014); Michael C. C. Adams, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

of postwar accounts, a sensory history of captivity explores patterns of perception and experience. Union and especially Confederate prisons were wretched and captives rightfully believed their suffering unnecessary. Experiences that were intuitively authentic for individuals were much more difficult for outside contemporaries or later historians to accept as true.<sup>21</sup>

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The dissertation is organized into seven chapters, four devoted to nonvisual senses and three on multisensory experience. Chapter one provides an overview of captivity by focusing on the movement of prisoners. Words such as “prison” and “prisoner” suggest a state of motionlessness, but prisoners spent much of their time traveling to and between prisons for reasons that mirrored the political and military course of the Civil War. It also situates the senses as a vehicle for understanding travel, which had antecedents not only in the long history of captivity narratives but also the slave and travel narratives of antebellum America. Although most Civil War prisons were improvised spaces, this chapter focuses on motion and the most transitory environments: the feeling of capture,

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<sup>21</sup> Historians have long debated suffering. William Best Hesseltine argues the suffering was unavoidable in the South and retributive in the north. *Civil War Prisons*, viii-ix. For followers of Hesseltine, see James I. Robertson, “The Scourge of Elmira,” in *Civil War Prisons*, ed. William B. Hesseltine, (1972; reprint, Kent, 1996), 88-92; Phillip R. Shriver and Donald J. Breen, *Ohio’s Military Prisons in the Civil War* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 5-6; Joslyn, *Immortal Captives*, esp. chapters 2 and 3; Horigan, *Elmira*, 86-88; Speer, *Portals to Hell*, xiv-xix, 11-15, 291-92; Speer, *War of Vengeance*, xi-xvii, 131-40. Charles Sanders persuasively argues that both sides intentionally abused prisoners, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, 5, 38, 297-316. On the memory of Civil war prisons, see Benjamin Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge, 2010), 27, 181. On pain and the limits of expression and understanding, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), esp. 3-11.

the politics of handling prisoners, and lastly, the multisensory experience of transportation aboard cattle cars and steamships.

Chapters two and three focus primarily on the senses of smell and touch. International conceptions of miasmic theory linked smell to disease, and sanitarians linked both to individual cleanliness and environmental discipline. To a greater extent than southern prisons officials, Union officials applied this knowledge in their efforts to engineer drained, ventilated, and deodorized prison environments. Sinks and sewage systems designed for northern prisons prefigured widespread urban deodorization movements of the late-nineteenth century. In spite of these efforts, prisoners in the North and, especially, the South consistently complained about the foul olfactory environment as part of the animalization of captivity. For prisoners, each breath came at the cost of smells they believed unfit for human inhalation.

Associated with the olfactory nuisances were haptic ones. Focusing on touch, chapter three discusses the relationship between prisoners and some of the smallest creatures in prison environments, lice. The historical relationship between lice and humans faced intense scrutiny in eighteenth-century Europe and the Americas alongside cultural changes in haptic comfort and cleanliness. By the nineteenth century, the sight and haptic feeling of lice connoted uncleanness and laziness as the middle and upper classes considered themselves clean and free of lice. When lice took advantage of the environmental opportunities of the Civil War, their pervasiveness in camps and, especially, prisons challenged the preexisting understandings about the lice and personal cleanliness. The feeling of lice animalized the experience of captivity, but lousy prisoners humanized the creatures by naming and describing them as having wit, personality, and

character. Likewise, prisoner's conceptions of cleanliness changed as well. Once a visual sign of laziness, the act of picking lice from clothes and skin became a public act that projected personal cleanliness. Only the truly lousy failed to nitpick. While lice were not the only haptic threats in prison—there was also plenty of violence between prisoners—the smallest insects formed perhaps a most intimate relationship with their human hosts.

Chapter four navigates the experience of hunger and eating in captivity, focusing not only on the sensory experience of tasting, smelling, and feeling prison fare but also on the economic and social relations surrounding food. Taste, smell, and touch helped prisoners explain the transition from eating like a human to feeding like an animal. The animalization of eating was unequal, as experiences of eating varied by location, rank, and the ability to engage in prison markets. After discussing the social aspects of food in captivity, the chapter ends with a discussion of the visualization of starvation through photographs and lithographs in 1864. After Union officials visualized the starvation in the South, Confederates undermined the veracity of such evidence by casting doubt on the connection between eye-witnessing and objective truth.

Whereas chapters on sanitation, lice, and food focus primarily on the “proximate” senses of smelling, feeling, and tasting, chapter five traces the vagaries of listening. As with the other senses, listening connected people's interior thoughts and feelings with the external environment, including the human and natural sounds emanating from within and around prisons. Listeners wore their hearts on their ears, using various sounds to describe their feelings. Religious listeners, for example, gave particular attention to Sunday bells and their descriptions suggested both the absence and presence of bells reminded them of the distance that separated them from home. Others used the sounds of



nature, especially birds, to describe the climate of their captivity and express their desire for freedom. Although listening is often considered more rational than the proximate senses, the meanings of sound varied as much as the range of emotions. Prisoners and guards who heard sound of suffering and sounds of destruction frequently disagreed about precisely what those sounds should mean.

The final two chapters are multisensory, focusing on the experience of nighttime and escape. The chapter on night makes the case that night served as both the culmination of the nonvisual senses and a time when power relations were more fluid than the daytime. When prisoners crawled into barracks, tents, or burrowed into earthen shelters and caves, lice and other vermin became more active. Sounds of suffering were more acute. Foul air smelled deadlier. Prisoners dreamed about friends, family, and food. Nighttime also gave prisoners opportunities because darkness provided a natural leveling effect to one-sided power relations. Guards were more likely to shoot at night because prisoners were more likely to talk back, make threats, and attempt to escape. The final chapter returns to the themes of mobility and the senses in describing how Union prisoners navigated the Confederate South by enlisting the help of African Americans and subverting the senses of the whites and dogs who would recapture them.

These chapters recover a history that has hitherto eluded our grasp because we have not searched for it. As an exercise in contextualizing experience, it takes interpretive risks. Juxtaposing sensory experiences at Andersonville and Johnson's Island or Elmira, there is the danger of implying parity of experience or treatment. That is not something I wish to convey. Rather, this project is about retiring that fear and dealing with most subjective and emotional experiences in a way that leads to new conversations about

captivity. Whereas one generation of historians sought to elevate the study of prisons above the subjectivity of prisoners by looking to the *Official Records* and turning a skeptical eye to wartime and, especially, postwar prison accounts, this project seeks to reassert the primacy of individual and collective experiences by placing them within broader patterns. Rather than brushing off or masking subjective human experiences, the following chapters wallow in them in pursuit of meaning.

## CHAPTER 1:

### THE SENSORY ENVIRONMENTS OF PRISONERS ON THE MOVE

In August 1861, Willard W. Wheeler fell into Confederate hands at Cross Lanes, West Virginia, less than a month after Bull Run. Captors took the 23-year-old Ohioan south to Richmond, Virginia, and from there through North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to New Orleans, Louisiana. Wheeler recorded the smells, tastes, sights, and sounds of the journey. In the basement of Atkinson's Factory in Richmond, he winced at the strong tobacco smell and the brutish uncleanness. By careful sweeping and digging prisoners attempted to clean up the room, but Wheeler confessed "still it is a mere hog pen." Eating soup and half a loaf of bread for breakfast and dinner, Wheeler and some of the 1300 other prisoners consoled themselves with grim humor that "if we are kept idle several months we shall not get the gout." The prisoners busied themselves reading a Bible, scraps from an 1859 newspaper found in the building, a German grammar book, Shakespeare, and anything else they could find or purchase.<sup>1</sup>

As they traveled aboard boxcars by rail, Wheeler saw his first cotton plant, a contemporary visual metonym of slavery. The whiteness of the boll gave it a strange illusion of purity, "as though it was not the fruit of the terrible and cursed institution."<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Willard W. Wheeler diary, September 3, 4, 1861, Schoff Civil War Collection, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan [hereafter CL, UM]

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler diary, September 22, 1861, Schoff Collection, CL, UM.

New Orleans, he listened. The sound of the closing door resonated with his strong emotions he felt at being confined alongside murderers, prostitutes, and civilians suspected of Unionist sympathy. He wrote, “It is a gloomy thing to hear the creaking of the heavy door as it swings upon us shutting us from the pure light and air and to hear the heavy bolt as it passes to its sure place making it sure that we are to remain forever unless it is removed.”<sup>3</sup> Confederates removed Wheeler from New Orleans in spring 1862, traveling back across the Confederacy and through another prison in Salisbury, North Carolina, on his way to Union lines. A medical discharge in June 1862 ended Wheeler’s war. He was not the first to experience captivity, but circuitous routes like Wheeler’s journey came to characterize the value of the senses in expressing experience and the surprising simultaneity of captivity and movement.

The slow flow of prisoners in 1861 became a deluge by early 1862 as Union and Confederate armies came out of winter quarters. In February, Union General Ulysses S. Grant captured fifteen thousand prisoners at Fort Donelson. Prisoners on both sides had no knowledge where they were going, and keepers on neither side had prepared for such numbers. Union and Confederate officials began repurposing existing jails and prisons, coastal fortifications, abandoned buildings, and training camps as well as building open-air prison camps with and without shelter.<sup>4</sup> With no centralized prison system yet in place, Major General William W. Halleck divided the Fort Donelson prisoners and sent them to the camps that served as training grounds for U.S. recruits: 3,000 to Camp

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<sup>3</sup> Wheeler diary, September 30, 1861, Schoff Collection, CL, UM.

<sup>4</sup> Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 1997), 9-10.

Morton at Indianapolis; 7,000 to Camp Douglas at Chicago; and the remainder to Camp Chase at Columbus.<sup>5</sup> While enlisted men were confined at these former Union training camps in Illinois, Indiana, or Ohio, some imprisoned officers traveled as far as Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. The practice of separating prisoners by rank and sending them to makeshift prisons set a pattern that continued for the rest of the war.

Forced passage by river, rail, and foot marked a formative travel experience for both Union and Confederate prisoners throughout the war. Confederates captured by Grant at Fort Donelson spent as much as two weeks traveling in captivity before ever entering a prison. One of the prisoners, Thomas Hopkins Deavenport, made the journey down the Tennessee and Ohio Rivers and up the Mississippi to Alton, Illinois, where trains took prisoners the rest of the way to Camp Douglas. Anonymous sympathizers offered words of encouragement to them at several places along the way. In contrast, when Deavenport remembered entering Chicago, he recalled the sounds of anonymous civilians and a rooster named Jake that had long staying power in Deavenport's memory. Standing in doorways, hanging out of windows, and sitting on fence rails, crowds of men, women, and children came to watch and jeer. He thought the crowd seemed undecided as to whether the prisoners were men or animals, and they seemed to compete "with each other to see who could insult the most. Ear, mouth, and eyes were all open." Explaining the tension between prisoners and civilians, Deavenport listened with gender in mind. The voices signaled an aberration from how he thought women should speak. The taunts and jeers offended his ears not because of the volume or negativity but because the sounds came from people who he supposed were apolitical. Deavenport believed a

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<sup>5</sup> *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. II, vol. 3, pg. 274-282.

woman's "tongue should be used only for comfort," but these women "heaped insults on us" and followed the prisoners "not to comfort, but laugh at us." He contrasted the sounds of sharp-tongued women to quiet southern ladies at home.

As Deavenport listened to the Chicago women, he heard or imagined sounds from two unlikely sources that reaffirmed his auditory interpretation of the women. A child rebuked his mother with the words, "Ma, they are white like us," implying surprise and disapproval that white men received such unnatural hostility. The second affirmation came from Jake, one prisoner's rooster brought from Fort Donelson. Agitated by the crowd and noise, Jake crowed at the squawkers, aurally articulating in Deavenport's mind the "unconquerable spirit" that prisoners felt but dared not speak.<sup>6</sup> The human and nonhuman sounds of Chicago helped create Deavenport's assessment of the wickedness of his captors.

From a bird's-eye view, prisoners like Wheeler and Deavenport experienced captivity as strangers in lands made stranger by the context of war and decades of an increasing sectional rift. The Civil War produced prisoners at every battle and most skirmishes, and captives traveled along every militarized railroad, up or down major rivers, and through many principle towns. The movement of prisoners formed one aspect of what some historians analyze as the mobility of the Civil War. In this view, the mobilization of armies created the Confederacy's tentative, *de facto* nationhood. Moreover, this nationhood lasted only as long its ability to control the movement within its borders of slaves, civilians, and armies. That necessity of controlling movement

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Deavenport Diary [Memoir], entry for February 23, 1862, pg. 11-12, Civil War Collection, Box 6, Folder 5a, Tennessee State Library and Archives [hereafter TSLA].

applied to prisoners of war as well. Confederate officials consistently prioritized safekeeping prisoners over everything else, including feeding them, by moving them out of reach until the end of the war. As movement helped create Confederate nationalism, at least 214,865 Confederates experienced their nation's short existence as prisoners in a foreign country; for at least 194,743 Union prisoners, movement and the senses helped create the captivity experience in the land of rebellion.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the continued existence of the Union depended on its ability to control the movement of people and things in the Confederate South. The popular meaning of the so-called Anaconda Plan utilized a metaphor of constriction, removing the ability of the Confederacy to move or breathe.<sup>8</sup> When Union arms wrested the control of movement from Confederate armies, the Confederate government lost the ability to control the movement of slaves, dissenters, and prisoners. Patterns of prisoner movement depended less on the changing military situation than diplomatic questions surrounding international recognition, and later, biracial prisoner treatment. If the so-called Confederacy comprised a real nation on a move, for captives both sides were also prisons on the move.

Most Civil War prisons were defined, albeit improvised, spaces; yet, captivity was not limited to these spaces. This chapter focuses on motion and transitory environments:

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<sup>7</sup> Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 28-29; Warren G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 9-10. The numbers are low as they do not take into consideration political prisoners on both sides, Charles W. Sanders, Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>8</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 333-334.

the feeling of capture, the politics of handling prisoners, and lastly, the multisensory experience of transportation. It begins with the genres of captivity and travel narratives that prisoners echoed in their writings not because it formed a universal experience, but rather because the senses were important in constructing different meanings across time.<sup>9</sup> This section synthesizes a common theme in which prisoners used the senses to construct the meaning of animalizing captivity. Subsequent sections explore the senses and movement. The moment of capture and the violating touches that accompanied prisoner searches highlighted a liminal moment between human and nonhuman and life and death. The haptic experience and movement of prisoners then intersected with the policy implications, including prisoner exchange, for international recognition of the Confederacy as well as the evolution of anti-slavery to the abolition of slavery. The movement of prisoners reflected both the vagaries of political contests and, ultimately, the collapse of the Confederacy. The chapter then turns to forced mobility, exploring the multisensory experience of travel as a prisoner of war. The first and formative experiences of captivity involved forced marches along dusty and muddy roads, cramped spaces below deck on steamboats or in railroad cars, as well as temporary quarters in churches, factories, and vacant lots after capture and between prison depots. Many of the interpretations laid out in this chapter are similar to those of subsequent chapters.

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<sup>9</sup> Rather than historicizing captivity through the senses, captivity narratives have also been conceptualized as a universal experience. Robert C. Doyle emphasizes this continuity as the “anatomy of experience” of prisoners of war. *Voices from Captivity: Interpreting the American POW Narrative* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 4. See also Glenn Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die: The Civil War Prison Diary of Sgt. Lyle Adair, 111<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2011), esp. 197-116. While a sensory approach seeks to historicize experience, the other approach seeks to universalize it.



Focusing on the experience of transportation is significant, however, because prisoners began learning what captivity meant through the senses while on the move in a way that prefigured actual imprisonment.

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When prisoners used the senses to construct captivity experience, their writings paralleled earlier captivity and travel narratives that were familiar to antebellum readers in the United States. The rise of the genre of captivity narratives began in the New World in the late-seventeenth century during King Philip's War (1675-76). The conflict destroyed twelve villages and damaged nearly half of all colonial towns in New England, disrupted the fur trade, and affected the way colonialists saw themselves in relation to Indians and God. Presented as first-hand experiences, such narratives purported to tell truthful accounts of Indians, Puritans, and salvation by God.<sup>10</sup> Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) described in vivid sensory and emotional detail her capture in 1675 and movement as a prisoner.<sup>11</sup> Historians have emphasized the visual

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Slotkin and James K. Folson, eds., *So Dreadful a Judgment: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, *Puritans among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724* (Cambridge, MA and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1981). This is one sample of a large literature. The outpouring of captivity narratives for whites in Indian raids prefigured a similarly large volume of slave and prisoner narratives in the nineteenth century, much of it focusing on the senses. See, for example, Archibald Loudon, *A Selection, of some of the Most Interesting Narratives, of Outrages, Committed by the Indians, in Their Wars, with the White People...* (1808; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Harrisburg Publishing Company, 1888); Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Artur Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993); Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995); Olaudah Equiano, Mary Rowlandson, and Others, *American Captivity Narratives*, ed. Gordon M. Sayre (Boston and New York: Houghton

experience as well as the important roles of gender and religion, but Rowlandson also expressed the movement of captivity through the sounds, touches, tastes, and smells. She organized her narrative by “removals” as well as the literary arc of capturing, suffering, and redemption common in seventeenth through nineteenth-century captivity narratives that ranged from puritans, to slaves, to prisoners of war.<sup>12</sup>

Rowlandson combined the senses of hearing and touch in her description of the early morning attack on her town. Guns and the ensuing shouts of Indians first sounded the alarm of danger.<sup>13</sup> The sounds and touches of the attack were animalistic. Settlers died “like a company of sheep torn by wolves” and were “stripped naked by a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranting and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out.”<sup>14</sup> She described the hands of Indians as brutish because they bludgeoned, stripped, and disemboweled their victims.<sup>15</sup> In terms of smell, she vowed to distinguish herself from Indians in the future by giving up the “stinking tobacco pipe,” and she inferred the intervention of God when her foul-smelling wounds suddenly healed.<sup>16</sup>

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Mifflin Company, 2000); Teresa A. Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds of Early America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 100-106.

<sup>13</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 33, quotation on 34.

<sup>14</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 35 (quote), 36, 40, 42, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 33, 35. In the eighteenth century, Euro-Americans did not consider sexual assault to be a threat from Indians. Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 143-144.

<sup>16</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 38, 47.

Lastly, Rowlandson's sense of taste expanded. She wrote that bear meat, once "enough to turn the stomach of a brute" suddenly became "savory" and over time, "though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that and I could starve and die before I could eat such things, yet they were sweet and savory to my taste."<sup>17</sup> When she saw an English child "sucking, gnawing, chewing, and slobbering" on a piece of a horse's foot because the child's teeth were not strong enough to tear the flesh, Rowlandson stole the meat from the child "and savory it was to my taste."<sup>18</sup> The literal truth of Rowlandson's narrative, like the dozens of Indian captivity narratives that followed, was less important than what it implied about the senses in conveying answers to big questions about experience. Rowlandson used her sensory environment to draw conclusions on the differences between settlers and Indians as well as the effects of captivity on spirituality and the denigration of a civilized palate.

While readers in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consumed stories of Euro-Americans in the hands of Indians, the most widely read captivity narratives in antebellum America came from former slaves. These narratives also drew on the senses to explain dehumanization and survival of blacks in slavery, emphasizing the emotive power of the sounds and silences of slavery.<sup>19</sup> Charles Ball recalled hearing his mother's voices for the last time amid screams, supplications, and blows from the master as well as

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<sup>17</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 44, 48

<sup>18</sup> Vaughan and Clark, *Puritans among the Indians*, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

his father's silence after the separation.<sup>20</sup> Slavery was also an acutely haptic experience. Describing the feeling of a hickory stick, Ball compared the first sensation to "streams of scalding water, running along my back," then turning into "acute and piercing pain," until finally succeeded by a "dead and painful aching."<sup>21</sup>

Although bondage was an intensely felt and heard experience, former slaves also described the tastes and smells of captivity. Harriet Jacobs recalled an incident in which the master forced a cook to eat the "Indian mush" prepared for the dog. She wrote, "He thought that the woman's stomach was stronger than the dog's; but her sufferings afterwards proved that he was mistaken."<sup>22</sup> Smell also served as a mode of supervision. An overseer accusing Ball of eating meat believed that he could not only see but also smell evidence of meat, asserting that he could "smell the meat inside you" and "see the grease as it runs out of your face."<sup>23</sup> It was only because of Ball's quick and clever explanations that the white men "began to doubt the evidence of their own senses."<sup>24</sup> And while plantation owners trusted in their senses to read slave behavior, they enlisted the

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<sup>20</sup> [Charles Ball], *Fifty Years in Chains; or, The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, 1858), 11, 14. See also Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Slavery, No. 1 delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, NY, on Sunday evening, December 1, 1850," in Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), vol. 2, pg. 137; John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series Two: The Autobiographical Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), vol. 1, pg. 20-21.

<sup>21</sup> [Ball], *Fifty Years in Chains*, 303.

<sup>22</sup> Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. L. Maria Child (1861; reprint, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>23</sup> [Ball], *Fifty Years in Chains*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> [Ball], *Fifty Years in Chains*, 238.

noses of dogs to track down runaways. The wilderness offered a sensory refuge. Slaves took to the woods for many reasons, including when they feared being whipped and wanted to negotiate a safe return.<sup>25</sup> Describing the olfactory environment of the South to northern readers, Ball described the fragrance of a magnolia tree. Ball wrote “No adequate conception can be formed of the appearance or the fragrance of this most magnificent tree, by any one who has not seen it or scented the air when scented by the perfume of its flower.” Ball asserted that the fragrant smell of magnolias could travel at least fifteen miles.<sup>26</sup>

The senses were also useful in travel narratives that created and reflected perceived differences between emerging sections in nineteenth century America, the North and South. In their most rigid form these analytic categories were fictitious and oversimplified, but they helped contemporaries navigate and understand the rise of sectional ideologies which developed in opposition to each other in the 1840s and 50s. Proponents of each increasingly cast suspicion on the other as holding opposing values which threatened to undermine their perception of a well-ordered society. The idea of the North and the South in the minds of travelers helped to splinter and sectionalize American nationalism. The South increasingly felt, sounded, tasted, smelled, and looked more like a foreign country within national boundaries of the Union.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 98-109. See also Elizabeth D. Blum, “Power, Danger, and Control: Slave Women’s Perceptions of Wilderness in the Nineteenth Century,” *Women’s Studies* 31 (2002): 247-266.

<sup>26</sup> [Ball], *Fifty Years in Chains*, quote on 106, 107.

<sup>27</sup> Eric William Plagg, “Strangers in a Strange Land: Northern Travelers and the Coming of the American Civil War,” (Ph.D. diss, University of South Carolina, 2006), 227-286;

That travelers helped shape sectional identity through the senses also indicates the mobility of the Civil War Era was not an aberration of nineteenth-century America. The spread of roads, canals, and railroads in the first half of the century as well as the international market in newspapers and travel literature reflected a nation and a world that was already on the move. The internal improvements built by common laborers, immigrants, and slaves marked changes not only in the agricultural and industrial economy but also in communication and forms of free and unfree travel. Railroads, too, were a national development. In the three decades between the emergence of the first railroads and the Civil War, rail lines spread quickly from the eastern seaboard to the Midwest and Old Southwest. While railroads grew rapidly first in New England and along the east coast in the 1840s, states between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River nearly all experienced railroad growth faster than the national average, making the railroad boom a parallel experience rather than a sectional theme. More than fifty percent of the population in South Carolina, Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, and Mississippi lived within fifteen miles of a railroad in 1861 and Louisiana, Missouri, and North Carolina were not far behind.<sup>28</sup> Built on the dreams of businessmen, railroads carried human and nonhuman cargo, segregating shipments into spaces such as

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Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America*, 12-17; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 9; Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000), 1-9, 82.

<sup>28</sup> John F. Stover, *Iron Road to the West: American Railroads in the 1850s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 7, 11, 26, 61, 116; Aaron W. Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 5, 8; Thomas, *The Iron Way*, 4-5, 9, 27.

passenger cars, freight cars, and cattle cars. The word “cattle car” entered common usage in the 1840s and 50s, when railroads began carrying large numbers of animals to slaughter, and the term became especially meaningful when they were repurposed for human cargo in the Civil War.<sup>29</sup> Nineteenth-century revolutions in the movement of living things and information shaped the form of captivity in the North and South during the Civil War. For prisoners, the simultaneity of captivity and mobility created a paradoxical experience. Prisoners enjoyed no freedom of travel, yet they spent much of their time on the move between prisons or, as they were otherwise called, “depots.”

### The Feeling of Capture and Search

The senses were central to understanding boundaries to both free and unfree travelers in the nineteenth century. In this context, the senses also helped people distinguish themselves from nature. A serialized column on the five senses in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* during the 1850s often hinted at an ambiguity in which sensory organs connected humans with and distinguished them from the nonhuman world. As for touch, humans were said to have the dubious benefit of having skin with “exquisite sensitiveness,” comparatively unadorned with protective “hair, scales, boney and horny plates, or shells and spines.” Delicate skin came at the price of sensitivity to pain and required the protection of clothing and shelter. The author noted that even the “half-civilized inhabitants of the tropics” utilized oils, odors, scars, and tattoos “to make the skin less sensitive and open to danger.” The writer also gendered and regionalized skin.

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<sup>29</sup> “Accident on the New York and Erie Rail,” *New-York Daily Tribune* (New York, NY) April 8, 1844; “A Desperate Leap,” *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer* (Wheeling, VA) September 13, 1853; “The Collision on the New York Central,” *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), September 24, 1855.

Human skin varied in thickness and sensitivity, he wrote, “from the hard-working laborer to the delicate lady.” And the writer even summarized the difference between the North and South through skin-protecting strategies. Whereas the South turned to “airy, fluttering dress” and “shady architecture,” northerners turned to “heavy furs and heat-retaining houses.”<sup>30</sup> Such measures protected sensitive skin from the outside environment.

The antebellum significance of touch, skin sensitivity, and the importance of clothing and shelter resonated with prisoners who described the feeling of capture and movement during and after the Civil War. The sensory environment of captivity began with the haptic or tactile experience of being in the hands—quite literally—of the enemy. The feeling of capture stood in stark contrast to the protocols of touch in antebellum America, at least for genteel white men for whom handshaking was a haptic marker of civility between equals in a republic.<sup>31</sup> Thorough and invasive searches occurred on the battlefield, on the road, and at prison entrances. Prisoners used tactile phrases such as “going through,” “stripping,” and “skinning” to express how they felt when captured, searched, and robbed. Capture felt animalistic and violated manhood. Falling into the hands of Tennesseans at Culpepper, Virginia, William D. Wilkins described being “seized[,] dismounted, stripped of all except my watch & pocket book & hurried to the

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<sup>30</sup> “The Senses. II—Touch,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 12, no. 68 (January 1856), 179-185, quotes on 179, 180, 181, 184. On touch, see also John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2006), 5, 11-12, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Mark M. Smith, “The Touch of an Uncommon Man,” *The Chronicle Review*, February 22, 2008.



rear.”<sup>32</sup> Many prisoners were stripped of all their clothes in the process. Nakedness itself may or may not have been demeaning, but the act of being forced to strip violated the bodily independence enjoyed by white men in nineteenth-century America. Describing the capture of a blockhouse along the Nashville and Decatur Railroad at Brentwood, Tennessee, Charles Holbrook Prentiss wrote that Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest’s men plundered their equipment and belongings “like so many hungry wolves.”<sup>33</sup> W. Frank Bailey recalled that guards in Richmond “skinned” with their hands going through clothing, and possessions, cutting open plugs of tobacco and breaking photograph cases. Bailey wrote, “Fingers were run through the hair, the mouth ordered to be opened, and every imaginable means employed to thwart Yankee ingenuity in

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<sup>32</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, August 12, 1862, Library of Congress [hereafter LC]. On “stripping,” see also Hiram F. Penland diary, March 11, 1863, #86630 Aa1, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan [hereafter BL, UM]; Francis Everett Hall to “Dear Friends at Home,” March 18, 1865, Francis Everett Hall papers, #86543Aa1, Michigan Historical Collections, BL, UM; Frederick Schmalzriedt to “Dear Brother,” February 22, 1863, Frederick Schmalzriedt papers, #852225Aa2, Michigan Historical Collections, BL, UM; Edmund E. Ryan diary, February 15, 1864, Peoria Historical Society Collection, Bradley University Library; James J. Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier,” *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1957), 239, entry for October 15, 1863; House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 36. On “going through,” see Allen O. Abbott, *Prison Life in the South...* (New York, 1865), 22. On tactile metaphors and pain, see Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Holbrook Prentiss diary, March 25, 1863, Letters and Diaries, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Army Heritage Education Center [hereafter AHEC]. See also Gilbert E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War* (New York: The American News Company, 1865), 11; John Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence...* (Philadelphia, 1870), 27-29; Roger Tusken, “In the Bastile of the Rebels,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (1963): 320; James H. Franklin, “Prison Diary of Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” pg. 7, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia; Harvey Henderson diary, September 23, 1864, New York State Library, Albany.

secreting valuables.”<sup>34</sup> Unaccustomed to being touched by men in this way made the hands feel particularly transgressive and demeaning. It was not how white men were supposed to be touched.

Stripped men wore evidence of humiliation on their heads, shoulders, and backs. Describing a group of prisoners entering Andersonville, Eugene Sly wrote, “The rebels have stripped them of everything but enough to cover their nakedness.”<sup>35</sup> Confederate prisoners also considered Union hands invasive. Confederate cavalryman Curtis R. Burke resented the careful search of Union captors who took three dollars in U.S. greenbacks found in his jacket. They then felt through his boots, socks, and shirt as well as ran their hands down the seams of Burke’s pants.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, guards at Fort Delaware searched James H. Franklin and other prisoners captured at Gettysburg. In addition to northern-made blankets and canteens, the “fleecing operation” of the guards took watches, money, and “anything else that might attract the cupidity of the searcher.”<sup>37</sup> Although often

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<sup>34</sup> Washington Davis, *Camp Fire Chats of the Civil War...* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1888), 100-101

<sup>35</sup> Eugene R. Sly diary, June 3, 1864, United States Civil War Collection, Western Michigan University, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/civilwar1/USCW004.0001.001?view=toc>. See also Unknown diary, undated [before May 26, 1864], ANHS; Decker diary, June 8, 1864, ANHS; Amos A. Yeakle diary, June 25, 1864, ANHS; Jacob Heffelfinger dairy, May 6, 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 14, AHEC; and (though more implicit) George A. Clarkson diary, June 20, 1864, Andersonville National Historic Site [hereafter ANHS]. On the “inhumanity” of being robbed, see George M. Hinkley diary, June 11, 1864, File 1864 April 11, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison [hereafter WHS];

<sup>36</sup> Curtis R. Burke journal, July 24, 1864, #M0903, Indiana Historical Society [hereafter HIS].

<sup>37</sup> James H. Franklin, “Prison Diary of Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” pg. 7, MC. See also Herbert M. Schiller, ed. *A Captain’s War: The Letters and Diaries of William H. S.*

humiliating, fleecing sometimes helped guards separate types of prisoners. When Henri Jean Mugler deserted from the Confederate army by allowing Union pickets to capture him, the amount of things he brought helped corroborate his story. The search convinced Henry M. Lazelle, the examining Union officer, that Mugler ““came prepared to be captured.””<sup>38</sup> These searches did not occur universally or systematically, but they left a powerful impression on those in the hands of the enemy.

Prisoners described the feeling of capture as a form of violent robbery. Recalling his capture, Missouri guerilla Thomas W. Westlake wrote that after searching his house the Union captain “Returned to go through me, which he did to a finish. He was much more accurate at this than he was shooting at Rebbels... He was more in his natcheral Element Robbing some body.”<sup>39</sup> Samuel W. Fiske, a correspondent for the *Springfield Republican*, decried that Confederate soldiers were more skilled at “picking” pockets than Italian brigands, Greek pirates, or Bedouin Arabs. He described the penetrating touches of robbery through multiple senses. After falling into the “omnivorous clutches” of the enemy, the guards’ “acute olfactories” seemed to smell out every crumb or possession.<sup>40</sup>

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*Burgwyn 1861-1865* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1994), pg. 158, entry for October 23, 1864.

<sup>38</sup> Henri Jean Mugler diary, July 10, 1864, West Virginia Collection, University of West Virginia, Morgantown.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas W. Westlake memoir, pg. 69, Watson-Westlake papers, #C0186, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia [hereafter SHSM].

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Wheelock Fiske, *Mr. Dunn Browne's Experiences in the Army: The Civil War Letters of Samuel Fiske*, ed. Stephen W. Sears (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 1998), 82.

Slavery made touch particularly meaningful for some Union prisoners who believed that southern hands were more practiced at stripping and skinning because of the corporal realities of slaveholding. In southern slave markets, buyers did not measure the value of slaves on vision alone. They trusted in their hands the ability to feel the soundness of slaves. It was necessary for the economics of slave markets and, as some have argued, the sexual fantasy of slaveholders.<sup>41</sup> Prisoner George Erwin of Iowa wrote of being taken in a group to the river under the pretense of washing at Belle Island. He wrote, “We are all escorted by twos into a tent and there searched by two men who jerk and yank us around as they are accustomed to handle their slaves.”<sup>42</sup> Whether or not the Confederate guards learned how to search bodies from their knowledge of handling slaves, many noted their thoroughness. The early sensations of captivity were overtly haptic, animalistic, and resonated in the minds of prisoners as part of a multisensory experience.

The thorough hands of captors made secreting valuables and possessions more important for prisoners. Captured near the end of the war, Samuel T. McCullough wrote that at the entrance to Johnson’s Island the prisoners “were subjected to a pretty close examination... but I managed to save my valuables mementoes &c by putting them in my mouth.”<sup>43</sup> Union prisoners described the act of hiding possessions as a Yankee trick or

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<sup>41</sup> Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 121, 141, 149. See also Smith, “Getting in Touch with Slavery and Freedom,” *Journal of American History* 383-384.

<sup>42</sup> Ted Genoways and Hugh H. Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hell: Eyewitness Accounts by Civil War Prisoners from the 12<sup>th</sup> Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 211.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Thomas McCullough diary, April 11, 1865, Hotchkiss-McCullough Papers, LC.

ingenuity. George Albee wrote that other prisoners lost cloth and rubber blankets, haversacks, canteens, knives, and portfolios. He succeeded in saving his belongings the first day, but lost his rubber blanket, canteen, and haversack on the second.<sup>44</sup> Union prisoners hid valuables in the backs of buttons, crevices of clothing, and inside the body. W. Frank Bailey hinted at one strategy when he spoke of “a disease known in the army as the ‘green piles,’” of which Confederate guards searching for greenbacks made a “careful examination on this point.” Smuggling possessions and money under the skin spoke to perceived vulnerability of captives in practiced Confederate hands.<sup>45</sup>

Humiliating and animalizing, falling into enemy hands also had a liminal quality between life and death and the human and nonhuman world. Stripping and skinning prisoners paralleled controversial ways of handling the dead before and during the Civil War. Soldiers and civilians on both sides both frowned upon and participated in scouring battlefields and scavenging provisions and souvenirs from the dead. Writing on the aftermath of the Battle of Stones River, George W. Squier, an Indiana soldier, described two Confederate soldiers, one dead and one holding on to life. Squier wrote that both men “had their pockets turned inside out and ever thing of value taken, which is no uncommon circumstance.”<sup>46</sup> Yet Squire had not ventured out that night to moralize. He

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<sup>44</sup> George S. Albee diary, August 27 (quote) and 28, 1864, MSS 41695, Library of Virginia.

<sup>45</sup> Davis, *Camp Fire Chats*, 100-101. On hiding money and valuables, see also Michael Dougherty, *Prison Diary, of Michael Dougherty...* (n.p.: p.p.), pg. 2, entry for October 14, 1863.

<sup>46</sup> Julie A. Doyle, John David Smith, and Richard M. McMurry, eds., *This Wilderness of War: The Civil War Letters of George W. Squire Hoosier Volunteer* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 39. Union prisoners at Shiloh joined Confederates

scavenged the battlefield, and filled his pockets from those of the dead and dying. While wounded men “dragged themselves” like animals into clusters, Squier traded his gun for a Confederate’s imported rifle and remarked, “in fifteen minutes after the fight, every rebel’s pocket was turned in and out.” Feeling his way through the pockets of the dead and dying, Squier obtained an ink stand for letter writing and a new pair of buckskin gloves for his hands. These were good pickings for one night’s work. Sometimes joining these scavengers were animals, especially hogs, who rooted like humans among the dead.<sup>47</sup>

Confederates also took from the dead, sometimes their own. In early 1864, *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* applied similar tactile language to the treatment of the dead as prisoners did to capture when it depicted a scene in which Confederates “peeled” and “stripped” fallen Union soldiers.<sup>48</sup> The language of stripping bodies went back further into eighteenth and nineteenth century debates on dissection or “stripping,” most commonly applied to captives of a different kind, usually Indian prisoners of war,

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in picking through the dead on their way to Corinth. Genoways and Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hell*, 29.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Degruccio, “Letting the War Slip through Our Hands: Material Culture and the Weakness of Words in the Civil War Era,” in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 15-35; Michael C. C. Adams, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 88.

<sup>48</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage, 2008), 73-75. Overlooked in one of the iconic images of the dead at Gettysburg is a Confederate soldier stripped partially naked. Alexander Gardner (photographer), “Confederate dead gathered for burial at the edge of the Rose woods, July 5, 1863,” Library of Congress, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., digital id. cwpb 00882, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/civwar/item/cwp2003000202/PP/resource/>.

criminals, and slaves. The bodies of sailors made especially easy targets because they were strangers buried away from home and might be presumed nonwhite.<sup>49</sup> The customary rules for appropriating the bodies of the dead provided at least the plausible license for both sides. It was ambiguous whether Confederates were belligerents protected under the rules of war or criminals guilty of treason. Confederates often described the invaders, particularly the foreigners, as nonwhite. Although these implicit justifications often went unstated, robbing the dead was common.

Civilians who felt captivity gave meaning to gestures as small as a handshake. James A. Bell, a U.S. government worker living in Washington, D.C., caught a train from the city to Manassas in August 1862 to assist with the wounded after erroneously hearing of a Union victory. Arriving at a scene of chaos, Bell instead found himself scooped up by Confederates after the battle and described the emotional introduction to captivity in animalistic and haptic references. “Like wolves who scent their prey afar off,” he wrote, “we were beset at all points after we entered the road by thousands of filthy, ragged, repulsive Rebel troops, all anxious to get a sight of what they called the d—d yankees.” Among the crowd, Bell spied Wilson M. Stuart, a former clerk in the U.S. Treasury Department, and went to shake his hand as a gesture of respect. The handshake and the few words spoken to him were “cold and disdainful.” Bell wrote, “When I reflected how courteously I had treated him in Dover and the civilities shown his sister, and compared them with this reception in my adversity, I could not help but feel that it was pearls cast

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Sappol, *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 98-135, esp. 111, 116.

among swine.”<sup>50</sup> Bell was equally insulted when Delawarean Confederates James H. Buckmaster and his son Nathaniel refused to shake his hand or even acknowledge his acquaintance.

Captivity inflated the importance of the nonhuman environment as well. The combination of human choices and the nonhuman environment made natural elements more difficult to endure. Halting temporarily in Staunton, Virginia, Horace Smith wrote, “the Rebs took our tents and blankets from us and turned us into a lot like so many cattle with nothing to shelter us from the sun, rain, or cold, cold nights.”<sup>51</sup> Antebellum expositions on the sense of touch interpreted the “exquisite sensitiveness” of human skin a blessing and curse, requiring clothing and shelter to protect the flesh from the “fatal influences of wind and weather.”<sup>52</sup> The clothing, hats, and shoes that shielded against rain and sun were the same targets of thieves. Emphasizing the combined effect of Confederates and nature on the feeling of captivity, Sabre wrote, “The sun poured down upon our hatless heads a perfect stream of fire. The intense heat falling upon our ill-clad persons raised painful and feverish blisters.”<sup>53</sup> David Kennedy, a Union prisoner sent to

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<sup>50</sup> James A. Bell to “My dear Brother,” September 30, 1862, Bell family collection, Delaware Historical Society, Dover.

<sup>51</sup> Horace Smith diary, July 18, 1863, SC 504, WHS. The effects of weather of course were not limited to prisoners, but they had few ways of ameliorating the conditions. Sometimes the weather could lead men to surrender. See Megan Kate Nelson, “The Difficulties and Seductions of the Desert: Landscapes of War in 1861 New Mexico,” *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 34-51, esp. 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> “The Senses. II. Touch,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 179.

<sup>53</sup> Gilbert E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*, 11.



Andersonville, wrote that the sun “melts down men like transplanted plants.”<sup>54</sup> It was as if the environment colluded with the captors to attack the skin.

### The Hard Hand of Politics, Emancipation, and Prisoner Movement

The movement of prisoners reflected changing policies, political maneuverings, and rhetorical humanitarianism in Washington and Richmond. Exchanging prisoners helped the Confederate national effort in two ways. Exchange not only benefited the numerically inferior Confederate army, it also implied governmental equality and, thus, a recognition of statehood. Alert to the possibility of trading their way into legal existence, Confederate officials had good reason to pursue a general prisoner exchange from the beginning of the war. President Abraham Lincoln, suspicious that prisoner exchange was the thin end of a legal wedge, consistently took the unpopular position of opposing exchange. In the time it took Lincoln and northern officials to decide whether to transport prisoners to permanent prisons or send them back across the lines, northern citizens and the press, prisoners, and Confederate officials challenged inaction as inhumane. An exasperated William Irvin of Pennsylvania wrote to Secretary of War Simon Cameron in November 1861 encouraging him to exchange prisoners (and free the slaves) on humanitarian and strategic grounds. Irvin reasoned that if the Union could actually suppress the rebellion, then acknowledgement would do the Confederacy no good in the long run. In contrast, if the Union doubted its ability to beat the Confederates, a policy of refusing prisoner exchange would neither “encourage the hearts” nor “strengthen the

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<sup>54</sup> David Kennedy diary, June 23, 1864, #P1091, Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis.

hands” of those fighting to preserve the Union.<sup>55</sup> Exchanging prisoners was not just a concern of humanitarianism, international politics, or public relations. It was the sum of all those concerns.<sup>56</sup>

Union prisoners and northern newspapers grappled with the question of whether exchanging captives with the Confederate government gestured at recognition.<sup>57</sup> Writing to his parents in 1861, Union prisoner James J. Gillette argued that humanitarianism necessitated exchange. “Much of the horror of war,” he wrote, “would be saved by weekly exchanges of prisoners. I believe this was the custom in Crimea.” He also warned that the Union should tread carefully in handling prisoners, especially those it regarded as criminals, because of the potential to spark retaliation. Referring to a standoff between Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln on whether captured privateers could be hanged as pirates, Gillette wrote, “don’t hang the privateers unless you are willing we should be similarly treated.”<sup>58</sup> Another prisoner in Richmond wrote Bradley F. Granger, a U.S. Congressman from Michigan, on the effect of refusing to exchange prisoners on those actually fighting the war. “We believe belligerency can be recognized without involving independence.... We enlisted to serve our country and if necessary die for it, but we

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<sup>55</sup> William Irvin to Simon Cameron, November 6, 1861, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 3, 126-127.

<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Cloyd puts it best. “Unfortunately for prisoners, the reality that they were placeholders for the fundamental issues of the war—racial equality, Confederate sovereignty, moral superiority—ensured their suffering.” *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 29.

<sup>57</sup> Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons*, 7-33.

<sup>58</sup> James J. Gillette to “Dear Parents,” August 8, 1861, Box 1, Folder 2, James J. Gillette papers, LC. See also Gillette to “Dear Parents,” October 4, 1861, Gillette papers, LC.

would prefer a different death than the one awaiting us here.”<sup>59</sup> Not everyone in the North agreed. Although consistently appealing to exchanges on the basis of humanity, the *New York Times* acknowledged that the British had engaged in small-scale prisoner exchanges during the American Revolution, but they never agreed to an exchange between governments. Lincoln and other Union officials were charting a similar course.<sup>60</sup>

Faced with mounting prison populations in summer 1862, Lincoln acceded to exchanges between armies but not governments. The decision reflected continuing hesitancy about the meaning of swapping prisoners, but the policy had precedents in conflicts with England in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The exchange cartel worked through a point system which recognized the equality between equivalent ranks in Union and Confederate armies. For example, one Confederate private equaled one Union private, a lieutenant equaled a lieutenant or four privates, and generals equaled generals or sixty privates. In the foreseeable event one army held more prisoners than others, the cartel agreed to parole excess prisoners until they were officially exchanged. In July 1862 the exchange cartel began draining northern and southern prisons and reversed the direction of the forced movement of prisoners.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> [Anonymous] to “Hon. B. F. Granger,” December 4, 1861, *Official Records* ser. II, vol. 3, 153.

<sup>60</sup> “The Exchange of Prisoners. Precedents of the American Revolution. The British Government Never Assenting to a General Exchange, nor Conceding National Rights to the Colonies,” *New York Times*, December 11, 1861. See also “Exchange of Prisoners,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1861; Humanity, “Why Not Arrange a General Exchange [of] Prisoners,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1862.

<sup>61</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 787-788.

The problems of black slavery and emancipation were never far removed from the issue of white prisoners and exchange. The same month agents for Union and Confederate armies signed the exchange agreement, Lincoln announced his intentions to issue an Emancipation Proclamation and Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act. The First Confiscation Act (1861) began a process of allowing Union forces to employ slaves who escaped from disloyal masters and reached Union lines.<sup>62</sup> The Second Confiscation Act (1862) went further, declaring that slaves of disloyal owners could be made free forever.<sup>63</sup> The Militia Act, passed the same day as the Second Confiscation Act, set the precedent for employing African Americans in military service that became the legal basis for enlisting them in 1863.<sup>64</sup>

Prisoner exchange emerged as European countries watched the conflict with increasing interest. The brutality of the conflict and the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation momentarily made European power more, not less, inclined to intervene on humanitarian grounds to stop the haptic excess. Some political cartoons depicted the Emancipation Proclamation as a desperate last card in Lincoln's hand and European powers worried Emancipation would spark an even more violent race war on the North American continent.<sup>65</sup> While European powers did not intervene, the promise of

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<sup>62</sup> Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21-22.

<sup>63</sup> Berlin, et al, *Slaves No More*, 40.

<sup>64</sup> Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Howard Jones, "History and Mythology: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War," in *The Union, The Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim*, ed. Robert May, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1995; reprint, Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 2013), 61.

Emancipation and black enlistment added a fatal wrinkle to a system based on equality between ranks.

Northern officials rewrote the laws of war in an effort to formalize equal treatment in a multiracial war. When Francis Lieber drafted General Orders No. 100 for the United States government in late 1862 and published the document in 1863, it sought to control the hapticity of the conflict through two modes of touch—humanitarian and retaliatory. The humanitarian touch prohibited stripping captives of money, watches, jewelry, clothing, and other personal possessions. It defined inhumane or cruel acts as acts simply “for the sake of suffering or for revenge” and therefore forbade executing prisoners, torture, and acts of revenge.<sup>66</sup> It stipulated that armies could make “no distinction of color” between prisoners meaning that African Americans captured in uniform must receive the same treatment as white prisoners. “No belligerent,” Lieber wrote, “has a right to declare that enemies of a certain class, color, or condition, when properly organized as soldiers, will not be treated by him as public enemies.”<sup>67</sup> The regulations had the dual benefit of enlightened humanitarianism and the rhetorical value of holding the “so-called Confederacy” to a standard that protected African Americans.

To enforce humane war, General Orders No. 100 formalized a long-recognized strategy of the retaliatory hand of governments, which had the effect of putting the American Civil War on an even more violent trajectory. It expanded the rights of armies to seize chattel and personal property, complementing the Emancipation Proclamation

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<sup>66</sup> General Orders No. 100, *Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field*, Section III, Article 76, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 672.

<sup>67</sup> *Instructions for the Government*, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 672.

and encouraging the formation of African American regiments. It laid the groundwork for what later became called the hard hand of war against civilians. Prisoners were central to this strange symbiosis of retaliation and humanitarianism. While Lieber's Code outlawed revenge as needless pain, it conceptualized retaliation as necessary suffering.

Acknowledging retaliation as "the sternest feature of war," Lieber argued, "A reckless enemy often leaves to his opponent no other means of securing himself against the repetition of barbarous outrage."<sup>68</sup> Retaliation and revenge differed because the careful application of the former acted to hold belligerents to the same rules. Revenge, in contrast, was "unjust or inconsiderate retaliation" and had the effect of pushing belligerents "farther and farther from the mitigating rules of a regular war and by rapid steps leads them nearer to the internecine wars of savages."<sup>69</sup> The two opposing modes of touch coexisted in the same document because the humanitarianism required the threat of retaliation for collateral enforcement. "All prisoners of war," Lieber wrote, "are liable to the inflection of retaliatory measures." Soldiers who murdered the surrendering or belonged to corps that gave no quarter could be executed in retaliation. The code stipulated that since the United States had no power to enslave Confederates, they would respond to the enslavement of African American soldiers by executing Confederates.<sup>70</sup> Prisoners had to be treated equally, traded equally, and if the South hanged or enslaved black prisoners, it opened the likelihood of the hard hand of retaliation.

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<sup>68</sup> *Instructions for the Government*, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 672.

<sup>69</sup> *Instructions for the Government*, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 673.

<sup>70</sup> *Instructions for the Government*, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 674-675

By formalizing a policy of retaliation, Lieber's orders promised to make war more humane. While it is easy in retrospect to be suspicious of humanitarianism promises through more blood, there is no evidence that Lieber's code was insincere. Moreover, the same dynamic simultaneity between retaliation and humanitarian impulses was a common feeling in the North. James J. Higginson, a Bostonian studying speechmaking in Germany in 1861, read newspapers anxiously and gauged European temperament by eavesdropping, but even from abroad he felt the American conflict. In letters to his father he lambasted "weakminded Virginia" and the border states for "keeping our hands tied, while they were preparing themselves for war," and he longed to "get a blow at those bragging South Carolinians."<sup>71</sup> When Higginson learned of the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862, he predicted Charleston would fall into "our hands" within one year of the opening shot so that "we may say to the world, that before the close of one year the chief plague spot in all this infernal, horrible rebellion was in our hands."<sup>72</sup> When time proved his prediction incorrect, Higginson crossed the Atlantic to serve first in the U.S. Sanitary Commission and later as a commissioned officer. When the Emancipation Proclamation came, he felt it, too, and wrote to his father, "I think it is very touching now finally we have washed our hands of this great curse [of slavery], as far as is now possible, and can breathe freer," and the words "thrilled through me as tho I myself were a slave set free by those simple words."<sup>73</sup> Higginson's haptic metaphors

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<sup>71</sup> James J. Higginson to "Dear Father," May 5, 1861, Hanover, GE, Higginson Family Papers II, Box 3, Massachusetts Historical Society [hereafter MAHS].

<sup>72</sup> Higginson to "Dear Father," March 12, 1862, Berlin, GE, Box 3, MAHS.

<sup>73</sup> James J. Higginson to "Dear Daddy," January 1, 1863, Washington, D.C., Box 3, MAHS.

straddled two opposing modes of touch. He vowed to crush the rebellion with his own hands; he wept at the cleansing and humanitarian act of Emancipation.

The Emancipation Proclamation and Lieber's Code, alongside the Confederate reaction to both, created the first major impasse in the exchange system. In 1863, Jefferson Davis and the Confederate Congress threatened to execute or enslave captured black Union soldiers and also threatened to execute the white officers of black regiments.<sup>74</sup> Preparing for the possibility of retaliatory executions, the Union War Department began slowing prisoner exchanges. Had Union officials followed Lieber's Code to the letter, they would have executed hundreds of white prisoners in response to the Confederate's enslavement of black prisoners. Lincoln himself admitted that "the difficulty is not in stating the principle, but in practically applying it."<sup>75</sup> Complicating matters further were accounting problems in which Confederate officials improperly sent 37,000 paroled Confederate prisoners captured at Vicksburg and Port Hudson back to their regiments before they were officially exchanged. When the doomed exchange cartel sputtered to a halt in summer and fall 1863, it reversed the flow of prisoners back into northern and southern interiors.

Although a trickle of special exchanges still sent Union prisoners north and Confederate prisoners south, prisons filled again and this time they would not begin to empty until the final months of the war when the Confederacy agreed to exchange black and white prisoners equally. By summer 1864, the insistence of Lincoln and Grant that

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<sup>74</sup> Dunbar Rowland ed., *Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His letters, Papers, and Speeches*, Collected (10 vols, Jackson, 1923), Vol. V, 209.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 795.



the Confederates must account for the misdeeds in the exchange cartel and ensure the equal treatment of white and black prisoners came at the cost of political popularity in the north. While Lincoln and Grant may have known that exchanges worked in the Confederate's favor by giving them more defenders, refusing to exchange on the basis of race was a hard sell for prisoners, soldiers, or northern families of prisoners. In August 1864, amid stories of fearful mortality in southern prisons, Grant made an additional case for refusing to exchange prisoners on humanitarian grounds. He wrote, "It is hard on our men held in Southern prisons not to exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in the ranks to fight our battles....If we commence a system of exchange which liberates all prisoners taken, we will have to fight on until the whole South is exterminated. If we hold those caught they amount to no more than dead men."<sup>76</sup> Although those words are often interpreted as an alternative, more sinister, and truer motive for refusing to exchange prisoners, there was nothing in Grant's statement that contradicted or rejected Lieber's code. It was the strange product of a movement toward humanitarianism in the midst of a relentless war.

By summer 1863, the nearly constant movement of prisoners began to take on a familiar pattern. Many Union soldiers captured at Gettysburg, for example, experienced captivity in half-a-dozen official prisons as well as makeshift holding pens in jails, churches, and open fields along the way. An odyssey beginning in Pennsylvania took Union prisoners by road, canal, and rail through Richmond's Libby or Pemberton prisons

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<sup>76</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to Benjamin Butler, August 18, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. 2, vol. 7, 606-607. Although I generally agree with the assessments by Benjamin Cloyd and Charles Sanders, I see no evidence this marked a change in what had been the Union policy for most of the conflict. See Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, 217; Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*, 10.

and Belle Island on the James River by the end of 1863. In spring 1864, Confederate officials removed these prisoners into the Confederate interior. Some passed through prison camps in Danville, Virginia, and Salisbury, North Carolina, en route to a new prison at Andersonville. The number of prisoners deposited at Andersonville reached approximately 35,000 by early September 1864 when most of the survivors were removed, not on account of the fearful mortality but because Sherman's capture of Atlanta posed a threat to its security. They were removed to keep them from falling back into Union hands.



Figure 1.1. Confederate prisoners awaiting transportation to northern prisons. "Chattanooga, Tennessee. Confederate prisoners at railroad depot," 1864, Library of Congress.

For the remainder of the war, guards moved prisoners more frequently, as Confederates deftly moved them out of the way of approaching Union armies to safer prisons at Millen and Savannah, Georgia, Charleston, Florence, and Columbia, South Carolina, as well as various prisons in North Carolina, southern Virginia, and Cahaba, Alabama. Some Andersonville survivors found themselves back at the old stockade by Christmas as Confederate officials reacted to movements by Sherman and kept prisoners out of reach. In November and December 1864, some of the sick went by rail to Virginia for exchange or to Charleston to take a steamship back to Maryland. While this movement took place in the interior of the Confederacy along the fringes where military and civilian worlds met, prison accounts regularly appeared in northern newspapers. Following the movement of hundreds of thousands of Union prisoners was a northern readership that consumed stories of imprisonment through newspapers, speeches, friends, and later in dozens of published captivity narratives. Anyone who wanted it had second-hand access to the movement of prisoners.<sup>77</sup>

As a result of the racial politics, the pattern of prisoner movement changed. Prisoners continued to move, but away from their homes and family. Some Union prisoners agreed with Lincoln's policy. Lyle G. Adair, a sergeant from an African American regiment, preferred personal captivity to the national disgrace of letting

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<sup>77</sup> See, for an example among many, John Whitten diary, 1863-1864, LC; on consumption of prison accounts in the North, see Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*, 20-25; Douglas G. Gardner, "Andersonville and American Memory: Civil War Prisons and Narratives of Suffering and Redemption" (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1998), 180-196.

Confederate officials dictate terms.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, William Tritt, who spent the last seventeen months of the war in various prisons, noted that prisoners were divided on the issue. Shortly after arriving at Andersonville in June 1864, he wrote, “Quite a percentage of the prisoners are trash. Some still beller out against the negro.”<sup>79</sup> Describing complaints that African Americans impeded prisoner exchanges in September, Tritt commented “No language is too bad to use in some mouths.”<sup>80</sup> Yet many other Union prisoners resented their government for leaving them to slowly die in southern prisons. One of those who disagreed with the Union policy was William T. Peabody of Massachusetts. Peabody denounced Lincoln in his diary, threatening never to vote for him again. He wrote, “If the government don’t get us out they may go to the Devil with Abraham Lincoln and his votes.”<sup>81</sup> Peabody died at Andersonville in September, but survivors held mock elections at several prisons in November. While prisoners still voted overwhelmingly for Lincoln, the margin between him and Democratic candidate George B. McClellan was closer than for soldiers as a whole. Some could not forgive the government for leaving them to die in southern prisons.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Robins, *The Have Left Us Here to Die*, 74, entry for January 31, 1865.

<sup>79</sup> William L. Tritt diary, June 19, 1864: M92-141, WHS.

<sup>80</sup> Tritt diary, September 19, 1864, WHS.

<sup>81</sup> William T. Peabody diary, July 16, 1864, ANHS. See also Leon Basile, ed., *The Civil War Diary of Amos E. Stearns, a Prisoner at Andersonville* (London: Associated University Presses, 1981), 77; Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Glenn Robins, “Race, Repatriation, and Galvanized Rebels; Union Prisoners and the Exchange Question in Deep South Prison Camps,” *Civil War History* 53, no. 2 (June 2007): 127-129.

Confederate prisoners in the North experienced less movement than prisoners in the South. Although the transfers of prisoners, especially officers, to coastal fortifications were frequent, the organization of northern prisons made individual prisons considerably more self-sufficient. Confederate prisoners, especially those captured in the west, might experience any number of small city and county jails en route to larger prisons in the North, including Gratiot Street Prison in St. Louis, Missouri; Alton, Camp Douglas, and Rock Island, Illinois; Camp Morton, Indiana; and Camp Chase, Ohio. By 1863 and 1864, most Confederate enlisted men captured in the east went to Point Lookout, Maryland, and to a newly opened prison camp in Elmira, New York. The addition of new prisoners counterbalanced attrition through death, special exchange, oath-taking, and escape.<sup>83</sup>

When prisoner exchange began again in February, 1865, it took place under drastically different circumstances than in 1862. Sherman had already demonstrated his army's ability to writhe through Georgia like a fire-breathing worm. His attention now shifting to the Carolinas portended more of the same. Lee's army around Richmond was immobilized by siege and the Army of Tennessee had all but vanished into the ground or into the woods. The Confederacy had all but lost its ability to control the movement of dissenters, refugees, runaway slaves, and deserters who roamed the countryside,

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<sup>83</sup> This summary of the movement of prisoners draws upon collective patterns found in prisoner of war manuscripts cited throughout this dissertation as well the most comprehensive studies of captivity in the American Civil War, Roger Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Gray: The Civil War Prisons of the Union* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009) and *Captives in Blue: The Civil War Prisons of the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013). An obvious absence in my summary is Camp Ford, Texas, in which Union prisoners captured in west of the Mississippi were confined. Prisoners held at Camp Ford seem to have moved less frequently than those in other southern prisons.

sometimes together.<sup>84</sup> As late as October, 1864, when Lee offered to trade prisoners, Grant responded that he could only trade recently captured prisoners, but would pursue the exchange if it included black prisoners. Lee equivocated, stating that he would trade soldiers “of whatever nation and color,” except for former slaves which “are not considered subjects of exchange.” Grant then declined to continue prisoner negotiation.<sup>85</sup> Although the end was not certain in January 1865, Confederate politicians and prison officials began slowly changing their policies around the movement of prisoners. As the Confederacy dissolved in the final months, it loosened its policy of dealing with African American soldiers because it was preparing to recruit slaves to fight for the Confederacy in a last drive for independence.<sup>86</sup> Increasingly unable to ensure safe-keeping, at least one Confederate prison official suggested “paroling the prisoners and sending them home.”<sup>87</sup> In general, however, the Confederate officials continued to hold on to prisoners, moving them out of the way of approaching armies to new places of relative and temporary safety until the very end of the war.

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<sup>84</sup> Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 155-194.

<sup>85</sup> Ulysses S. Grant to Robert E. Lee, October 1, 2, and 3, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, 906-907, 908, 914.

<sup>86</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 800. James M. Gillespie notes that officials seemed to sidestep the race issue in February 1865, *Andersonvilles of the North* (Denton: University of North Texas, 2008), 93. On the 1865 effort to enlist slaves, see Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> John H. Winder to S. Cooper, January 20, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 8, 96.

## A Traveling Menagerie

Guards put prisoners of war in jails, slave pens, abandoned churches and public buildings, empty lots, and warehouses along the way. In these confined spaces the senses of taste and smell animalized captivity. In the 1850s, the *Harper's* writer mentioned above argued that while humans had to eat, the discriminating sense of taste distinguished them from the animal world by being able to enjoy the experience of eating. The *Harper's* writer stated, "Many animals surpass us in the acuteness of other senses, but man stands supreme in the delicacy of his perception through taste."<sup>88</sup> For animals, the writer argued, the tongue had only a mechanical function of guiding and breaking down food. The sense of taste for humans, like touch, was fragile and the act of tasting might be as miserable as it was pleasing. Like pleasure and pain, tasting might lead instantaneously to salivation and tears of joy or "nausea and violent emotion."<sup>89</sup> Hunger drove the prisoners to eat food in ways considered fit only for animals. Bell wrote that guards opened a gate, pointed to the cornfield, and told the prisoners to help themselves, "raw or roasted." Prisoners followed the order with alacrity: some "snatched off the husks and ate the corn raw but a few waited for a fire to be kindled but crunched off the grains with a greediness akin to swine." Their stomachs punished the animalistic feast with the pain of indigestion. The food created in some a "stubborn constipation;" for others, it produced "a debilitating dysentery."<sup>90</sup> Days later, when guards shot and skinned a hog, Bell had his

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<sup>88</sup> "The Senses. I. – Taste," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 12, no. 67 (December 1855): 79.

<sup>89</sup> "The Senses – Taste," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 81.

<sup>90</sup> Bell to "My dear Brother," Bell collection, DHS. On picking corn kernels from cars, see George A. Clarkson diary, June 27, 1864, ANHS.

first cooked food and “it was singed over the fire and eaten with the greediness of canibals [sic].” Hunger had the effect of shaping the perception of food. Captured at Gettysburg and en route to Belle Island, Horace Smith and others cut and shelled wheat in a field where they slept, boiled it, and greedily consumed it. Smith wrote, “Never had anything tasted better to me.”<sup>91</sup> In what became a common pattern in places of captivity, prisoners learned to eat with avidity and without discrimination on the road to prison.

While some prisoners who experienced long confinement traced their experiences through smell, the olfactory experience of captivity began as a series of strong whiffs at temporary locations while traveling prisoners. In the 1850s, the *Harper’s* writer had noted that the sense of smell arbitrated pure and dangerous air. The nose “measures with marvelous delicacy all that takes the form of air or vapor.” The writer noted that the human nose was weaker than those of most animals, but smell, like taste, produced in humans that unique and violent sensation of nausea and disgust.<sup>92</sup> Travel by ship, rail, and road varied, but prisoners consistently emphasized crowding and the lack of personal space which contributed to the sensory animalization of captivity. In 1862, Confederate Randal McGavock sat aboard a crowded steamship, the *Nebraska*, and wrote that “the crowd, the filth, and the stench made it extremely disagreeable.”<sup>93</sup> McGavock used his connections to procure a seat aboard a passenger car and thereby avoided confinement in

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<sup>91</sup> Smith diary, July 9, 1863, WHS.

<sup>92</sup> “The Senses. III. – Smell,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 12, no. 70 (March 1856), 496, 497 (quote), 499-500.

<sup>93</sup> Jack Allen, ed., *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1959), 597, entry for February 23, 1862.



a box car “with fifty men, negroes and all.”<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Francis A. Boyle described the below-deck passage from Point Lookout to Fort Delaware in 1864 with five hundred other prisoners “crowded on the main deck and forward hold...packed as close as herrings and the weather unconscionably hot.”<sup>95</sup> In these spaces they traveled for days and sometimes weeks.



Figure 1.2. A Sketch of Confederate prisoners.  
“Marching prisoners over the mountains to  
Frederick, M.D.,” Library of Congress.

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<sup>94</sup> Allen, ed., *Randal W. McGavock*, 598, entry for February 27, 1862.

<sup>95</sup> Francis A Boyle diary, entry for June 28, 1864, LC. See also Philil Burnham, “The Andersonville’s of the North,” in *With My Face to the Enemy: Perspectives on the Civil War*, ed. Robert Cowley (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 2001), 369.

Union prisoners made fewer journeys by water but described confined spaces through animalistic comparisons. William D. Wilkins wrote that he and others “were crowded together into a cattle car, covered with maneur [sic] and kept herin [sic] until the train arrived to take us to Richmond.”<sup>96</sup> An anonymous Union prisoner captured at Olustee, Florida, wrote of being packed “like sheep” among sick and wounded prisoners into boxcars.<sup>97</sup> Traveling southward to Andersonville, Darius Starr blamed some of the crowding on “hoggish” prisoners who lay down and refused to sit up until forced to do so by fellow prisoners.<sup>98</sup> Leaving Cherokee Station, Alabama, Lyle Adair boarded “cattle cars” that smelled so horribly it produced a smothering or suffocating sensation inside filthy cars.<sup>99</sup> Making matters more wretched were the sick prisoners forced “to squat down on the filthy floors of the cattle cars” and prisoners crowded towards openings to breathe fresher air.<sup>100</sup> At the other end of such a journey, writers compared the hurrying

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<sup>96</sup> Wilkins Diary, August 12, 1862, LC. See also Nathaniel Rollins to Senator Tim O. Howe, January 26, 1865, Nathaniel Rollins papers, Wis Mss UW, WHS. On the metaphor of cattle car or being treated like hogs, see also William T. Peabody diary, May 20, 1864, ANHS; Sheldon R. Curtiss diary, May 19, 1864, ANHS; Thomas Dekay Kimball, Jr., diary, May 7, 1864, Kimball Civil War [Digital] Collection, Hillsdale College; Westlake memoir, pg. 93, Watson-Westlake papers, SHSM.

<sup>97</sup> [No Author], *A Voice from Rebel Prisons...* (Boston, 1865), 4.

<sup>98</sup> Merton Coulter, ed., “From Spotsylvania Courthouse to Andersonville: A Diary of Darius Starr,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 41, no. 2 (June 1957), 184, entry for May 24, 1864.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Hale Kellogg diary, April 29, 1864, Robert H. Kellogg Papers, 1862-1931, Ms68013, Connecticut Historical Society

<sup>100</sup> Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die*, pg. 19, entry for October 5, 1864; Robert Knox Sneden, *Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey*, Charles F. Bryan and Nelson D. Lankford eds. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 193.

of prisoners into jails and stockades as corralling animals. William Tritt of Wisconsin wrote that Confederates “drove in” prisoners into the pen “like hogs, sheep or cattle.”<sup>101</sup> Crowded as they were into cattle cars and ships, the close proximity, the touches, and the smells made prisoners question whether their existence was more akin to humans or animals.

At night the crowding of prisoners during forced transportation had an even stronger animalizing effect. Prisoners slept in the holds of ships, inside railroad cars or in woods and thickets on the side of roads and tracks. Still wearing his sword and pistols as he had for a week after the surrender of Fort Donelson, Andrew Jackson Campbell at first slept soundly in the “stinking hold” of the steamboat *Neptune*.<sup>102</sup> The next night, however, Campbell awoke to Illinois guards “rudely thrusting their hands into my pockets” as they confiscated side arms. On the third night, Campbell began to describe the feeling of capture, and especially sleep, as animalistic. Guards drove them around “like a herd of swine,” and “at night we had to pile up like hogs, scarcely room enough for all of the floor, which was covered over with mud, slop, and tobacco spittle, well tamped up through the day.”<sup>103</sup> George Bell, an Irish immigrant to the U.S. who joined the Confederate army, described the nighttime passage from Castle William on Governor’s Island to Fort Delaware. At one o’clock in the morning, 1,300 boarded the

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<sup>101</sup> Tritt diary, May 21, 1864, WHS. On the metaphor of “driving” used in the same context, see Heslin, ed., “Diary of a Union Soldiers,” 240, entry for October 18, 1863; Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> Jill Knight Garrett, ed. *The Civil War Diary of Andrew Jackson Campbell* (Columbia, TN: Privately Printed, 1965), pg. 20, entry for February 16, 1862.

<sup>103</sup> Garrett, ed., *Civil War Diary*, 21, entries for February 17 and 19, 1862.

boat and Bell feared they would suffocate, writing that “Such a Stowing away of human beings i Never Saw or do i believe it Ever was Resorted to in the african slave trade.” When Bell complained about the suffocating lack of air, the guard replied that on the bright side there would be fewer prisoners in the morning. Bell slipped out of the hold and slept on the deck, but the next night he was confined again to the hold and he got no sleep.<sup>104</sup>

### Listening and Talking Back

Equally important to touch and smell, careful listening enabled prisoners to interpret the progress of the war and the loyalties of civilians through their ears. By careful listening, prisoners selected and gave meaning to elements of the sonic environment. At the national level, the interpretive process of listening had corresponded with shifting allegiances to slavery, capitalism, and the Union in the years leading up to the Civil War.<sup>105</sup> An antebellum writer in *Harper’s* stressed the link between hearing, imagination, and emotion. That the same resonances sounded different in the day and night suggested to the writer “the truly amazing influence of the ear on the

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<sup>104</sup> Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., ed., “Notes and Documents: Diary of George Bell, A Record of Captivity in a Federal Military Prison, 1862,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 22, no. 2 (1938), 182-183, entries for July 10, 11, 1862. On sleeping “in a man hole,” see Peter Guerrant diary, April 13, 1865, Guerrant Family papers, Mss1G9375a, VHS. On “thickets,” see Kimball diary, September 22, 1863, HC. On smothering, Heslin, ed., “Diary of Union Soldiers,” *New York Historical Quarterly*, 240.

<sup>105</sup> Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, passim.

imagination.”<sup>106</sup> Listening, like all the senses, had a subjective but emotionally seductive quality that helped create the experience of captivity.

The early animalization of captivity was sometimes the expressed aim of captors. Other times it was a perversely beneficial side effect. Marcus W. Darling of New York was quick to draw on the natural world to describe the positive and negative attributes of people around him. When a family friend visited him at Arlington Heights in October 1862, Darling remarked that “he looks tough as a bear and as natural as a pig.” He also drew upon the animal world to describe the Rebel prisoners. He wrote that “they looked mean” and “like dogs to me.”<sup>107</sup> Aboard the *Neptune* near Paducah, Kentucky, in February 1862, Campbell described an aural scene in which Union soldiers on the docks jeered at the prisoners, who in response cheered “lustily for Jefferson Davis.”<sup>108</sup> The taunts from citizens who came to see prisoners “as if we were so many wild animals” and the “sharp rejoinders” from prisoners made James Mayo’s trip from the Old Capitol Prison in Washington to Johnson’s Island more exciting.<sup>109</sup> George A. Hitchcock wrote that the band from a German regiment serenaded a group of recently acquired “rebel guests” he was guarding. Hitchcock thought the Germans had more patriotism than taste, but he laughed at the dialectic between the band and the captives. The bands played, “‘We’ll Hang Jeff Davis to a Sour Apple Tree,’ ‘Down with the Traitors,’ and ‘The, Red,

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<sup>106</sup> “The Sense. IV. Hearing,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 12, no. 71 (April 1856), 634.

<sup>107</sup> Marcellus W. Darling to “Dear parents,” October 5, 1862, Marcellus W. Darling letters, 1862-1863, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa libraries, Iowa City.

<sup>108</sup> Garrett, ed. *Civil War Diary*, 21, entry for February 19, 1862.

<sup>109</sup> James Mayo diary, August 7, 1863, LC.

White, and Blue,” which “were responded to with howls and groans from the seething cauldron of grey-backs.”<sup>110</sup> Comparing prisoners to dogs or lice, Darling and Hitchcock looked to the natural world to characterize captured enemies. It naturalized suffering and made harsh treatment more justifiable.

The dialectic between captors and captives that Hitchcock and Mayo described as humorous was rarely enjoyable for both sides. Within hearing of the siege of Vicksburg and aboard the *Nashville*, a floating hospital on the Mississippi river, Anson R. Butler watched 7,000 Confederate prisoners head northward. Union wounded aboard the *Nashville* could not pass up the opportunity to taunt. According to Butler, they called out: “What do you think of the Sothern Confederacy now? eh! Don’t you want some Jackson tobacco? eh, Wouldn’t you like some bread?... And where’s your hat? O, what breeches, how many lice you got aboard?” Interspersed with such taunts leveled at the Confederate prisoners were oaths and curses returned from northward bound Confederates.<sup>111</sup>

The senses helped prisoners understand their surroundings, military and civilian, human and nonhuman. For Randal McGavock, the sounds of walking through Columbus as a prisoner made him reflect on the difference between his trip in 1859 to the city as a guest among legislators. In contrast, he wrote, “Now I am a Rebel Prisoner too poor and mean for even their dogs to bark at.”<sup>112</sup> Union prisoner Frank T. Bennett, captured in April 1862 at Tyke Island, South Carolina, kept a journal in the margins of the novel,

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<sup>110</sup> George A. Hitchcock diary, May 16, 1864, Ms. N-2282, MAHS.

<sup>111</sup> Anson Butler to “My Dear Wife,” May 25, 1863, Anson R. Butler letters, 1861-1900, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries. See also Westlake memoir, pg. 94, Watson-Westlake papers, SHSM

<sup>112</sup> Allen, *Randal W. McGavock*, 598, entry for March 1, 1862.

*Lotus Eating*. Temporarily confined in the Charleston Jail on his way to Columbia, the prisoners were paraded out on several occasions for the view of civilians. “We were trotted out, and stired [sic] up, to show the animal.” When the exhibition was over, they returned to their cells “to growl at secession.”<sup>113</sup> The feeling of being led out for the amusement of onlookers was emotionally animalizing for prisoners like Bennett. James Bell described the lips of “the chivalry” in the Confederate army as “fevered, white and raw enough to grow together except for the incessant flow of saliva produced by smoking and chewing tobacco.” The skin on their hands was the color of soil and their hands were typically employed in shuffling cards or searching clothing for vermin. Yet it was from listening that Bell inferred that their minds were “uneducated, vulgar, and bratish,” and their obedience to orders reminded Bell of oxen.<sup>114</sup> For captors and captives, it was animals all.

Listening prisoners inferred the mood of a town by its sounds. Captured at Gettysburg, English immigrant James Franklin heard little in the way of celebration at Westminster, Maryland, on the Fourth of July. Franklin wrote, “There was no display of bunting, no ringing of bells, no little boys exploding their fire crackers and squibs in the streets,” and he interpreted gloomy silence as a sign that the civilians put no confidence in the rumors of a Union victory. At some towns, Franklin noted that the procession of

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<sup>113</sup> Frank Bennett diary, May 1, 1862, Historical Society of Philadelphia. For negative interactions between prisoners and civilians, see also James J. Heslin, “The Diary of a Union Soldier [George Hegeman] in Confederate Prisons,” *The New York Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1957), 239-240.

<sup>114</sup> Bell to “My dear Brother,” September 30, 1862, Bell collection, DHS. On this animalizing feeling, see also Heslin, ed. “Diary of a Union Soldier,” *New York Historical Quarterly*, 240.

prisoners created “a greater sensation” than “a traveling menagerie.”<sup>115</sup> E. L. Cox, captured in 1864 by Union cavalry in southern Virginia, slept in the Norfolk guard house and city jail en route to a northern prison. From his position in the guard house, he watched and listened to African Americans pass by the jail on Sunday and noted that “the wenches would scoff and sneer at us as they passed.” The next day Cox listened to a Fourth of July celebration from the guard house. “There was flying colors, Ringing of Bells firing of heavy Ordinance as is usual on such occasions.”<sup>116</sup>

Women and civilians provided auditory, gustatory, and haptic comfort to prisoners along roads and railroads as well. By careful listening, prisoners found allies among the civilian population: copperheads in the north; slaves and Unionists in the South. The *Elmira Daily Advertiser* reprimanded those it called “copperheads in petticoats” who stood at train stations uttering “words of compassion” for arriving prisoners.<sup>117</sup> Southern sympathizing citizens in St. Louis threw apples over the heads of guards to prisoners on the Steamer *Fannie McBurnie* heading to Camp Douglas. Women in Baltimore smiled and kissed their own hands as prisoners passed through the city on their way to Elmira.<sup>118</sup> Union prisoners also found allies on their journey through the Confederacy, particularly

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<sup>115</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary,” 5, MC.

<sup>116</sup> E. L. Cox diary, July 3 and 4, 1864, Mss5:1C8394:1, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>117</sup> *Elmira Daily Advertiser* (Elmira, NY), August 13, 1864.

<sup>118</sup> William Sylvester Dillon diary, January 22, 1863, University of Mississippi. See also, Mugler diary, July 23, 1864, West Virginia Collection, UWV; Allen, ed., *Journals of Randal W. McGavock*, 597, entry for February 23.



among women, who gave, sold, and traded food.<sup>119</sup> When Charles Whipple Hadley and other prisoners arrived as “hungry as dogs” at Cahaba, Alabama, in April 1862, women from the town brought out cornbread and meat.<sup>120</sup> On their way to exchange through northern Alabama, Whipple received a cup of sour milk from a woman at Bell Fount. Whipple wrote, “never did a cup full of milk tickle my palate more pleasantly than did that. I could never bear the taste[e] of sour milk, but that cup full surpassed any sweet milk I ever tasted.” He reasoned that living on parched corn en route to exchange altered their stomachs and soon they might be able to relish gravel.<sup>121</sup>

On at least one prison train, a special female visitor provided haptic comfort inside the cars. Captured at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863, Alonzo M. Keeler took a train south to Atlanta, east to Columbia, and north towards Richmond. After passing Charlotte they spent night in the cars while traveling through rural North Carolina. Sometime after midnight, a prostitute came aboard the train and “performed her peculiar evolutions” for prisoners, likely for those who had successfully kept U.S. Greenbacks out of Confederate hands.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> See Forbes, *Diary of a Soldier*, 9, entry for May 14, 1864; Kellogg diary, April 25, May 1, 1864, Kellogg Papers, CHS.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Whipple Hadley diary, April 21, 1862, State Historical Society of Iowa. On food given or sold to prisoners on the road, see also Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 194-195

<sup>121</sup> Hadley diary, May 28, 1862, SHSI. Throwing food was sometimes spontaneous sympathetic support and not a sign of political allegiance. See Spencer Bidwell King, Jr., *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1861-1865* (Macon, GA: The Ardivan Press, 1960), 131.

<sup>122</sup> Alonzo Merrill Keeler diary, entries for September 20, 25, 1863, quote on September 28, Keeler family papers, HL, UM. See also Robert and Cheryl Allen, eds., *A “Guest” of the Confederacy: The Civil War Letters & Diaries of Alonzo M. Keeler, Captain*

Although many prisoners resented the jeers of civilians silently, others sang cheery songs to spite their captors. In this way the singing prisoners engaged with the sensory environment, not only inferring meaning from sound but also shaping the auditory environment. After bringing Kimball and other prisoners to Atlanta, Confederates removed them by rail to Richmond. As the train departed, the prisoners sang “Hail Columbia,” “The Star Spangled Banner,” and “The Red White and Blue.”<sup>123</sup> When Confederate prisoners passed through somber Baltimore, Franklin interpreted silence as unspoken support, which prompted the prisoners to sing. He wrote, “If they had any love for the South, the stirring notes of ‘Dixie,’ sung by the boys...must have made their hearts warm to the ‘Sunny Land.’”<sup>124</sup> Confederate Griffin Frost wrote that traveling west from prison in St. Louis through Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, Union officers encouraged their prisoners to sing. The prisoners sang “Old John Brown,” a Confederate song in which the last verse offered words of advice to “all you southern darkies,” and Union guards responded with “We’ll Hang Jeff Davis to a Sour Apple Tree.”<sup>125</sup> While some guards tolerated singing, talking back was perilous. A Union guard warned Confederate prisoners captured at Buffington Island, Ohio, to watch their mouths when

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*Company B., Twenty-Second Michigan Infantry Including Letters & Diaries Written while a Prisoner of War* (Nashville: Cod Tree Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>123</sup> Kimball diary, September 24, 1863, HC. See also Keeler diary, September 25, 1863, BHL, UM. See also Asa Dean Mathews diary, July 4, 1864, MSA 371:12, Vermont Historical Society.

<sup>124</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary,” 5. See also Garrett, *Civil War Diary*, 24.

<sup>125</sup> Griffin Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal ...* (Quincey, IL: Quincey Herald Book and Job Office, 1867), 42, entry for April 23, 1863.

they entered Cincinnati. Fearing they might be mobbed, the officer in charge “advised us not to sing any songs or enter into any argument with the citizens or soldiers.”<sup>126</sup>

Union prisoners also listened to civilians and interpreted the sounds in similar ways as Confederates. Ezra Hoyt Ripple described civilians treating prisoners “as they would cattle” by talking “in our presence as if we were devoid of sense of hearing.”<sup>127</sup> One woman told the prisoners it was a pity they “had not been killed on the battlefield instead, and your bodies left to enrich the land you came to destroy.”<sup>128</sup> Not only did Ripple think that these women talked to Union prisoners like animals, they advocated using their bodies as fertilizer. Union Prisoners also learned much from silence. When John Urban entered Richmond as a prisoner early in the war, civilians were “loud in their boasts” of an impending northern defeat. After his second capture in 1864, he commented that the “boastful spirit of the people appeared to be broken.”<sup>129</sup> Prisoners used the tone of civilians, especially women, as a way to interpret civilian environments.<sup>130</sup>

Union prisoners in the South had a unique demographic to whom they looked and listened for support—an enslaved population who had long used sound and silence as a

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<sup>126</sup> Burke journal, July 23 1864, IHS.

<sup>127</sup> Cows do hear, but they have thick skin and are hard to offend. Ezra Hoyt Ripple, *Dancing along the Deadline: The Andersonville Memoir of a Prisoner of the Confederacy*, ed. Mark A. Snell (Novato, CA: Presido Press, 1996), 14. William D. Wilkins described being ordered around “as if we were dogs,” at Libby Prison, entry for August 13, 1862, Wilkins papers, LC.

<sup>128</sup> Ripple, *Dancing along the Deadline*, 14-15.

<sup>129</sup> John W. Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell and In Rebel Den* (Lancaster, PA, 1882), 296.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel Henderson wrote in his transportation to Andersonville that the “women came out and tried to spit on us,” Samuel Henderson diary, June 10, 1864, ANHS; Sheldon R. Curtiss diary, May 14, 1864, ANHS.

means of resistance and existence. Prisoners interpreted subversive silence and sympathetic looks by slaves and free blacks as offerings of friendship that counterbalanced the often loud and often hostile white men and women. Ripple recalled, “In the eyes of one class there was always that look which said to us plainly as *words* could say it, ‘we pity you,’ ‘we are your friends.’”<sup>131</sup> Daniel G. Kelley recalled a similar occurrence on the railroad between Columbia and Orangeburg, South Carolina. While passing a “negro hut,” Kelley witnessed a woman standing in a doorway quietly revealing a small American flag.<sup>132</sup> A similar, visual representation evoking silent support is similarly present in Winslow Homer’s painting, *Near Andersonville*, in which a woman stands silently watching prisoners pass. In hushed and ambiguous displays, Union prisoners found reassurance that they had friends in the Confederate South.<sup>133</sup>

### Returning Prisoners

Returning brought more questions than answers about what happened inside Union and Confederate prisons. While special exchanges increased in fall 1864, prisoners

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<sup>131</sup> Ripple, *Dancing along the Deadline*, 14.

<sup>132</sup> Daniel G. Kelley, *What I Saw and Suffered in Rebel Prisons* (Buffalo, 1868), 30.

<sup>133</sup> Peter Wood, *Near Andersonville: Winslow Homer’s Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 60, 71-82, 79; Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 67-68. Even small acts of resistance were subversive in a time of war. South Carolinians hanged an enslaved girl for expressing gratitude in words for the arrival of Sherman’s troops. See Faust, *Republic of Suffering* 141; George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 117-118. See also Robert Scott Davis, “‘Near Andersonville’: An Historical Note on Civil War Legend and Reality,” *Journal of African American History* 92 (Winter 2007): 96-105.

did not begin moving en masse until late winter 1865. One of the tens of thousands coming home was George Washington Whitman, who fell into Confederate hands near Petersburg on September 30, 1864. George Whitman experienced a circuitous tour of Virginia and North Carolina as a captive in the final months of the war. Sometime in February he left Danville and stayed for a short time in “Hotel De Libby” (Libby Prison) before Confederates paroled him on February 22, 1865.<sup>134</sup> While in captivity he reassured his family, reporting that he was as “tough as a mule” twice and, in one letter, “about as ugly [as a mule], and can eat any amount of corn bread.”<sup>135</sup> Yet when he returned, his mother wrote to Walt Whitman to say that George looked “quite thin and shows his prison life,” but was in better condition than many of the others. While he was in Annapolis, sometimes as many as twenty returned prisoners died a day. Some ate “like hungry wolves” and “died eating.”<sup>136</sup>

When Walt Whitman observed prisoners disembarking from boats at Annapolis, he neither believed his eyes nor concealed his emotions. “There are deeds, crimes, that may be forgiven; but this is not among them,” he wrote. For Whitman, the act of holding persons in captivity, like other forms of suffering in the American Civil War, was

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<sup>134</sup> George Washington Whitman, *Civil War Letters of George Washington Whitman*, ed. Jerome M. Loving (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1975), 18, 134.

<sup>135</sup> George Washington Whitman to “Dear Mother,” October 2, 23, 1864, Whitman, *Civil War Letters*, 133.

<sup>136</sup> Louisa Whitman to Walt Whitman,” March 5, 1865, in Whitman, *Civil War letters*, 25.

inherently animalizing.<sup>137</sup> The sight, he wrote, was more difficult than the bloodiest of battlefields and hospitals. Only three out of several hundred prisoners walked off the boat; others rode in arms to be laid down on the shore. He asked, “Can those be men – those little livid brown, ash-streak’d, monkey-looking dwarfs?—are they really not mummied, dwindled corpses?” He concluded that the dead in southern prisons “are not to be pitied as much as some of the living that come from there-if they can be call’d living—many of them are mentally imbecile, and will never recuperate.”<sup>138</sup> Although filled with movement, the captives Whitman saw ultimately experienced the immobility of a cripple and the stillness of the grave.

Whitman was not alone in describing returned prisoners as damaged, disabled, and unhuman. Prisoners agreed that captivity was an animalizing experience, and they drew on a more than just vision to understand their environment and its animalizing effects. The next chapters will take Whitman’s observation seriously by inverting the subject and expanding the question. How did those “monkey-looking dwarfs” sense the world around them and what does that tell us about the experience of captivity, conflict, and the senses in nineteenth-century America? Whitman described what should have been a moment of relief. After all, these prisoners were coming home. But returning prisoners brought more questions and uncertainty than certainty, more indignation than reconsolidation.

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<sup>137</sup> Robert Leigh Davis, “Wound-Dressers and House Calls: Medical Representations in Whitman and Williams,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 6, no. 3 (Winter 1989): 133-139.

<sup>138</sup> Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1882), 70.

## CHAPTER 2:

### “WE ‘NOSE’ THE MURDERERS”: SMELL, SPACE, AND THE LANDSCAPE OF HEALTH

The smell of prison was inescapable as long as prisoners continued to breathe and their nostrils functioned. The transgressive nature of smell—it was a function of living—meant that there was no choice but to inhale tobacco and smoke, rotting food, unwashed bodies, shit, and, in some places, death. For James A. Bell, a government worker captured at Bull Run in 1862, the first indication of southern prisons was a breathtaking smell at a small pen behind the Culpepper Court House. The quarters “seemed composting all manner of vile things,” and it was impossible to lay down, sit up, or even stand, “without getting in contact with the worst of the nuisances.” However, as bad as the olfactory nuisances were at Culpepper, it did not prepare Bell for Libby Prison in Richmond. There he smelled “a sickening, gloomy, loathsome, Stygian Den.” An “oozy compound of filth” one inch deep covered the floor, emitting “a stench more intolerable than I ever before inhaled.” At first Bell thought it was impossible to breathe the stench and live. At night the “damp exhalations” and the accumulations of filth poisoned every breath. A leaking privy saturated everything in the room “with its disgusting odor.” When prisoners crowded by the windows for outside air, guards gestured with their muskets to stand back or die. In time, however, “as it could not be escaped, continual breathing accustomed our olfactories, until we became in a degree insensible to its presence.” The

source of the stench had not abated, but Bell's nose could only take so much before his sense of smell withered as a register of the olfactory environment. For prisoners like Bell, the smells of prison produced anosmia, the olfactory equivalent of blindness or deafness.<sup>1</sup>

Europeans and Americans had long recognized that prisons offended the nose alongside other city nuisances. Contemporaries said that a nose could detect the French prison Bicêtre from a distance of about four hundred *toises* or twenty-four hundred feet.<sup>2</sup> Descriptions of smell unfortunately eluded easy or precise description. Places and things that were foul, putrid, stale, or musty were more difficult to describe and identify than colors, musical notes, or tastes. An antebellum contributor to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* noted that smell "is so vast that it can not be fully or satisfactory designated by words. Smell is the poorest of all senses in point of language."<sup>3</sup> Olfaction required subjective interpretation and each verdict contained layers assumptions and implications. How did people in the nineteenth century use olfactory language to interact with—and give meaning to—their environment? What did sanitation mean before the bacteriological revolution of the late-nineteenth century? And what does this tell us about the experience of captivity in American Civil War?

The aim of this chapter is to historicize smell in Civil War prisons by exploring the ideas, meanings, and values imparted on space through the nose. It explores the

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<sup>1</sup> James A. Bell to "My dear Brother," September 30, 1862, Bell collection, Delaware Historical Society, Dover [hereafter DHS].

<sup>2</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 49.

<sup>3</sup> "The Senses – Smell," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 12, no. 70 (March 1856), 499. Elaine Scarry makes a similar argument about the inability of words to describe pain. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4-7.



(in)visible environment of prisons by focusing on the sense of smell as it worked in tandem with vision. It argues that sanitarians, prison officials, civilians, and prisoners gave meaning to their environment through smell and while the sense was a unique mode of inquiry it had a close relationship with visual uncleanliness. Foregrounding olfaction while not losing sight of vision allows this chapter to take the unseen seriously without forgetting that the senses work together. When prisoners described smell they emphasized the spatial environment with which they interacted through the rest of the senses. Exposing and exploring cooperation between smell and vision allows for informed inferences about one sense through the other.<sup>4</sup>

The smells of prisons, like their death rates, were not the designs of machinating officials. They were, however, the consequences of choices and assumptions about the environment, human health, and the responsibility of prison keepers. In the North, prison officials and sanitarians worked to improve the olfactory environment of prisons, drawing on previous experiences in Europe in ways that largely foreshadowed the large-scale sanitation of cities. In particular, they stressed engineering dry, ventilated, deodorized environments and the spatial configuration of an orderly cityscape served as a model for visual and olfactory cleanliness. And the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC), at least early in the conflict, took a bold stance in favor of bettering the olfactory environment of prisons. The Confederacy, in contrast, had no semi-autonomous organization equivalent to the USSC or comparable government interest in sanitary pursuits because it was not a priority. Likewise, Confederate officials were also more likely to consider the stench of prisons a characteristic of the prisoners, not a

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<sup>4</sup> On intersensoriality, see David Howes, *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses and Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

responsibility of prison officials, or blame the overcrowding on the refusal of northern officials to exchange prisoners.

Prisoners used smell to describe the spatial layouts of prisons, including both the human and nonhuman features of the landscape. Prisoners' thoughts on smell were consistent with the sanitarians that breathing foul air damaged their health, and some thought the odors blunted the power of the nose to smell. Breathing prison air had an animalizing effect on prisoners who compared their surroundings to animal stockades. Prisoners longed to breathe pure or fresh air outside the boundaries of the foul and suffocating air of confinement.

#### Sanitation through Deodorization

While the language of smell had a wide range of uses, olfaction had discursive links to conceptions of space and public health. Although the underpinning ideas of clean air and deodorization had deep roots in western thought, the nineteenth-century sanitary campaign came to the United States from abroad, imported from European urban and wartime experiences. Edwin Chadwick, the famed English reformer, linked smell and disease clearly in his pronouncement that “all smell is disease.”<sup>5</sup> Beginning in the 1840s, Chadwick and other middle class sanitarians spread a gospel of sanitation, which aspired to cleanse and deodorize city spaces through drainage, deodorization, and ventilation. There was also a moral element to these progressive campaigns, and sanitarians in Europe and France feared the failure to deodorize through sanitation would result not in

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Reinartz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 187-188.

disease, but the degeneration of morals and manners as well. These efforts culminated in the introduction of sewer mains in London by 1875 that increased drainage and pushed filth out of sight and, crucially, out of the range of smell.<sup>6</sup>

Although sanitarians in the United States eagerly consumed reports and recommendations by British reformers, Americans and Europeans already shared similar perceptions of smell by the 1840s that made such congruence possible. Scenting sanitation required two preexisting assumptions, one about the nature of smell and the nose and one about the relationship between humans and the olfactory environment. First, it required a consensus that the nose could sniff out unseen but dangerous particulate matter in the air. The European sanitary movement resonated in the United States during the Civil War not because it challenged preexisting beliefs, but because it largely affirmed a much deeper suspicion that linked smell and disease. Immanuel Kant warned against the refinement of smell like the sense of hearing or seeing because “this sense can pick up more objects of aversion than of pleasure (especially in crowded places).” Yet smell did have an important function. He admitted that the nose “warns us not to breathe noxious air (such as vapor from a stove, or the stench from a swamp or from dead animals),” making it valuable as a means of avoiding foul air.<sup>7</sup> Although imprecise and

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<sup>6</sup> Reinartz, *Past Scents*, 192-194. See also David Inglis, “Sewers and Sensibilities: The Bourgeois Faecal Experience in the nineteenth-century City,” in *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500*, ed. Aelxaner Cowan and Jill Steward (Hants: Ashgate, 2007), 105-130; David S. Barnes, “The Senses in Medicine: Seeing, Hearing, and Smelling Disease,” in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 145-155.

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer, ed., *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 211-212. On cleanliness, class, and the home, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 120-141.

vague, words such as miasma, night air, noxious fume, and poisonous atmosphere each described olfactory dangers originating from humans and nature. When urban residents in the 1840s and 50s brought suits against distilleries, slaughterhouses, soap and candle factories, and tanneries, judges commonly upheld complaints on the basis of nuisance law.<sup>8</sup>

There was also a clear class component to smell and sanitation. Studying the sanitary conditions in New York City in the early 1840s, chemist John H. Griscom drew on Chadwick's work in London and A. J. B. Parent-Duchatelet of Paris. He came to similar conclusions about the meaning of odor, the value of deodorization, and the stench of the poor. Griscom believed he could smell whether people lived in cellars, writing, "*the odor of the person* will remove all doubt; a musty smell, which a damp cellar only can impart, pervades every article of dress...as well as the hair and skin."<sup>9</sup> Just as middle class reformers thought it natural to link smell and disease, they also thought it natural to link odor to poverty.

In nineteenth-century America, frontier settlers and city-dwellers used their noses to sense foul and pure landscapes. The decomposing smell of low-lying lands such as swamps and river bottoms were considered natural enemies to human health. The St. Louis *Medical and Surgical Journal* warned residents of "local marshes" in the cellars of

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<sup>8</sup> Christine Meisner Rosen, "'Knowing' Industrial Pollution: Nuisance Law and the Power of tradition in a Time of Rapid Economic Change, 1840-1860," *Environmental History* 8, 4 (October, 2003): 567-568.

<sup>9</sup> John H. Griscom, *Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* (1845), 4-5, 7, 9-13, quotation on 10. Griscom based his understanding of air from David Boswell's book, mentioned below. See also Alain Corbin, "Urban Sensations: The Shifting Sensescape of the City," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire*, ed. Constance Classen (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 55-67.

urban residences where “the evil genius of death and decomposition manufactures the agents of destruction.”<sup>10</sup> People so commonly understood odor as synonymous with disease that powerful political figures adapted stench as a metaphor for moral and political corruption. In his second speech against slavery at the Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York, Frederick Douglass asserted, “the pestiferous breath of slavery taints the whole moral atmosphere of the north, and enervates the moral energies of the whole people.”<sup>11</sup> Those with a sharp sense of smell confidently professed knowledge about the physical and moral health of the land.

In addition to smelling disease, Europeans and Americans shared a second assumption that humans could reign in odor by rationalizing and disciplining human environments. Beginning in the eighteenth century but with increasing frequency in the nineteenth, emerging states and city planners used the cadastral map as a tool to organize nature and people through the rationality of the grid. This geometric pattern, applied first to German forestry and later to armies, cities, cemeteries, and countries, fostered

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<sup>10</sup> Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 95. On lime in France, see Corbin, *Foul and the Fragrant*, 103-104, 120-122.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery, No. 2, delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, on Sunday evening, December 8, 1850,” in Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), vol. 2, pg. 146. Land (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 114-119. Although most concerned with foul smells, pleasant fragrances such as magnolias or the sea were believed to improve health. See Francis Peyre Porcher, *Resources of the Southern Fields and Forests, Medical, Economical, and Agricultural...* (Charleston, 1863), 36-37. See also Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental References Guide* (Baton Rouge, 2012), 58; John Hope Franklin, ed, *The Diary of James T. Ayers, A Civil War Recruiter* (Baton Rouge, 1999), 48; Valencius, *Health of the Country*, 90.

efficiency and legibility for governing bodies and sanitizing space.<sup>12</sup> Continental armies in the Revolutionary war had drawn on the spatial advice of Frederick Wilhelm A. Von Steuben, who provided the blueprint for military encampments that served as a model through the American Civil War. The model utilized streets to reinforce the hierarchy and discipline of armies and these designs paralleled the organization of gridded cities. The spacing of streets fostered ventilation through the entire camp while drainage ditches avoided foul, stagnant water. The plan placed receptacles for dead animals and human waste hundreds of feet beyond the tents.<sup>13</sup> Later theorists on space and ventilation, such as Chadwick or David Boswell Reid's *Illustrations of the Theory and Practice of Ventilation* (1844), drew on these international understandings about space, air, and smell.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The shift from communal to individual beds as well as the spacing and ultimate grid-like separation of cemeteries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also may have olfactory origins. See Rodolphe el-Khoury's introduction in Dominique Laporte, *History of shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (1978; reprint, Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2002), xi; Corbin, *Foul and the Fragrant*, 89-110. During the Civil War, controlling and "improving" nature could also be weapons or components of strategy. Brady, *War upon the Land*, 17, 45-48.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Ludoff Gerhard Augustin Baron von Steuben, *Steuben's Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (Boston: Printed for William Pelam, 1807), 45. For the comparison to the 1862 regulations, see Daniel Butterfield, *Camp and Outpost Duty for Infantry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1862), 53, 57-58.

<sup>14</sup> David Boswell Reid, *Illustrations of the Theory and Practice of Ventilation* (London, 1844), 10, 11, 18. Although Michel Foucault focuses on the visual and the gaze, there is clearly an olfactory aspect, particularly in his discussion of spatial partitioning and quarantine during plague epidemics. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1995), 197. On maps and sewers in London, see Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 14-26. See also Kate Flint, "The Social Life of the Senses: The Assaults and Seductions of Modernity," in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 25-45.

Predisposed to the understanding that discipline and order could prevent disease, the experience of the Crimean War (1853-1856) repackaged ideas shared by people across the Atlantic. Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* (1859) reflected and propagated an international mode of sensing and, especially the smelling of the human and nonhuman world. She emphasized the place of smell in the environmental origin of disease, reasoning that if 25,000 children sickened and died in London the culprit was "want of cleanliness, want of ventilation, want of whitewashing; in one word, defective household hygiene."<sup>15</sup> To Nightingale, the term "nursing" meant improving the many sensory conditions of hospitals, applying "fresh air, light, warmth, cleanliness, quiet, and the proper selection and administration of diet."<sup>16</sup> Nursing was for the individual what sanitation was for the city.

Although Nightingale's emphasis on nursing was multisensory, nothing was more critical than the origin, movement, and perceived freshness of air. She believed along with Chadwick, Boswell, and Reid that the nose cautioned against disease like a bell warned of fire. She cautioned against complacency, writing that "although we 'nose' the murderers, in the musty unaired, unsunned room, the scarlet fever which is behind the door, or the fever and hospital gangrene which are stalking among the crowded beds of a hospital ward, we say, 'It's all right.'"<sup>17</sup> Places that emitted strong smells—kitchens, sinks, warehouses, and open sewers—could be harmful, but so too were corridors that

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<sup>15</sup> Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What It is, and What It Is Not* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 14.

recirculated air from other rooms. Hallway air could produce a poisonous olfactory cocktail that combined “fumes of gas, dinner, [or] various kinds of mustiness.” Enclosed courtyards inhibited the purifying effects of wind creating air “as stagnant as any from a hall or corridor.”<sup>18</sup> Unventilated air smelled “stagnant, musty, and corrupt,” which created an atmosphere “ripe to breed small-pox, scarlet-fever, diphtheria, or anything else you please.”<sup>19</sup> Not all air was created equal. Recirculated or still air inside buildings or walled enclosures was not only unpleasant, it might be lethal.

The international belief that smell was disease, the conviction that discipline and order could purify olfactory environments, and the experiences of European city and wartime sanitarians helped lead to the creation of the USSC in 1862 to alleviate the sensory and environmental crisis of the Civil War. Mary Livermore, recalling a visit to a camp at Cairo, Illinois, inferred from air lessons that resonated with *Notes on Nursing*. “The fetid odor of typhoid fever, erysipelas, dysentery, measles, and healing wounds,” Livermore wrote, “was rendered more nauseating by the unclean beds and unwashed bodies.” Yet the origins and movement of air exacerbated these problems. “The smell of boiling meat and coffee,” escaped from the kitchen and ventilated into the wards, “befouling still more the air of the unventilated apartments.”<sup>20</sup> The USSC, although deeply committed to the cause of the Union, was highly critical of military sanitation and

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<sup>18</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 12, fn.

<sup>19</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 13.

<sup>20</sup> Mary A. Livermore, *My Story of the War* (Hartford, CT: A. D. Worthington, 1896), 202-203. On the United States Sanitary Commission, see also Margaret Humphreys, *Marrow of Tragedy: The Health Crisis of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).



characterized the conflict as animalizing from the beginning. Regiments arriving in Washington “made their journey in cattle cars, as crowded and as ill-provided as if they were carrying beast to the shambles.”<sup>21</sup> First in camps and later in prisons, USSC officials looked and smelled for uncleanness, asking questions about the topography, natural and manmade drainage, soil and subsoil, spacing of tents, cleanliness of the streets, the habit of bathing, the presence or absence of “odors of decay,” as well a long list of questions about the location, maintenance, and use of “disinfectants” in the privy.<sup>22</sup> Alongside this sanitary questionnaire, the USSC published a series of pamphlets emphasizing the contemporary sanitary knowledge on healthy camps, malarial fevers, yellow fever, and diarrhea.<sup>23</sup>

For the occupying Union army in 1862, the city of New Orleans offered a crucial test that reinforced the entwined beliefs that smell was disease and that a policy of

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<sup>21</sup> Charles J. Stillé, *History of the United States Sanitary Commission being The General Report of Its Work during the War of the Rebellion* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868), 33., 33.

<sup>22</sup> “Draft of Sanitary Commission Report No. 19, camp Inspection Returns,” in Clarence R. Geier, David G. Orr, and Matthew B. Reeves, eds., *Huts and History: The Historical Archaeology of Military Encampment during the American Civil War* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 17-25.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead and John T. Metcalfe, and the United States Sanitary Commission, *Report of a Committee of the Associate Members of the sanitary Commission, on the Subject of the Nature and Treatment of Yellow Fever* (New York: William C. Brant & Co., 1862); United States Sanitary Commission, *Report of a Committee of the Associate Members of the Sanitary Commission on Dysentery* (Philadelphia: Collins, 1862); John T. Metcalfe and the United States Sanitary Commission, *Report of a Committee of the Associate Members of the Sanitary Commission, on the Subject of the Nature and Treatment of Miasmatic Fevers* (New York: Baillière Brothers, 1862); William Holme Van Buren and the United States Sanitary Commission, *Rules for Preserving the Health of the Soldier* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1861).

discipline and deodorization would sanitize unhealthy locations. The city had a long reputation of being a sickly location with yellow fever claiming a total of eighteen thousand lives in the years 1853, 1854, 1855, and 1858 alone.<sup>24</sup> An 1854 report on the previous year's epidemic plotted olfactory nuisances, effectively mapping the smellscape of New Orleans. In addition to the "undrained swamps," the Mississippi River, as well as paved and unpaved streets, the map depicted soil disturbances and olfactory nuisances, including "Cemeteries, Slaughter houses..., livery stables, markets, sugar depots...,Manufactories of soap, tallow, bone, Open basins & unfilled lots, Canals, Drains, Gas works, Fever nests, [and] Crowded boarding houses."<sup>25</sup> The map combined olfactory nuisances from the natural world alongside those of industry and the poor. The Sanitary Commission gave the city a grim prognosis and the report went to the printer just as the "noisome odor" and another outbreak of yellow fever hit the city in 1854.<sup>26</sup>

When Union General Benjamin F. Butler arrived in New Orleans in May, he knew of the epidemics and perceived the threat through his nose. Visiting the "basin," where a canal extended to Lake Pontchartrain, he found the water covered with "green

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<sup>24</sup> Jo An Carrigan, "Yankees Versus Yellow Jack in New Orleans, 1862-1866," *Civil War History* 9, no. 3 (September 1963), 248. See also Humphreys, *Marrow of Tragedy*, 96; Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers: Malaria, Yellow Fever, and the Course of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 36-39. Craig E. Colten, *An Unnatural Metropolis: Wrestling New Orleans from Nature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 47-76.

<sup>25</sup> E. H. Barton, "Sanitary Map of the City of New Orleans," in Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Sanitary Commission of New Orleans on the Epidemic Yellow Fever of 1853* (New Orleans: Picayune, 1854), between pgs 211-212. For the centrality of smell in the Commission's map, see xvi; for smell and odor and yellow fever patients in the testimony of city doctors, see 9, 13, 17, 29, 45, 56, 65, 95.

<sup>26</sup> Sanitary Commission, *Report of the Sanitary Commission*, xvi.

vegetable scum” and large numbers of cats, dogs, and mules lying dead on the bank and rotting under a hot sun. Butler wrote, “the air seemed filled with the most noxious and offensive stench possible,—so noxious as almost to take away the power of breathing.”<sup>27</sup> Butler’s efforts to improve the sensory environment for the sake of health reflected a nineteenth-century confidence in improving human and natural environments. Butler had two thousand men clean New Orleans for a month. The military required heads of households to clean premises inside and out. Butler ordered liberal use of chloride of lime in its solid form or diluted in whitewash to deodorize privies and walls, a solution similar to the transatlantic sanitarians, such as Nightingale, who called for the use of whitewash, which many believed afforded protection against both yellow fever and smallpox.<sup>28</sup> The army also implemented household refuse service by using barrels and wagons. After transporting the refuse, the wagons were to be inspected. If wagons did not smell “clean and sweet,” Butler ordered the operators to disinfect the vehicle which chloride of lime—a cask of which was to be carried in each wagon.<sup>29</sup> The way

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<sup>27</sup> Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler’s Book* (Boston, 1892), 395. For Butler the southern sympathizers in New Orleans produced a moral stench, as he believed that churchgoing population silently prayed for an outbreak of yellow fever. Butler, *Butler’s Book*, 396, 398, 530; Carrigan, “Yankees Versus Yellow Jack,” 249-250, 398. In the streets, children taunted Union soldiers with words that reminded everyone that yellow fever was more fatal to visitors than residents: “Yellow Jack will grab them up/ And take them all away.” Elisabeth Joan Doyle, “Civilian Life in Occupied New Orleans, 1862-1865,” (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1955), 56-57; Carrigan, “Yankees Versus Yellow Jack,” 250. Disease accounted for two-thirds of the deaths in the American Civil War. Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2010), 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 222, 290; Butler, *Butler’s Book*, 404.

<sup>29</sup> Carrigan, “Yankees Versus Yellow Jack,” 254.

Butler responded to the threat of yellow fever indicated his confidence in using the senses, primarily smell but reinforced by vision, to register environmental hazards. When there was no outbreak of yellow fever, it came as a victory for Butler, the USSC, and the gospel that smell was disease and deodorization was sanitation. The Union army's response to the olfactory danger of New Orleans prefigured how officials responded to prison nuisances in the North.

### Deodorizing Union Prisons

Northern prison officials and the USSC took smell seriously. Responding to the unprecedented influx of prisoners in 1862, Union Commissary-General of Prisons William Hoffman had placed Confederate officers at Johnson's Island and converted a series of training camps in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio into depots for enlisted men in the Confederate army. In June 1862, Hoffman sent Captain Henry M. Lazelle to investigate training camps in New York that might be converted into additional prisons to absorb the influx of captured Confederates. When Lazelle visited Camp Rathburn near Elmira, he began with an analysis of the environmental attributes. The camp sat west of the city on "gravely soil covered with greensward which does not during the most violent storms become soft."<sup>30</sup> The land sloped to a stream on the south side and provided drainage. The olfactory environment was free of the odors of decomposition. Lazelle wrote, "There is not in its vicinity either marsh or standing water nor dense forest or shrubbery which could generate malaria or disease, and the whole country about Elmira is exceedingly

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<sup>30</sup> H. M. Lazelle to William Hoffman, June 25, 1862, *Official Records*, vol. 4, pg. 67.

healthful and no forms of low fever prevail.”<sup>31</sup> Within the camp, the barracks did not suffer from stale air, being “all well ventilated by square windows placed sufficiently near each other.” Spoiling the olfactory serenity, however, were the sinks, which were “insufficient, incomplete, and filthy.”<sup>32</sup>

Lazelle reported on seven more former training grounds: Arnot Barracks, Post Barracks, and Camp Robinson Barracks in Elmira; Camp of the State Fair Grounds in Rochester; Industrial School Barracks in Albany; and Camp Porter in Buffalo.<sup>33</sup> Each location had similar spatial layouts: wooden barracks surrounded by a rectangular enclosure. Camp Rathbun, Camp Robinson, and Post Barracks could each accommodate a population up to 2,000 to 3,000 prisoners. Although the sinks at each site were “filthy,” all buildings were structurally sound and the landscapes were generally well drained and odor free. Camp Rathbun, however, was perhaps the most symmetrical and city-like. The original dimensions were 300-by-500 yards bounded by a pond on the south side and a rectangular fence elsewhere. On the inside, a road bisected a row of twenty barracks. Each of the twenty quarters was 88-by-18 feet with two rows of wooden bunks. Behind these buildings stood quarters of officers, storage for a merchant and the sinks. Near the river were two large mess halls with a kitchen which could accommodate two thousand people at a time. Foster’s pond provided water for washing clothes and bathing.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 67.

<sup>32</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, 25 June 1862, *Official Records* ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 67-84.

<sup>34</sup> H. M. Lazelle to W. Hoffman, 25 June 1862, *Official Records* ser. II, vol. 2, pg. 4, 67-68.

Orderly and odor free for the time being, Camp Rathburn received a second life as a depot for Confederate prisoners beginning in summer 1864. The transformation of Camp Rathburn into Camp Elmira accentuated the gridded camp by adding three streets. Hospital barracks, represented in a prisoner's map in yellow, were separated from the barracks by the salubrious "Gardens and Bayou," as well as a network of sentry boxes and walkways.

Figure 2.1. The layout of Elmira, drawn by a prisoner, separating the prisoners' barracks from the hospital by a garden. The layout betrays intentional olfactory choices. The green, yellow, and blue highlight olfactory distinctions between the prison, the gardens and nature, and the hospitals. David Coffman, Map of Elmira, ca. 1865, Library of Virginia.

separated prison barracks and put pleasant smells between the sick and the well.<sup>35</sup> Like other large-scale prison camps in the North and South, it was a self-contained unit like a walled city or a living organism. Water flowed through the enclosure, which provided water for bathing, washing, and drinking. Prisons also centralized necessities such as a cookhouse and a series of sinks that rid the prison of waste. Yet in spite of the order, the drainage, and ventilation, the pure air turned foul and killed 24 percent of the Confederate prisoners between July 16, 1864 and July 10, 1865.<sup>36</sup>

Neither Lazelle nor Hoffman had any way of knowing in 1862 that Elmira would become the deadliest northern prison. For the time being, they worried more about the smells of prison camps in the Ohio Valley. In contrast to the pleasant environment found at Elmira, the olfactory environment of each western prison appalled Lazelle's nose and eyes. "The air of the camp, and more particularly the prison," Lazelle wrote of Camp Chase, "is polluted and the stench is horrible."<sup>37</sup> Unlike the gridded barracks at Camp Rathburn in Elmira, the irregular clusters of small buildings inhibited proper flow of air. Barracks had no brooms and no whitewash had been applied to the buildings for months. Heat from the stoves, in addition to overheating interiors, also begrimed prisoners with smoke, grease, and cooking debris. On the exterior, streets, drains, gutters, and spaces

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<sup>35</sup> Sanitarians had also promoted flowers, though they did not trust the smell of lilies. Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2001), 152. See also James M. Gillispie, *Andersonvilles of the North: The Myth and Realities of Northern Treatment of Civil War Confederate Prisoners* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 196-212.

<sup>37</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 198.

between buildings contained “the vilest accumulations of filth.”<sup>38</sup> Although Lazelle disliked the general state of cleanliness, he saved particular ire for improper drainage and sinks at the three prisons. Lack of effective drainage left the ground wet and soft. Water entered the barracks through defects in the boarding and holes made by prisoners to ventilate the building. But the most revolting olfactory effects came from the sinks. “A terrible stench everywhere prevails,” Lazelle wrote, “overpowering the nostrils and stomach of those not impermeated with it.” What he found on arrival were earthen holes with a single rail placed over it lengthwise. When the main drain of the prison overflowed, it emptied into this trench, resulting in constant moisture. This created “rapid decomposition” and it filled “the air of the prison with the most nauseating and disgusting stench.”<sup>39</sup> He worried very much about the future health of the imprisoned occupants.

While the olfactory environment appalled Lazelle’s nose, his criticisms and suggestions reaffirmed his faith in draining, ventilating, and deodorizing the land. He criticized the administration of the prison rather than the Confederate prisoners who he described as quiet, well-behaved, and interested in improving living conditions.<sup>40</sup> To that end, Lazelle suggested particular changes to the prison infrastructure. The prison needed better sinks, and Lazelle ordered officials to excavate earthen vaults to a depth of at least ten feet, lined with planks and surrounded by sloped ground to keep out surface water. On top of these vaults, Lazelle ordered “substantial privies with air chimney and bench seats.” In conjunction with the liberal use of lime, the structural improvements would

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<sup>38</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 198.

<sup>39</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 198.

<sup>40</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ver. II, vol. 4, pg. 200.



diminish the smell of privies throughout the camp. The use of lime linked the deodorization efforts at the privies with the general sanitation of the camp, particularly in the barracks. To deodorize the barracks, Lazelle called for “lime and whitewash brushes in sufficient abundance for rapidly whitewashing all the quarters in all the prisons.” Every twenty prisoners should have a twenty-gallon tub of whitewash.<sup>41</sup> Lime-fortified whitewash checked the decomposition of wood and helped deodorize the air. Lazelle ordered the barracks raised one foot above the ground and the side covering of the building removed below the floor to solve the moisture problem and allow for increased circulation of air. Lastly, he had drains constructed to channel water away from the barracks, curved streets with side drains, and graded open areas to prevent standing water.

When Lazelle returned to Camp Chase in July and August, he detected a change in the olfactory environment. He wrote, “The quarters are nearly all thoroughly whitewashed, and this together with the free use of lime...render the atmosphere of the prisons comparatively pure.”<sup>42</sup> On August 4, Lazelle reported that compliance with his orders was reflected by great improvement to the drainage and walkways, the ventilation and whitewashing of the barracks, and the constructions of the privies and vaults. He wrote, “I need not add that the health and comfort of not only the prisoners, but the whole camp, have been materially increased, and the stench, before so intolerable, almost removed.”<sup>43</sup> Lazelle’s confidence in improving the health through deodorization reflected

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<sup>41</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 200.

<sup>42</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, July 28, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 304.

<sup>43</sup> Lazelle to Hoffman, August 4, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 342.

the same sanitary impulse as Butler in New Orleans, the USSC, and previous sanitation efforts in Europe.

Smells elsewhere were not so sweet. Henry W. Bellows of the USSC was appalled when he described his visit to Camp Douglas, Chicago, in June 1862. He wrote, “The amount of standing water, of unpoliced grounds, of foul sinks, of unventilated and crowded barracks, of general disorder, of soil reeking with miasmatic accretions, of rotten bones and the emptying of camp-kettles is enough to drive a sanitarian to despair.” According to Bellows, only God or abnormally strong winds from Lake Michigan could prevent pestilence in late summer. Less optimistic than Lazelle, Bellows thought the olfactory environment so foul it was beyond amelioration. Improved drainage would not “purge that soil loaded with accumulated filth, or those barracks fetid with two stories of vermin and animal exhalations.”<sup>44</sup> For Bellows, the only sure way to purify Camp Douglas would be to set this prison on fire.<sup>45</sup>

Hoffman took this warning seriously and proposed a solution that would have pleased even the most rigid Chadwickian sanitarians. He could build an underground sewer, connecting with water pipes that would push the filth into Lake Michigan. He wrote, “The sinks should be connected with the sewers so that during the summer the camp and neighborhood would be relieved from the stench which now pollutes the air.”<sup>46</sup> The suggestion paralleled ongoing proposals in the United States and Europe to move

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<sup>44</sup> Henry W. Bellows to William Hoffman, June 30, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 106. See also B. McVickar to Col. J. H. Tucker, June 30, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 107.

<sup>45</sup> See also McVickar, Post Surgeon, to J. H. Tucker, June 30, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 107.

<sup>46</sup> W. Hoffman to M. C. Meigs, July 1, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 110.

from a “private system” of cesspools and vaults to a “public system” of subterranean sewers.<sup>47</sup> Quartermaster-General of the U.S. Army M. C. Meigs’s response echoed advocates of the older, private system, arguing that the prisoners were responsible for handling their own filth and the U.S. government had better uses for the funds.<sup>48</sup>

Meigs’s decision not to approve a sewage system was unfortunate but not surprising given the resistance to public sewer systems in major cities.<sup>49</sup> After Meigs’s objection, Hoffman backed down on his public works project, but he directed Colonel J. H. Tucker, commanding Camp Douglas, to fill in old sinks and dig new ones “large and deep, with good shed houses over them. Have a thorough police of all the grounds daily

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<sup>47</sup> Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in American from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 91, 92-93. See also Joel A. Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 1996), 8-13, 113-122.

<sup>48</sup> M. C. Meigs to W. Hoffman, July 5, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 129; Hoffman to Meigs, July 10, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 166. On sanitation in early American cities, see Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Martin V. Melosi, *Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment, 1880-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1981); Cady Staley and George S. Pierson, *The Separate System of Sewerage: Its Theory and Construction*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1891); Zane L. Millar and Patricia M. Melvin, *The Urbanization of Modern America: A Brief History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987); Blake McKelvey, *American Urbanization: A Comparative History* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1973); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742* (New York: Knoph, 1955); John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Joel A. Tarr, “Urban Pollution: Many Long Years Ago,” *American Heritage* 22 (October 1971): 64-69.

<sup>49</sup> Although Brooklyn and Chicago built limited sections of underground sewers in the 1850s, Boston, Cincinnati, and Indianapolis only built them in the 1870s. Melosi, *The Sanitary City*, 93.

and carry off the refuse trash of all kinds in carts; use lime plentifully everywhere.”<sup>50</sup> He also stressed that there needed to be better enforcement of personal cleanliness among prisoners. Hoffman wrote, “the quarters must be well aired and policed by removing all bedding and clothing from them once a week and there must be a free use of lime everywhere to neutralize all impurities. There can be no excuse for non-compliance with this order.”<sup>51</sup> As Bellows and McVicker predicted, however, the deaths increased during July, but the beginning of the Dix-Hill cartel meant the prisoners soon began traveling South.<sup>52</sup> The political agreement between Union and Confederate generals and politicians averted a sensory disaster.

Variations of this theme—air, water, and the smell of both—echoed in other internal reports within the Union prison system in summer 1862 and continued throughout 1863 and 1864. Assistant Surgeon J. Cooper McKee wrote Hoffman from Camp Butler, Illinois, reporting on the health of the prison. The natural topography was high and rolling about fifteen acres of enclosed space. The barracks provided insufficient ventilation and “protection neither from heat nor storm.” Although abundant space existed for exercise, McKee complained that Confederate prisoners were “generally indifferent to this and to their personal cleanliness.” The hospital provided the worst ventilation, drainage, and smell. He wrote, “The floors were filthy; deodorizing agents were not thought of; slops and filth were thrown indiscriminately around....No attention

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<sup>50</sup> W. Hoffman to Col. J. H. Tucker, Commanding Camp Douglas, July 9, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, pg. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Hoffman to Col. J. H. Tucker, Commanding Camp Douglas, Chicago, August 1, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 324.

<sup>52</sup> Levy, *To Die in Chicago*, 71.

was paid to ventilation or drainage. The stench of the wards was horrid and sickening.”<sup>53</sup>

McKee also believed that these problems, olfactory in detection, required deodorization for resolution. He paid much attention to the smell of the prison hospital, ordering the floors scrubbed, applying lime everywhere, as well as draining and ventilating the grounds and barracks.<sup>54</sup>

Prison populations were relatively small in late 1862 and early 1863, but by late spring the problems associated with securing equal treatment for African American prisoners and the subsequent breakdown of the exchange cartel began filling prisons once again. The same olfactory problems that registered in the noses of the USSC and prison officials resurfaced. Dr. Thomas Hun and Dr. Mason F. Cogswell visited Camp Douglas at Chicago and Gratiot Street Prison in St. Louis and found both places reeking of filth and disease. At Gratiot Street Prison, they wrote in a letter that reached Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, reporting that “the small yard of the prison is scarcely sufficient to contain a foul and stinking privy,” and “it is difficult to conceive how human beings can continue to live in such an atmosphere as must be generated when the windows are closed at night or in stormy weather.”<sup>55</sup>

As their efforts to maintain deodorized prison environments failed, however, both the USSC and the prison officials became critical of the Confederate prisoners, point to them as not the victims, but the source, of the great stink. Dr. William F. Swalm, a former

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<sup>53</sup> J. Cooper McKee, Assistant Surgeon, U.S. Army, to William Hoffman, Commissary-General of Prisoners of War, July 21, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 255.

<sup>54</sup> McKee to Hoffman, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 4, pg. 255.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas Hun and Mason F. Cogswell report, enclosed in William H. Van Buren to Edwin M. Stanton, May 10, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 588.

prisoner of war, inspected Point Lookout, Maryland, for the USSC in 1864, and commented that the prisoners “seem to abhor soap and water,” paid no attention to the location of the sinks, and preferred to sit on the ground and “roll into it as a hog will wallow in the mire.”<sup>56</sup> Swalm’s criticism of Point Lookout, however, did not absolve prison officials of the duty to maintain prison discipline. The report, critical of both prisoners and officials, was one of the last USSC reports on any northern prison. Instead, they focused their efforts on publishing accounts of privation and suffering of Union prisoners in the Confederacy while downplaying the nuisances of northern prisons.<sup>57</sup>

For the duration of the war, Hoffman sent surgeons to prison hospitals to report on the health of the prisons. There was considerably continuity in efforts to address the sensory nuisances at existing prisons as well as new ones new ones at Rock Island, Illinois, Point Lookout, Maryland, and Elmira which continued the tradition of planning gridded, city-like prisons. Each inspection reported the same problems: poor ventilation, bad drainage, privies needing more lime and walls requiring a new coat of whitewash.

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<sup>56</sup> William F. Swalm to J. H. Douglas, November 13, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, 578.

<sup>57</sup> Humphreys, *Marrow of Tragedy*, 252-262.



Figure 2.2. How deodorization was supposed to look. Drainage, ridge ventilation, and whitewashing were all olfactory tactics at deodorizing the environment of Civil War prisons. Camp Chase, ca, 1864, National Archives Records Administration.



Figure 2.3. The visual order of the city-like prison. This idealized bird's-eye view depicts the organizational grid that provided order through policing, draining, and ventilating the prison camp at this and other northern prisons. C. Speidal, Rock Island Barracks, 1864, Library of Congress.

Whitewash, the same mixture advocated by Nightingale in England and utilized by Butler in New Orleans, had become a visual and olfactory cure all for prisons by 1863 and 1864. Whitewash as well as its key ingredient, lime, had been widely used to clean privies throughout the nineteenth century. An advertisement in the *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, Ohio) made clear the visual-olfactory connection: “Common lime...absorbs carbonic and other disagreeable and unhealthful gases and odors; and for this purpose, in times of plagues, epidemics, and wasting diseases, it is scattered plentifully in cellars, privies, stables, and gutters of the streets.” When dissolved into water, however, it had an even wider application: “It not only purifies the air and



promotes physical health, but as whitewash enlivens and beautifies wherever it is applied.”<sup>58</sup> Whitewash beautified surfaces while at the same time offering the olfactory protection provided by lime alone.

Prison officials applied whitewash on outside walls, inside walls, floors, and ceilings. At Fort Delaware on the Delaware River, a medical inspector suggested whitewashing the insides of barracks every six weeks as well as applying Ridgewood Disinfecting Powder and chloride of lime.<sup>59</sup> Officials at Rock Island praised the effect of whitewashing barracks formerly occupied by smallpox patients, which had rendered them “measurably free from smell.”<sup>60</sup> An official at Johnson’s Island complained that the hospital “is in a locality deprived of the necessary quiet for the sick, and actually swarms with vermin, notwithstanding the liberal use of salt water, coal oil, and whitewash which the companies have resorted to.”<sup>61</sup> At Camp Chase, an inspector reported an

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<sup>58</sup> “Whitewashes,” *The Highland Weekly News* (Hillsboro, Ohio), May 7, 1863.

<sup>59</sup> Joseph K. Barnes letter to Brig. Gen. W. A. Hammond, August 28, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 235; H. R. Silliman letter to Brig. Gen. A. Schoepf, November 6, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 477 (quote); E. A. Hitchcock letter to Brig. Gen. S. A. Meredith, November 13, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 515; A. M. Clark, Report of Inspection of Barracks and Hospital at Fort Delaware, November 12, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 516-518. See also A. M. Clark letter to Col. William Hoffman, January 16, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 844-45; A. M. Clark letter to Captain Jones, January 21, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 866-67.

<sup>60</sup> William Watson report to Surg. Charles S. Tripler, March 29, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pgs. 12-14; Watson letter to Col. A. J. Johnson, March 16, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 15; A. P. Caraher to Johnson, April 29, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 99. See also Clark report to William Hoffman, March 1, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 1001-1003.

<sup>61</sup> Chas. W. Hill letter to Hoffman, August 29, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pgs. 700-01. See also Clark letter to Lt. Col. W. S. Pierson, January 11, 1864, *Official*

improvement in health because of the simultaneous efforts to improve smell and vision through “the introduction of ridge ventilation and a coat of whitewash on the exterior.”<sup>62</sup> The olfactory effect of whitewashing was temporary deodorization, but whitewash also left unmistakable visual evidence that officials were doing what they could to keep prison conditions sanitary. The continuing importance of smell in the minds of northern prison keepers suggests not only that officials linked smell and disease, but also that they cared enough about the prisoners to try to keep their environment sweet smelling.

Prison officials and inspectors were not the only ones to notice either the smells of prison or the efforts at deodorization. Prison guard Alexander James Hamilton wrote in June 1863 that the smell of water pumped from the moat surrounding Fort Delaware was intolerable and he disliked guarding the prisoner barracks nearby “because of the stench.”<sup>63</sup> Confederate prisoners took note of the efforts to whitewash various prisons. James Franklin had frequently complained of the smell at Fort Delaware in summer 1863 and he recorded when the surgeon had the whole interior whitewashed. The following day a detail of prisoners spread lime over the prison yard. However, Franklin believed the efforts were in vain and by August, 1863, the stench became unbearable. Interpreting the

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*Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 829-30; Clark report to Hoffman, October 7, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pgs. 364-65.

<sup>62</sup> Clark report to Hoffman, April 29, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pgs. 95 (quote), 95-98; Clark to Hoffman, January 7, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 819; H. M. Lazelle report to Hoffman, December 21, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, pg. 132-37; Alexander E. Drake report to Hoffman, April 25, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, pgs. 524-25.

<sup>63</sup> E. Emerson Wilson, *A Fort Delaware Journal: The Diary of a Yankee Private A. J. Hamilton, 1862-1865* (Wilmington, DE: Fort Delaware Society, 1981), 29, 31.

arrival and quick departure of General Robert C. Schenck and his staff as a result of the smell, Franklin commented, “It was too much for his olfactory senses.”<sup>64</sup>

### Smell about the South

Confederate officials, guards, and civilians shared the belief, common throughout Europe and the North, that “smell is disease.” In practice, however, high-ranking Confederates made no effort comparable to the deodorization campaign promoted by the USSC and Union prison officials. No systematic medical inspections of Confederate prisons took place until the end of 1863, leaving no official record on the early olfactory conditions at the myriad of prisons in the South.<sup>65</sup> The reason for the lack of emphasis on smell is unclear. The collection of Confederate prisons was never as organized as the northern prison system, and prison officials in the South were under increasing pressure later in the war as the Union army made deeper incursions into the heart of the Confederacy. Resources dwindled and were earmarked for the armies already barely hanging on to territory. In addition to these contextual problems there existed a consistent

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<sup>64</sup> James H. Franklin, “Prison Diary of Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” pg. 15, 19, entries for July 24 and August 4, 1863, Museum of the Confederacy. On whitewashing in prisoners diaries, see also James M. Gunn diary, January 7, 10, and 30, 1865; James Taswell Mackey diary, February 13, 1864; Joseph W. Mauck diary, June 11, 1864, May 16, 1865, Museum of the Confederacy; Curtis R. Burke diary, September 10, 1863, #M0903, Indiana Historical Society; James May diary, October 5, 1863, LC. See also Mark der Wolf Stevenson Letters, dated 190[?], Southern Historical Collection,

<sup>65</sup> Little has been written on Confederate prisons in 1862, especially outside Virginia. For an overview, see Pickenpagh, *Captives in Blue*, chs. 2 and 3. Frank Hughes characterized the temporary prison at Montgomery, Alabama, as “the filthy stinking old cotton ware House.” Norman Niccum, “Documents: Diary of Lieutenant Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45, no. 3 (September 1949), 278, entry for May 27, 1862. See also William W. Campell reminiscence, 1861-1865, no page numbers, P82-2513, Wisconsin Historical Society.

doubt that prison officials had any responsibility for the living conditions inside the prison. When officials discussed the stench emitting from the stockade, they characterized it as a product of the population therein and therefore not their problem. Like opponents to municipal sanitation, officials implicitly argued that odor was a private concern.

While officials made little notice of the prison smell for most of the war, Richmond newspapers found the odors offensive. Out of concern for the civilian population, the Richmond *Enquirer* in July 1862 complained about the industrial neighborhood that crowded Union prisoners together into warehouses. The Richmond civilians in this area were unfortunate enough to live between two potent places: a Union prison and a (lard-based) candle factory. Referring to nineteenth-century nuisance laws, the paper reported that “residents have a disagreeable time of it generally. Prisons should be in a less populous district, and in no other city but this have we ever known a candle factory to be established within the average range of the sense of smell.”<sup>66</sup> In September, the Richmond *Examiner* reported that the Belle Island prison had “undergone a fumigation for purification purposes,” but this took place only after the prisoners had left for exchange.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, in early 1864, the Richmond *Examiner* criticized the “unwholesome atmospheric diet” of Libby Prison and compared the crowded conditions

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<sup>66</sup> The *Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), July 14, 1862; Rosen, “‘Knowing’ Industrial Pollution,” 567-573; see also Rosen, “Noisome, Noxious, and Offensive Vapors, Fumes, and Stenches in American Towns and Cities, 1840-1865,” *Historical Geography* 25, (1997), 49-28.

<sup>67</sup> Richmond (Virginia) *Examiner*, September 24, 1862. John Ransom believed “the stench” from Belle Island prevented civilians from coming to gawk at the prisoners. John L. Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, introduction by Bruce Catton (New York: Paul S. Ericksson, 1963), 108.

to a tin of sardines. “It is truly surprising,” the newspaper stated, “that some pestilence has not already been the result of this indiscriminate herding together of human beings, who are thus forced constantly to breathe impure air.” Recommending fresh air and sunshine, the newspaper highlighted the common knowledge that unventilated air was dangerous.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to occasional complaints in newspapers, the few inspections of Virginia prisons that took place in 1863 and 1864 gave less attention to the olfactory environment than the USSC or Hoffman’s assistant surgeons. These inspections were also less critical of the status quo. John Wilkins, a surgeon at Libby Prison who inspected the site in September 1863, reported that the natural ventilation of the building was sufficient. “The prevailing wind (south),” he wrote, “unobstructed by adjacent buildings, secures thorough ventilation.” Some measures were taken to keep the prison clean: there were “bathrooms and water-closets” on each level of the warehouse, “strict attention paid to cleanliness,” and the daily attention paid to scrubbing and sweeping the floors. In November, Isaac Carrington, enclosing another report by Wilkins, drew similar conclusions about the adequate ventilation of all the prisons in Richmond.<sup>69</sup>

The smells emanating from the prisons, at Richmond and elsewhere, were too potent to downplay in 1864. Civilians continued to complain about the unnecessary burden they faced by living near foul prisons. At Danville, Virginia, the town mayor and the leaders of the town council petitioned the Confederate Secretary of War James A.

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<sup>68</sup> “City Intelligence. The Libby Prison and Its Contents,” *Richmond Enquirer*, February 2, 1864.

<sup>69</sup> John Wilkins to John H. Winder, September 5, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 262-63; Isaac H. Carrington to John Winder, November 18, 1863, *Official Records*, ser. II< vol. 6, pg. 544-548.

Seddon for the removal of Union prisoners elsewhere or, at the very least, outside the city limits. They complained that the smallpox- and fever-laden air from the prisoners was infecting the entire town: “The stench from the hospitals even now (in winter) is almost unsupportable, and is offensive at the distance of several hundred yards.” The town had no waterworks to aid in cleaning the streets, into which the filth of the prison and prison hospitals drained.<sup>70</sup>

In larger prisons the smell was considerably worse. In early 1865, citizens and prison officials near Salisbury, North Carolina, supported removing the prisoners for public health reasons. John Winder, who had commanded the prisons at Richmond and Andersonville, stated the prison’s proximity to the town was “extremely objectionable and injurious.” He linked smell and disease, writing that “The stench is unsupportable both to the prisoners and the people in the vicinity.” Winder proposed moving the prisoners to a new stockade fourteen miles outside Columbia, South Carolina, because “this locality is situated in poor land, country thinly settled, and very few persons to be annoyed by the proximity of a prison.”<sup>71</sup> Salisbury’s newspaper, *The Carolina Watchman*, also worried about smell, but showed the usual lack of concern for prisoners. Fearing the “filth and offal” from the prison would cause sickness in the warm months, the paper criticized its placement so near the city. The writer argued, “We believe Salisbury is the first and only town in the Confederacy in which a large body of prisoners

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<sup>70</sup> T. P. Atkinson, John W. Holland, E. J. Bell to James A. Seddon, enclosure in T. P. Atkinson to James A. Seddon, January 2, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 888-889.

<sup>71</sup> John H. Winder report to General S. Cooper, December 13, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 1219-20.

have been unceremoniously squatted down, as it were, right upon the citizens, subjecting them to all sorts of inconvenience, to say nothing of the danger to property, life, and the health of the community.” Although fear about disease pervaded discussions of prison smell, the health of captives was not the primary concern.

When Confederate officials recognized the olfactory environment of prisons as a problem, it never became a high priority. That summer, inspections took place at Richmond and other prisons, but they were rarely as detailed, olfactory specific, and critical as northern inspections. William A. Carrington, a medical officer under John Winder, cautiously reported the wretched conditions as a consequence of not adhering to sanitary principles. He had warned John Winder about overcrowding on Bell Island in November 1863, but the concerns were pushed aside. “I lost no occasion to make known to the proper authorities the violation of ordinary hygienic laws,” he wrote, but he was “deterred from further remonstrance by a feeling that it was supererogatory, and might be understood as disrespectful.”<sup>72</sup> Concern about respect, therefore, inhibited Carrington from calling for reform. Another internal criticism came from G. William Semple, who interpreted the filth and stench as a result of mismanagement. Prisoners had not been allowed to go to the sinks, located over the river because guards feared they would escape. This prohibition, combined with the great number of bowel complaints among prisoners, and the inability to effectively police the grounds on account of the crowding, created an unendurable olfactory environment. Semple wrote, “The whole surface of the camp has thus been saturated with putrid animal matter,” and surrounded by the filth of

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<sup>72</sup> William A. Carrington to John Winder, March 23, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 1085. See also Charles W. Sanders, Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 192.

fellow prisoners, other prisoners became more careless about their own personal cleanliness.<sup>73</sup>

In many ways, the Confederate decision to start removing prisoners into the heart of the Confederacy might have been an act of olfactory mercy. These designed prisons had the shape and outward shell of northern prison camps, but lacked the same attention paid to interior infrastructure from buildings and hospitals to effective water supplies and sinks. In May 1864, about two months after the first prisoners arrived, surgeon E. J. Eldridge complained about the sanitary and, implicitly, olfactory conditions of the prison. With 12,000 prisoners, it was already at 120 percent capacity, but there existed no exterior hospital to separate the sick from the well and neither sinks nor bathing pools had been arranged along the sluggish stream that bisected the prison.<sup>74</sup> Lacking the infrastructure, prison officials supplied two squads of twenty-five prisoners with shovels and told them to collect and burn “all offal” and throw the remainder at the lower end of the stream.<sup>75</sup>

Prison officials at Andersonville knew the area known as the “swamp” inside the prison needed draining as early as May 1864, but their efforts to address the problem were insufficient. In particular, they cited a lack of necessary tools to do the work.<sup>76</sup> Yet

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<sup>73</sup> G. William Semple to William A. Carrington, March 6, 1864, enclosed in Carrington to Winder, March 23, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 6, pg. 1087.

<sup>74</sup> E. J. Eldridge to Lamar Cobb, May 6, 1864, enclosed in Howell Cobb to S. Cooper, May 5, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 119-120.

<sup>75</sup> Walter Bowie to R. H. Chilton, Inspector-General, May 10, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 135. See also Thomas P. Turner to John H. Winder, May 25, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 167.

<sup>76</sup> Walter Bowie to R. H. Chilton, May 10, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 136.



Wirz also dismissed criticism about the sanitary conditions of the prison, suggesting that the drainage may never have been that high of a priority. When D. T. Chandler wrote to Richmond officials in September complaining about the lack of sanitary regulations and the unnecessary suffering at Andersonville, Wirz questioned his loyalty and called him “a plaything of the cute Yankees,” and criticized Chandler for remarking, like the prisoners, that Andersonville was incredible for its close approximation to hell.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to Hoffman’s efforts to drain, ventilate, and deodorize northern prisons, Confederate officials paid little attention to the same problems in the South.

The medical officials who reported on Andersonville as official duty or private research recognized the olfactory problems of the camp, but they differed in interpretation of the meaning of odor. Throughout spring and summer 1864, Isaiah H. White recommended changes to the olfactory landscape. He criticized the placement of the hospitals within the prison because of the “contaminating effluvia” entering the hospital from the camp.<sup>78</sup> Explaining the high mortality rate, White pointed to drainage, ventilation, and odor. The swampy ground created a breeding ground for pestilence because it exposed “a large surface covered with decomposing vegetable matter” to the sun. Overcrowding and the irregularity of the prison created ventilation problems.<sup>79</sup> By August, he lamented about the failure of sanitary regulations. There was human

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<sup>77</sup> Henry Wirz to John H. Winder, September 24, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 758-59.

<sup>78</sup> Isaiah H. White to Captain Bowie, May [no date], 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 125.

<sup>79</sup> Isaiah H. White, “Sanitary report of C.S. military prison hospital, Andersonville, Ga., for the quarter ending June 30, 1864,” *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 426.

excrement everywhere, “among the very shelters [and] under their very noses.” The summer rains caused the lower end of the stream to overflow, leaving “a solution of excrement” on the lower banks to dry under the sun, which, he wrote, “produces a horrible stench.”<sup>80</sup> White’s recommendations to drain, ventilate, and deodorize the prison were never implemented.

A private investigation into sickness at Andersonville produced olfactory inferences similar to White’s observation, but the report also underscored the subjectivity and politics of smelling. Joseph Jones and Louis Manigault received permission from the Confederate Surgeon General to visit Andersonville and study gangrene. At the prison, Jones examined the passage of water through the prison stockade and found it remarkably pure upstream of the prison and the natural topography of the surrounding land healthier than parts of Georgia to the south and southeast.<sup>81</sup> Yet the volume of water in the creek was not sufficient to remove the excrements of food, urine, and feces from the prison. “The action of the hot sun upon this putrefying mass of fragments of bread and meat and bones,” Jones wrote, “excited most rapid fermentation, and developed a horrible stench.”<sup>82</sup> Downstream from the prison Jones continued, “these waters, loaded with filth and human excrement, flow sluggishly through the swamp below, filled the trees and

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<sup>80</sup> Isaiah H. White to “Colonel Chandler,” August 2, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 525; Isaiah H. White to John H. Winder, August 6, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, pg. 558-559.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases of the Federal Prisoners Confined to Camp Sumpter, Andersonville, Ga.,” in *Sanitary Memoirs of the War of the Rebellion*, edited by the United States Sanitary Commission (New York: Published for the U.S. Sanitary Commission by Hurd and Houghton, 1869), vol. I, pg. 494, 496.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases,” 506.

reeds coated with a filthy deposit, they emit an intolerable and most sickening stench.”<sup>83</sup>

Within the prison stockade, Jones remarked on the increasing close confinement of prisoners, with less than thirty-six square feet for each man.

While both Jones and Manigault connected smell to disease, they offered a much different interpretation of responsibility than northern officials and sanitarians.

Highlighting the healthiness of the land, they blamed the olfactory environment of Andersonville on sick and lazy prisoners. It was the prisoners who left filth “at the very tent doors and around the little vessels in which they were cooking their food. Small pits not more than a foot or two deep, nearly filled with soft offensive feces, were everywhere seen, and emitted, under a hot sun, a strong and disgusting odor.”<sup>84</sup> Louis Manigault came to a similar conclusion. In a letter to his wife, he conceded the camp was worse than what he had found in a Shanghai prison or a Cholera hospital in North China: “The dirt, filth, and stench in and around the stockade is awful.” Still, he felt no sympathy. “I feel no pity for them,” he wrote, “and behold a dead Yankee in a far different light from a dead Confederate killed in fighting for all that is dear to him.”<sup>85</sup> Jones and Manigault’s interpretation of smell highlighted not only the connection between smell and disease, but also the partisanship of the nose.

The olfactory environment at Andersonville, one depot among many for most of its survivors, unsuspectingly left its visual imprint. Andrew Jackson Riddle, a semi-

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<sup>83</sup> Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases,” 495.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases,” 507.

<sup>85</sup> Louis Manigault to “Ma Chere Femme,” September 18, 1864, Louis Manigault Family Papers, #599, Library of Congress.

official Confederate photographer, visited Andersonville in August 1864, the deadliest month of the prison by sheer numbers of deaths. In photographing the prison, Riddle focused not on the hospital or the overcrowded living conditions but the engineering of the sinks. Most of Riddle's views captured the sinks and the stream that ran through the center of the camp. What Riddle intended to portray with the images is unclear. Some have suggested he wanted to shock Victorian sensibilities.<sup>86</sup> Yet there is no reason to believe Riddle wanted to depict suffering any more than Jones or Manigault sympathized with the prisoners. Indeed, had his actions hinted at such intentions, it is unlikely he would have been welcome there at all.



Figure 2.4. As aromatic as Andersonville could be. This image depicts the sinks at Andersonville, as well as the spatial layout of the camp, and the use of the hillsides as latrines by some Union prisoners. Andrew Jackson Riddle, Andersonville, 1864. Library of Congress.

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<sup>86</sup> Marvel, *Andersonville*, 182-187.

Another interpretation is that he was capturing the wooden channeling of the steam and sinks, the order of the camp, and, perhaps, the habits of the prisoners that were out of the hands of Confederate officials. A flash flood on August 9, 1864 had turned the sluggish stream into a torrent, sweeping away parts of the stockade wall and some of the filth.<sup>87</sup> The sinks that appear in the foreground may have been installed between the flood and the date of the photographs on August 16. In addition, the photographic views of Andersonville also suggest orderliness. Most of the huts and tents are in rows, spaced on the high ground away from the stream. Yet there are two areas the prisoners are using as sinks. The first is in the foreground at the wooden structure, but the second is the background, on the slope between the tents on the “island” and the main body of tents on the north side of the prison. Like the views of northern prisons that highlighted city-like qualities, whitewashing, ventilation, and drainage, the Riddle photographs conveyed not the foulest Andersonville but the most orderly depiction the camera could provide.

The stench of Andersonville, downplayed or ignored by Confederate officials, became more noticeable to surroundings civilians in late spring and summer 1864. Passing by Andersonville on a train, Eliza Frances Andrews compared “the seething mass of humanity” to “a swarm of blue flies crawling over a grave.”<sup>88</sup> In conversation with a paroled Union soldier from France, Andrews learned that prisoners had burrowed into the ground and the subterranean huts “were alive with vermin and stank like charnel

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<sup>87</sup> John Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell and In Rebel Den* (Lancaster, PA: Hubbard Brothers, 1882), 558. Vaughter, *Prison Life in Dixie*, 65-68.

<sup>88</sup> Spencer Bidwell King, Jr., *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl, 1861-1865* (Macon, GA: The Ardivan Press, 1960), 64, entry for January 11, 1865.

houses.”<sup>89</sup> Ambrose Spencer, a nearby resident of Americus, Georgia, later testified before the United States Congressional Committee on Confederate Prisons on the conditions at Andersonville. Spencer remarked, “The condition of the stockade perhaps can be expressed most aptly by saying that in passing up and down the railroad, if the wind was favorable, the odor from the stockade could be detected at least two miles.”<sup>90</sup> Spencer was a Unionist, Eliza Frances Andrews was not, but they both recognized the wretched olfactory conditions at Andersonville more directly than the Confederate officials running the prison.

The charges leveled against Henry Wirz during his trial in front of a military tribunal had an important olfactory dimension. The specifications included conspiracy to destroy the lives of prisoners by subjecting them to an unhealthy environment. In individual testimony, however, the olfactory environment was of particular interest to the prosecution. John C. Bates, an assistant surgeon at Andersonville, thought the smells from the stockade were worse than in the hospital because prisoners were more “thickly huddled together, like ants or bees or something of that kind.”<sup>91</sup> The doctor worried about the foul air so much he used adhesive plaster to cover any scratches or abrasions on his skin to protect against infection.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> King, Jr., *Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 78, entry for January 27, 1865.

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Congress, *Prisoners of War*, 81.

<sup>91</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, *Trial of Henry Wirz*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d Session, Ex. Doc. 23, pg. 34.

<sup>92</sup> House, *Henry Wirz*, pg. 33.

The guards who testified against Wirz also talked about smell as a way of knowing diseased landscapes. “The stench arising from the camp was very bad,” Nazareth Allen stated, noting that even the guards had little relief from it. “We soldiers preferred doing picket duty to sentry duty” because the air was fresher, even though from the distance of a mile his nose could detect the stench of Andersonville. More than merely unpleasant, smell was deadly. Although highly individual, prisoners like Allen sensed illness through their noses. “The stench was so bad,” Allen testified, “that it kept me sick pretty nearly all the time I was around the stockade.”<sup>93</sup> William Dills, a resident of Macon, Georgia, and former Confederate guard, stated that a very bad smell came from the prison that he could smell from the depot at Andersonville about a mile away.<sup>94</sup> The testimony of the guards highlighted not only the widespread recognition that smell was disease but also the notable absence of Confederate officials to attempt to ameliorate the unwholesome air.

### Smells Like?: Olfactory Degradation and Animalization

While smell was part of a larger experience of the Civil War, the sense helped prisoners define and understand the places of confinement. Spaces of imprisonment were diverse, but might be categorized as enclosed prisons and open-air prison camps. Enclosed prisons included antebellum jails, forts, and state penitentiaries, as well as abandoned buildings such as hotels, college buildings, warehouses, and factories. Open-air camps were equally diverse, usually consisting of open fields surrounded by wooden

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<sup>93</sup> House, *Henry Wirz*, pg. 117-118. See also pg. 127.

<sup>94</sup> House, *Henry Wirz*, pg. 124, 742.

walls, earthen embankments, or water. Inside open-air camps, prisoners in the north lived in wooden barracks or tents provided by the U.S. government. Union prisoners in the South who lived in open-air camps typically had to improvise their own shelter from old tents, blankets, wood, and mud. However, the growth of prison populations meant that prisons often became spatial combinations of different prison types. The sense of smell was spatial and helped prisoners map the visible and invisible parameters of their confinement. In close confinement and crowded places they wrote about close air and longed to breathe pure or free air. They also talked about smell indirectly through the spatial metaphors applied to their living conditions.

The continual existence of breathing foul vapors emanating from within prisons degraded the sense of smell for prisoners, blunting their ability to detect the olfactory environment. Nightingale had warned about the phenomena of desensitization, remarking that nurses needed scientific instruments—a mechanical nose of sorts—to measure the concentrations of organic matter in the air. Otherwise the nose could fail. “The senses of nurses and mothers become so dulled to foul air,” Nightingale wrote, “that they are perfectly unconscious of what an atmosphere they have let their children, patients, or charges, sleep in.”<sup>95</sup> For prisoners, the smells of captivity stripped first their sense of smell followed by their sense of humanness. William D. Wilkins worried that continually breathing in the atmosphere in Richmond prisons was damaging his sense of smell. Wilkins believed his nose delicate, cultured and refined.<sup>96</sup> He also thought of this

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<sup>95</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 16fn.

<sup>96</sup> See Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11; Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the*



sensitivity to smell as a feminine quality.<sup>97</sup> “I used to have a womanish fondness for perfumes,” he wrote, gendering the sense of smell and also noting the power of his discriminating nose. However, Libby Prison threatened to strip away what Wilkins’ considered his refined sense of smell: “I fear my nostrils will become so deodored by the horrid smells I am constantly inhaling that I will never be able to relish a sweet scent again.”<sup>98</sup> Breathing the stench of Libby Prison threatened to blunt his sharp nose and destroy his ability to enjoy the world through smell.

The sense of smell changed for prisoners over time, and those with sensitive noses agreed with Wilkins that captivity “deodored” the nose. James J. Higginson, a wine merchant in Great Britain and Germany when the conflict broke out, entered the war in the service of the U.S. Sanitary Commission before becoming an officer in a Massachusetts regiment. While working for the Sanitary Commission in near Fairfax, Virginia, he spent a miserable night in “a nasty little tavern” sleeping in the same bet with a sutler “who smelt badly.”<sup>99</sup> After being captured at the Battle of Aldie, Virginia, in June 1863, Higginson’s nose, like his skin, became less sensitive over time. After five months, Higginson noted that they were becoming used to smell of prison and “no longer shudder at the unpleasant smells from the dirty sinks nor the numerous lice with which everything

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*Fragrant: Odor in the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 146-51.

<sup>97</sup> On gender and smell, see Corbin, *Foul and the Fragrant*, 176, 181-86.

<sup>98</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, entry for August 15, 1862, LC. Another Libby prisoner sarcastically compared privy fumes to cologne. Charles B. Stone diary, February 21 1863, University of Vermont, Burlington.

<sup>99</sup> James J. Higginson to “Dearest Daddy,” November 18, 1862, Higginson family papers II, MAHS

is infested.”<sup>100</sup> Decreased sensitivities to smell could make captivity less unbearable. One paroled Union prisoner wrote that when he entered Castle Thunder in Richmond that the “curious, disagreeable smell” first accosted his nose. Over time it decreased. “A persistent detention, however, as I found, has a remarkable effect on blunting one’s olfactory sensibilities, and I owe nature for this wise provision of hers a heavy bill of thanks.”<sup>101</sup> In contrast to Wilkins, Higginson and the anonymous prisoner thought the blunting effect on their sense of smell was some natural form of mercy on those living in wretched olfactory environments.

Whether disabling or an act of mercy, olfactory desensitization also connected prisoners to the natural world. In explaining their olfactory environment they characterized a liminal boundary between living like humans and animals. Confederate prisoner William H. Davis found the enclosure at Fort McHenry in Baltimore “well supplied” with vermin and filth and characterized it as a place more fit for horses than humans. He wrote, “Our stable smells very bad for Some of the Boys lay with their heads in the Trough.”<sup>102</sup> After recording his fear that prisoners would die like sheep at Camp Chase in the summer, Randal McGavock asserted that no respectable Tennessee farmer

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<sup>100</sup> James J. Higginson to “My Dear Fellow,” November 13, 1863, Higginson family papers II, MAHS.

<sup>101</sup> L. A. Hendrick, “CAPTIVITY IN REBELDOM. The Experience of a HERALD Correspondent as a Prisoner,” *New York Herald*, January 30, 1864. See also Junius Henri Browne, *Four Years in Secessia...* (Hartford: O. D. Case, 1865), 242.

<sup>102</sup> William H. Davis diary, entries for May 18 and 19, 1863, William H. Davis Diary, 1863, Emory University, Woodruff Library, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library.

would allow their hogs or cattle to live in such a “dirty and loathsome” place.<sup>103</sup> James H. Dennison, captured by Nathan Bedford Forrest’s cavalry at Brice’s Crossroads, Mississippi, wrote that he had no shelter at Andersonville and “the place stinks as bad as a hog pen.”<sup>104</sup> Two days after his capture at Brentwood, Tennessee, Prentiss stayed briefly in the Columbia, Tennessee, courthouse, which he described as a hog pen further fouled by their own filth.<sup>105</sup> When prisoners did not link the hog metaphor explicitly to smell they did so implicitly through their consistent invocation of the presence of filth, disease, and the emotion experience of living more like animals than like humans.

Although many prisoners used animalistic metaphors inconsistently, Eugene Sly of Illinois drew on the nonhuman world regularly to describe the spatial, emotional, and environmental conditions of captivity from Danville, Virginia, through prisons deeper in the Confederate interior. At Andersonville, Sly compared the environment to a hog pen. “I fear my suffering has not yet commenced,” Sly wrote, “the place is crowded and filthy and unfit for hogs to say in.”<sup>106</sup> The lack of proper shelter added to the mud and smells of the prison and made Sly think that “we are used with no more respect than a lot of

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<sup>103</sup> Allen, Randal W. McGavock, 599, entry for March 2, 1862. See also Charles Holbrook Prentiss diary, March 25, 1863, Letters and Diaries, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Army Heritage Education Center.

<sup>104</sup> James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, ed. Jack Klasey (Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Historical Society, 1987), 40, entry for June 23, 1864.

<sup>105</sup> Charles Holbrook Prentiss diary, March 27, 1863, Letters and Diaries, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Army Heritage Education Center.

<sup>106</sup> Eugene Sly diary, entry for May 21, 1864, United States Civil War Collection, Western Michigan University, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/civilwar1/USCW004.0001.001?view=toc>.

hogs.”<sup>107</sup> One month after entering Andersonville, Sly used the metaphor one last time, writing that “fathers hog pen is a paradise to this place.”<sup>108</sup> Growing up on a farm in Illinois and knowing hog pens, Sly’s expressions were living metaphors that used the familiar to explain the extraordinary. When Sly gave up using the metaphor, he did so out of exhaustion. It was too good to call Andersonville a hog pen.

The physical space that smell occupied added to its visual impact on its use. Imprisoned Baltimore Mayor George William Brown wrote at Fort Warren of odor from the sewer as an “invading evil which as yet has defied efforts to correct it.”<sup>109</sup> Yet the space the smell occupied created an uneven experience even within the hall as his quarters were “on the less nasty side.” Other environmental factors changed the prevalence and strength of the smell. Brown wrote, “When the wind is from the East we do not suffer, for it seems to blow the smell off, but a westwardly wind brings it up through the wainscots & down the ventilators.”<sup>110</sup> Officials had applied disinfectants to minimize the smell, but the smell did not abate. Describing the “horrible odor” in the room at Libby Prison, William Wilkins investigated the sources of smell within the room, concluding that it did not come from the inch of “thick greasy slime” on the floors but from the privy at the end of the room that drained multiple floors. Wilkins wrote, “The walls are smeared from the floors above with slops & excretions of the hundreds of men

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<sup>107</sup> Sly diary, May 25, 1864.

<sup>108</sup> Sly diary, June 21, 1864.

<sup>109</sup> George William Brown to George C. Schattuck, November 19, 1862, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>110</sup> Brown to Schattuck, November 19, 1862, Maryland Historical Society.

confined overhead.”<sup>111</sup> Mingling with the “blasts from the privy” were those Wilkins described as “the swamp & dead house underneath.” The penetrating stench affected his sleep, interrupting his thoughts and even prevented him from dreaming of home and family.

In open-air prisons, smell also occupied considerable space. For larger prisons such as Andersonville, smell made large parts of the environment uninhabitable. Prisoners at Andersonville chose the more crowded parts of the stockade over the areas by the sinks and stream in the center of the prison. Some crowded windward or pressed their nose to the ground.<sup>112</sup> Wind and the natural environment affected the smell. Recalling the smell of the sluggish stream at Andersonville, John Ransom recalled that the combination of tall trees and wind: “On all four sides of us are high walls and tall trees, and there is apparently no wind or breeze to blow away the stench, and we are obliged to breathe and live in it.”<sup>113</sup>

Blasts of foul air were not just aggravating, and while invisible, smells warned prisoners of present and future dangers to their health. Randal W. McGavock, upon entering Camp Chase, wrote that “the smell from the pit [sinks] is intolerable, and I predict that if these men are kept here until warm weather, they will die like sheep with

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<sup>111</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, August 12, 1862, Library of Congress. See also (at Vicksburg), Browne, *Four Years in Secessia*, 241.

<sup>112</sup> House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 81; Gilbert E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War* (New York: The American News Company, 1865), 92.

<sup>113</sup> Ransom, *Ransom's Diary*, 112.

the rots.”<sup>114</sup> Union prisoner W. Marsh, captured at Shiloh in 1862, traveled as a prisoner through Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, and Macon. Marsh wrote that the sick men in the hospital were forced to use their bunks as sinks. “The smell of the hospital was enough to have killed well men.”<sup>115</sup> In Richmond, William Wilkins concluded from smelling the “noisome vapors” that “Typhus fever must soon appear.”<sup>116</sup> For McGavock, Marsh, and Wilkins, each breath came at the danger of death.

Prisoners hoped that certain smells could mitigate more offensive odors and conditions. Frank T. Bennett liked the smell of tobacco and whitewash. Early in his captivity in Charleston, anxiety overtook the prisoners’ appetite and instead of eating they smoked their cigars, “trying to lose our cares, in the soft and pleasant tobacco smoke which lay heavily around us.”<sup>117</sup> Later at Columbia, he and other prisoners cleaned and whitewashed their living spaces. “It now looks much more cheerful and smells less offensively,” he wrote.<sup>118</sup> Like whitewash, smoke also mitigated odors. When pipes burst at a Richmond prison, Hiram Eddy told his wife that every prisoner “lit up his pipe and

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<sup>114</sup> Jack Allen, ed., *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1959), 599, entry for March 1, 1862.

<sup>115</sup> House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 1116.

<sup>116</sup> Wilkins diary, entry for August 16, 1862.

<sup>117</sup> “Narrative of Lieut. Col F. J. Bennett,” pg. 13, Frank T. Bennett papers, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>118</sup> “Narrative of Lieut. Col F. J. Bennett,” pg. 80, Bennett papers, DU.

smoked for his life,” but the “awful stench” lingered in the building.<sup>119</sup> Not everyone appreciated the smell of tobacco smoke. Jonathan P. Stowe of Massachusetts described the noxious clouds of smoke in a Richmond prison in 1861. He wrote “It is all smoke here and the smell of tobacco, will I hope, keep off the vermin; but I fear for our health.” Several weeks later, the olfactory nuisance had not abated. “I suffer from the want of pure air – the continual smoking – oh dear!”<sup>120</sup> Other prisoners, north and south, commented on the nearly continual smoke from stoves and tobacco. At Johnson’s Island, James Mayo complained that he wished to be “some place where they did not chew and smoke tobacco. The habit is disgusting.”<sup>121</sup> Smoking mitigated the poisonous vapors for the nose of some but provided another nuisance for others.

Prisoners blamed the olfactory environment not only on the guards but also the habits and condition of the prisoners. “Oh! horrors-of-horrors,” James L. Hoster wrote in his diary on his first full day in Andersonville. While many aspects shocked Hoster’s sensibilities—the nearly naked prisoners, greasy and dirty clothing, and poor shelter—his eyes and nose were drawn to the sink. That the sinks were a just a wooden framework was bad, but the habit of the prisoners made it much worse. Sick prisoners “do their business just outside their tents in small holes and some have been seen to do it in small holes made with the hell inside the tent, while some do it on the surface outside.”

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<sup>119</sup> Hiram Eddy to his wife, May 20, 1862, Eddy Papers, CHS; see also John S. Crocker letters, Frank S. Brockett Collection, Division of Rare Books and Manuscripts Collections, Cornell University; Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Blue*, 37.

<sup>120</sup> Jonathan P. Stowe diary, October 26, November 15, 1861, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 26, AHEC. See also

<sup>121</sup> James Mayo diary, September 12, 1863, LC. See also James Bennington Irvine diary, March 8, 1865, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Hundreds of others used the stream banks above the sinks with the cumulative effect “creating an awful stench and rendering the water unfit to wash in.” Although Hoster did not care to exonerate prison officials, he wrote, “the slovenly made it unhealthy for us all.”<sup>122</sup> William Tritt described the effect of sickness and weather at Andersonville, where it rained almost every day in June. Prisoners without shelter were cold and wet. He wrote, “Some dirtied their breeches from the butt down to their shoes and stood there shivering.” Tritt was not particularly sympathetic and he characterized two classes of prisoners: those who washed their clothes and the sick or lazy. “Some standing at the brook washing their trousers,” he wrote, “Others standing with the dung running down their legs into their shoes.”<sup>123</sup> While prisoners admitted their own group’s role in befouling the prison environment, it did not absolve the captors. Sick and lazy prisoners were not the cause of the wretched conditions, but their actions made those around them more miserable.

Prisoners consistently expressed their desire to breathe free, fresh, or pure air and this contrasted with their condition of being forced to inhale unventilated, already-breathed, or foul air. Breathing in confinement felt suffocating. Confined in the Old Capital Prison in Washington after his capture at Fort Harrison, William H. S. Burgwyn wrote that he and thirteen other officers occupied a 300 sq. ft. room with no windows and

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<sup>122</sup> James L. Hoster diary, June 20, 1864, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University. See also James E. Wenrick diary, August 6, 1864, AM 66954, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg.

<sup>123</sup> William L. Tritt diary, June 14, 17, 1864, M92-141, Wisconsin Historical Society.



a closed door, which made the air “very close and suffocating.”<sup>124</sup> When Randal McGavock at Fort Warren had the privilege of walking around the island, he took the opportunity and “inhaled the fresh air from the sea.”<sup>125</sup> At Libby Prison in Richmond, prisoners crowded by the windows, and expressed outrage when guards shot at them from the streets for trying to breathe pure air.<sup>126</sup> Alonzo Tucker Decker of New York wrote in loose pages of his diary a poem entitled, “The Prisoners Dream,” that expressed the feeling of suffocation that came from breathing in Andersonville and the wish to breathe unsullied air.

Oh give me a breath of air  
At the rose morning dawn  
When dew drops like Jewels rare  
Brightly Sparkle on the Lawn  
To live on some mountain top  
Where the Breeze sweeps from the Sea  
In vain I cherish the Hope  
For life has few Days for me  
...  
I am going with each breath  
Despite my wishes and tears  
Now the lone foot falls of Death  
Are echoing in my ears  
Toward home I turn my face  
Where my wife and children Dear  
Gather round the bright fireplace

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<sup>124</sup> William H. S. Burgwyn, *A Captain's War; The Letters and Diaries of William H. S. Burgwyn 1861-1865*, ed. Herbert M. Schller (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Publishing Company, 1994), 154, entry for October 6, 1864.

<sup>125</sup> Allen, ed., *Pen and Sword*, pg. 608, entry for March 26, 1862.

<sup>126</sup> Wilkins diary, August 28, September 5, 1862. Shooting prisoners at windows was a common complaint among Union prisoners.

For Decker and others the air in Andersonville was a poison that sapped health.<sup>127</sup>

The opportunity to leave the suffocating environments of prisons gave captives a welcome breath of fresh air. William Wilkins, who worried so much about losing his sense of smell, had the opportunity to “get a breath of fresh air” when he went from Libby to the Adjutant General’s office, and he thought “the sensation was most delicious & inspiring.”<sup>128</sup> When Charles G. Lee went from the prison at Andersonville to the hospital he thought the “nice fresh breath of air” was far better for his health than the castor oil he received from a doctor. When Lee helped carry out a corpse of an anonymous man one quarter of a mile to the prison cemetery, he wrote that the “fresh air and green fields and forests made me feel almost like one risen from the dead.” Inside the prison, however, Lee felt like “a poor bird being caged” because of the lack of fresh air.<sup>129</sup> Other Union prisoners, including acquaintances Samuel E. Grosvenor and Robert H. Kellogg, took advantage of opportunities to collect wood outside the stockade walls. Grosvenor noticed that breathing outside air had an invigorating and restorative effect on his health and spirits. He wrote, “Went out & breathed once more the free air of heaven uncontaminated by the thousands within.”<sup>130</sup> Availing himself to the opportunity “just to breathe pure air once more,” Kellogg described “how good it seemed to get out in the

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<sup>127</sup> Alonzo Tuttle Decker diary, no date, ANHS. See also Franklin J. Krause diary, June 20, 1864, MS #14096, UVA.

<sup>128</sup> Wilkins diary, August 26, 1862, LC.

<sup>129</sup> Paul C. Helmreich, “Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41, 1 (January 1976), 22, entries for August 1, 14, 1864.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel E. Grosvenor diary, June 5, 1864, MS 8158, Connecticut Historical Society. See also Unknown diary, October 14, 1864, ANHS.

woods, among the trees & flowers. The world seemed almost like a new world to me.” After being transferred from Andersonville, Kellogg described splendid “air and scenery” where they were confined at the racetrack in Charleston and he predicted it would have a beneficial impact upon health.<sup>131</sup>

Breathing free air served as an olfactory metonym for freedom. John S. Ward wrote to a Confederate Senator from Camp Chase hoping he would intercede on his behalf for a release and allow him to “again breathe the free air of our sunny south.”<sup>132</sup> When Randal McGavock stepped off the exchange boat at Aikin’s landing downstream of Richmond, he noted that every man “seemed to draw a long breath.”<sup>133</sup> Griffin Frost in Missouri wrote, “God knows we all long to breathe the pure air of Dixie once more, free from the tyrant rule we are now under.”<sup>134</sup> After Henry Stone, a cavalryman who rode with John Hunt Morgan, made a successful escape from prison, he fled north to find free air in Canada. There he wrote, “I am no longer in the accursed dominion of Yankeedom. I can here breathe freer, much freer, than I would in Mt. Sterling Dungeon. Here the air is

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<sup>131</sup> Robert H. Kellogg diary, June 4, 1864, Robert H. Kellogg papers, 1862-1931, Ms68013, Connecticut Historical Society. Officers at the city jail, however, disagreed. Edmund E. Ryan diary, September [no day], 1864, Peoria Historical Society Collection, Bradley University Library.

<sup>132</sup> John S. Ward to Louis Trezevant Wigfall [A Confederate Senator], “My Dear Sir,” April 21, 1862, Camp Chase papers, folder 10, VHS.

<sup>133</sup> Allen, ed., *Pen and Sword*, pg. 659, entry for August 5, 1862.

<sup>134</sup> Griffin Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal...* (Quincey, IL: Quincey Herald Book and Job Office, 1867), 29, entry for January 14, 1863.

cool, pure & invigorating, especially to one who has been a prisoner.”<sup>135</sup> If captivity meant breathing foul, noxious air, freedom meant drawing a long breath of pure, free air.

Prisoners who drew and wrote from memory helped link the olfactory to the visual landscape. While many prisoners wrote about smell with space in mind, Robert K. Sneden wrote and perhaps even drew with smell in mind, using the nose to map the olfactory environment. Sneden’s family had fled New York during the American Revolution and he was born in Nova Scotia in 1832. He moved to New York around 1850 where he trained as an engineer and architect, which assisted him during the Civil War as a mapmaker. Sneden had not only sharp eyes by a keen nose, and like many prisoners his recollections of the sensory experiences were better than his narrative memory of the events. He incorrectly dated many of the key events at Andersonville, exaggerated personalities, and borrowed material from other writers, but he had unmatched precision in the spatial and sensory experiences of southern prisons.

The travel southward from the Pemberton warehouse in Richmond through Salisbury brought Sneden to Andersonville in southern Georgia. Having compared the smell of Salisbury to a hog pen, Sneden compared that place and Andersonville, writing that “the whole place looked like a collection of hog pens.” Sneden situated smell at Andersonville within the human and nonhuman environment, especially the swamp that bisected the stockade. “The filthy swamp undulates like small waves,” Sneden wrote,

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<sup>135</sup> “Henry L. Stone to “Dear Cousin Melia,” December 5, 1863, Hirons House, Windsor, C.W., Henry Stone papers, Bath County Historical Society. See also Ryan diary, September 28, 1864, Peoria Historical Society Collection, Bradley University Library.

“while the insufferable stench nearly takes away one’s breath!”<sup>136</sup> When Sneden wrote about the experience of smelling Andersonville, he conceptualized it in environmental and spatial terms. Rain and “the natural declivity of the ground” moved filth from the hillsides toward the swamp, and the footsteps of thirty thousand pairs of feet kneaded the ground into a foul mush of “sand, feces, decomposing vegetable matters,” in which insects propagated.<sup>137</sup> “The Rebels say that the smell makes them sick,” he wrote, and even though he had little way of knowing it, he believed the Confederate officials had moved the headquarters upwind of the prison in the town.

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Contemporaries perceived odor as an increasingly serious threat to public health and order in nineteenth-century Europe and America and prison officials inherited preexisting beliefs about the direct link between smell and disease. Northern military and sanitary officials drew on the international movement in public health to make olfactory sense of prisons in their effort to maintain health and order. Smells of decay posed a problem for officials whose goal was concentration but not extermination. Despite the intentions of northern prison keepers, odor returned. Rendering prisons orderly and deodorized with the logic of the grid, drainage, and ventilation was a losing battle in the North.

In contrast, nearly everyone in the South was cognizant of the problem of smell and Civil War prisons except for those who had the power to do something about it.

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<sup>136</sup> Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 230. See also Henry Davidson, quoted in House, *Prisoners of War*, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 256.

Civilians complained that the smell emanating from prisons was spreading pestilence among the population. Confederate surgeons, although not prone to much sympathy for the Union prisoners, pointed out problems. For whatever reason, Confederate prison commanders seemed unable or unwilling to use their nose.

For prisoners and those sympathetic to their condition, smell was evidence of inhuman suffering. Through smell, prisoners mapped out the visible and invisible qualities of their environment. The olfactory environment stifled the functioning of the nose. Smell made their space appear to be fit only for animals. As a way of conceptualizing the essence of their treatment in prison, smell symbolized the animalization of captivity at the same time breathing fresh air symbolized freedom and the promise of survival.



Figure 2.5. Calvin Bates, possibly the man referenced by the anonymous writer and Walt Whitman. Image of Calvin Bates, CDV, 1865.

After the war, smell continued to be important in the debates and uncertainties of what captivity meant or should mean. Talking about the treatment of prisoners, Walt

Whitman handed Horace Trabuel a letter originally sent to Attorney General Joshua Speed in August 1865. The letter lambasted United States Congressional Committee's inquiries into the suffering of Union prisoners at the hands of the Confederates, the impending trial of Henry Wirz, and, implicitly, the USSC involvement in both efforts. After describing Henry Wirz's universal kindness and humanity to prisoners, the anonymous writer attacked the publication of photographs of prisoners with rotten limbs: "Had it not been for the unnatural and criminal practices of those worse than brute men, they would not have been so afflicted. Sodomy was the cause of their disgusting condition, and the Committee disgrace themselves by their miserable attempt to irritate the people against the South by such infamous exhibitions." Whitman then asked Trabuel whether he thought the letter authentic. Trabuel replied, "It smells fishy to me—but what right have I got to an opinion? How does it smell to you?" In a "fiery" voice, Whitman said "It does not smell to me at all: it stinks to me: his man may be real or not: his story may have been true or not: I can't make up my mind: prisoners are real—pigpens are real—but they raise a hell of a fuss with a man's nose. I wouldn't take sides, except to say that such allegations as he makes are not borne out by other testimony in our possession."<sup>138</sup> Whitman and Trabuel implied, albeit in a convoluted way, the continuing power of the nose to judge truth from fiction. There was already a good enough explanation for gangrene, and the evidence was best judged by the nose.

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<sup>138</sup> Horace Trabuel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, vol. 4, pg. 346.  
<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/criticism/disciples/traubel/WWWiC/4/med.00004.53.html>.

CHAPTER 3:  
OF LICE AND MEN: THE FEELING AND VIOLENCE OF CAPTIVITY

Ye ugly, creepin, blastit wonner,  
Detested, shunn'd by saunt an' sinner,  
How daur ye set your fit upon her-  
Sae fine a lady?  
Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner  
On some poor body.

Robert Burns "To A Louse, On  
Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at  
Church," (1786).

This chapter reaches for the haptic or felt experience by considering both the nonhuman and human participants in prison environments. Cultural conceptions of cleanliness and humanitarianism shaped how human participants experienced their environments and the feeling of the Civil War through the skin. Touch also transcended the human-nature divide in that small creatures played oversized roles in shaping the felt experiences of prisons. The louse's agency in affecting the feeling of captivity came from a relational network between lice, concentrations of human beings, and the culture of cleanliness in nineteenth-century America. The consequences of an altered relationship between the human and nonhuman environment contributed to the animalization of captivity. In this chapter as elsewhere, animalization refers a perverse self-actualization in which prisoners perceived their own existence in relation to nature. Lice not only made



living uncomfortable, their collective power made prisoners pause to consider who mastered whom in the prison environment.

Although animalization operates as a process and an interpretive theme throughout the dissertation, this chapter focuses first on the relationship between prisoners and vermin through the sense of touch and then, more briefly, on the violence between prisoners that symbolized the brutal competitiveness for life that took place not only between but also among species in prison environments. Explorations into multisensory perception requires attention to language and the environment, but touch exemplifies the problem in which the nonvisual senses hide, for lack of a better expression, in plain sight. Touch is at first elusive and then everywhere in the written record. Expressions of feeling and touch, and the material culture utilized in the pursuit of comfort, are virtually endless, but touch also went beyond the tangible into the realm of bodily rhythms and emotions. And the use of touch as a figure of speech was as common in the nineteenth-century as the metaphor of sight and seeing is today. For the religious, questions of the course of civilizations, slavery, and later the Civil War, were in God's hands through providence or intervention. Handshakes symbolized friendship, respect, and some degree of social equality in a republican system of government. Captives fell into the hands of the enemy. Friends and family members commonly expressed the desire to provide comfort to the imprisoned, and prisoners went to great lengths to convince the same people that they were more or less comfortable even in captivity.<sup>1</sup> Even in the

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<sup>1</sup> The haptic language of providence, divine intervention, or those doing the Lord's work, is implicit in the treatment of religion in the Civil War. The title of George C. Rable's synthesis on religion in the Civil War draws from a speech by Abraham Lincoln in which he called himself "an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people." *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the*

twenty-first century, touch pervades language, though much of our inherited language of touch comes from dead metaphors. Feedback and criticism help build thick skin in an era when work for many people is gentler on the hands and skin than ever before. Feeling lousy, searching with a fine-tooth comb, and being nitpicky retain only the linguistic shell of their past relevance to the feeling of daily life.<sup>2</sup>

Some sensory anthropologists and historians contend that touch is more complex than the other senses. The eyes, ears, nose, and palate are centralized in comparison to the skin, which wraps the entire body and has the added dimension of internal feeling and emotion. Taking temperature, pressure, and movement into account, the skin's receptors register and relay to the brain haptic sensations that are complex and sometimes abstract. Yet like the other senses, touch also remains cultural. The subject, the object, and the meaning of haptic contact vary in different contexts, customs, and power relations. When historical informants discussed touch they expressed not universal experience but a

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*American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), front matter, 24, 50, 82-83, and over one hundred more times in the text. Although less has been written on handshakes in the U.S., see Herman Roodenburg, "The 'Hand' of Friendship': Shaking Hands and Other Gestures in the Dutch Republic," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 152-189. The best treatment of "comfort" in a prison, albeit implicitly, comes from the archaeological record of Johnson's Island. David R. Bush, *I Fear I Shall Never Leave This Island: Life in a Civil War Prison* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011). The phrase "in the hands of the enemy" was quite popular among contemporaries and spoke to treatment, and the implicit connection between hands and culpability is most clear in Charles W. Sanders, Jr., *While in the Hands of the Enemy: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 7.

specific relationship that historians can read as cultural statements.<sup>3</sup> This chapter, like others, burrows into the felt experiences of prisoners not just to portray a more vivid account, but to recover the historical feeling of captivity.

For all the bullets and shrapnel, some of the most common haptic experiences in the Civil War did not come from the human world. Although historians have known about the importance of weather and animals, studies about nonhumans in the Civil War have, until recently, been dominated by avocational historians.<sup>4</sup> Some of the best treatment of the human-nonhuman relationship has been indirect. The *Anopheles* mosquito, carrier of malaria, and *Aedes aegypti*, the carrier of Yellow fever, have important roles in the microbiological history of the Civil War, even though contemporaries considered them a haptic nuisance rather than a vector of disease.

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<sup>3</sup> On touch, see Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 93-116. Touch has been explored most frequently in the history of medicine. See essays by Roy Porter, "The Rise of the Physical Examination" and Sander Gilman, "Touch, Sexuality, and Disease," in *Medicine and the Five Senses*, ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 179-197, 198-224; Mark. S. Jenner, "Tasting Lichfield, Touching China: Sir John Floyers's Senses," *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 3 (2010): 647-670.

<sup>4</sup> That pattern is changing. See Kelby Oochley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental Reference Guide* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010); Jack Temple Kirby, *The American Civil War: An Environmental View* (Durham, N.C.: National Humanities Center, 2001), <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntuseland/essays/amcwar.htm>. Other historians sensitive to nonhuman agency, even though their monographs focus on other issues, can be found in Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 3-4, 6-7, 45-48, 51-52. Lice is often discussed indirectly in studies on Typhus. Margaret Humphreys, "A Stranger to Our Camps: Typhus in American History," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 80, no. 2 (summer 2006), 269-290; Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), esp. 129-130.

Likewise, soldiers were well aware of nature's effects on their physical and mental health.<sup>5</sup>

There is good reason to apply the tools of sensory history and animal studies to social history and the Civil War Era. For most of its existence as a field, social historians of the United States have looked to the bottom of social hierarchies for insight into the past: the working class under capitalism; African Americans under slavery and racism; women and children under patriarchal authority. Yet the endless creativity of social historians is usually bound to one side of the symbolic but very powerful boundary that separates the human species from the rest of the living world. With the help of other fields and disciplines, however, that assumption has come under scrutiny. From horses and dogs to insects and single-cell organisms, historians are increasingly recognizing the role that nonhumans play in history from the fields of environmental, urban, and, lately, Civil War history. Whereas many historians are currently breaking down the largely symbolic boundaries between nations, scholars in environmental, post-colonial, and feminist studies increasingly think across a species divide, which promises to dissolve an equally arbitrary division. In his work on postcolonial Egypt, for example, Timothy Mitchell asks, "Can the mosquito speak?" Mitchell interprets the mosquito as an invader in World War II brought on by the relational network between man-made dams, synthetic chemicals, and malaria carrying mosquitoes. Mitchell carefully avoids mono-causality,

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<sup>5</sup> Andre McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers: Malaria, Yellow Fever, and the Course of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 4, 11-14, 27-28; Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), especially 35-64; Meier, "The Man Who Has Nothing to Lose: Environmental Impacts on Civil War Stragglers in 1862 Virginia," in *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward and Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 67-95.

but he answers his own question in the affirmative. The relational effect of actions by humans and nonhumans creates change and even the subalterns of the animal kingdom affected the course and experience of so-called human history.<sup>6</sup>

Other chapters in this dissertation, such as the one on listening, take a more upbeat tone on the subject of human agency. In talking back to guards and civilians, prisoners could resist the animalizing experience of captivity. While the guards did not have a monopoly on touch and violence, the experience of feeling, like smelling and tasting, was animalizing. Surrendering to the feeling of lice or the violence of prison gangs spoke poorly about the state of humanity inside prisons, and the hands of prisoners were not unsullied. The even more grim implication is that the actions of humans and nonhumans in Civil War prisons were more similar than our anthropocentric conceit has allowed us to admit. Many bit. Hands crushed a few. Life went on for some but not for others. So it went.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, 2002), quotation in title of first chapter, 19-22, 29. See also Albert E. Cowdrey, "Environments of War," *Environmental Review* 7, no. 2 (summer 1983), 155-164; Edmund Russell, "'Speaking of Annihilation': Mobilization for War against Human and Insect Enemies, 1914-1945," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of War*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 142-174; Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Gregg Mitman, "In Search of Health: Landscape and Disease in American Environmental History," *Environmental History* 10 (April 2005), 193. On agency as used in environmental history of the Civil War, see Lisa M. Brady, "From Battlefield to Fertile Ground: The Development of Civil War Environmental History," *Civil War History* 58, no. 3 (September 2012), 308.

<sup>7</sup> My argument selectively applies some insights from "posthumanism" scholars to social history. See Peter Atkins, ed., *Animal Cities: Beastly Urban Histories* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 11-13. Historians' indifference to historical touch or "hapticity" might

## Evicting the Louse

Lice and humans had lived together for a long time by the nineteenth century, so long that the human hair and body louse had become highly host specific, unable to feed on most other mammals.<sup>8</sup> Alongside fleas and internal parasites, human bodies were the haunts of lice well before farming, when rodents and larger insects began to live permanently in areas where humans resided as well.<sup>9</sup> The relationship between lice and humans is so strong that lice colonized the Americas in waves: on the first Americans and, millennia later, on European colonists. Although they were participants in the Columbian Exchange alongside many other small and large animals, lice were already living on the bodies of Europeans and Native Americans, who settlers reported passed time picking lice from their skin and crushing them with their teeth.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, comfort followed culture. Hostility to lice became pervasive in the early modern period and disgust increased as bathing came back into style in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Social prohibitions on public scratching, picking,

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reflect of the belief that touch was more animalistic than sight. Smith, *Sensing the Past*, 93. On touch and animalization, see Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 103-109.

<sup>8</sup> David L. Reed, Jessica E. Light, Julie M. Allen, and Jeremey J. Kirchman, "Pair of Lice Lost or Parasites Regained: The Evolutionary History of Anthropoid Primate Lice," *BMC Biology* 5, no. 7 (2007); Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History...* (1934; reprint, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 170-174. Zinsser's two-chapter "biography" of lice is instructive but dated. *Rats, Lice, and History*, 150-188.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Germes, Seeds, & Animals: Studies in Ecological History* (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 111-112; Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 54.

and killing of vermin came first, followed by an effort by some to banish the louse and scrutinize the lousy members of society.<sup>11</sup> The presence of lice and vermin increasingly became a mark of social inferiority in the eighteenth century, and publications from cookbooks to *Poor Richard's Almanack* suggested ways to kill them. Household manuals, child-rearing books, and preachers professed the necessity of keeping clean of lice. In 1769, Anglican theologian John Wesley declared, "Tell them cleanliness is next to godliness," alongside specific instructions about taking care of the body, including "Clean yourself of lice. These are a proof both of uncleanness and laziness: Take pains in this."<sup>12</sup> Wesley's words reflected the altering relationship between humans and their lice, one that placed prudent, deloused people as more civilized than the lousy. Nicholas Culpepper's *Complete Herbal* suggested several remedies for killing lice, including the inner bark of the black alder tree, broomrape, hyssop, and tobacco.<sup>13</sup> Books designed for children in the early-nineteenth century warned that lice "add to the afflictions of the unfortunate and lazy; but they are routed by the hands of industry and cleanliness." It was a haptic nuisance with claws, tough skin, as well as "a sort of sting, proboscis, or sucker, with which it pierces the skin, and sucks the blood."<sup>14</sup> Rev. William Kirby summarized

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<sup>11</sup> Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*, 185-188. On disgust and insects, see Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 57-58.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 138-140, 150; John Wesley to Mr. S., April 24, 1769, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2002), 12: quotes on 247-249.

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Culpepper, *Culpeper's Complete Herbal* (London: Richard Evans, 1816), 7, 32, 95, 177-78.

<sup>14</sup> [Unknown Author], *The History of Insects* (New York: Samuel Wood, 1813), 13-14.

the cultural disgust toward lice and the lousy in 1835 when he proclaimed the louse to be God's way of inspiring cleanliness and punishing those with dirty habits.<sup>15</sup>

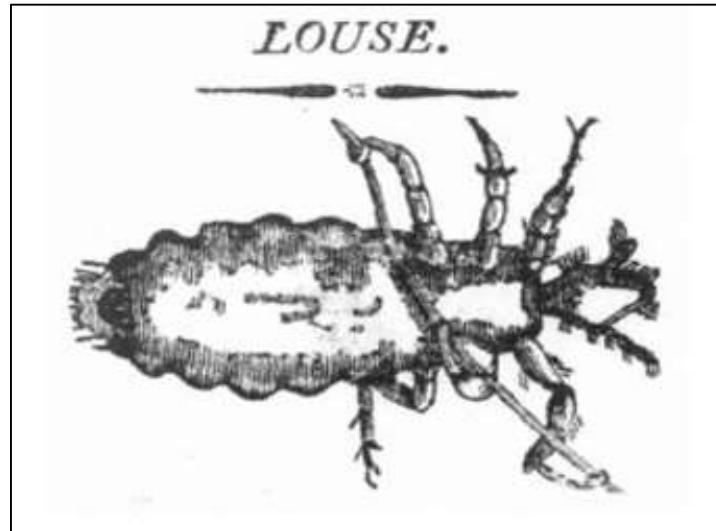


Figure 3.1. The Louse. Children were taught that they should feel disgusted at the sight of a louse, and that it was a haptic nuisance to the lazy and unclean. Samuel Wood, *History of Insects*. New York: p.p., 1813.

Despite well-laid plans, lice spoiled the best attempts by humans to pick the last nit, especially in populations of the urban poor, the enslaved, prisoners, and, more generally, in times of conflict. Prisons were notoriously lousy places, even after prison officials began policing cleanliness as an external measure of the bigger goal of penance and inner reform.<sup>16</sup> During the Revolutionary War, General Wayne noted that the entire

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<sup>15</sup> William Kirby, *On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God as Manifested in the Creation of Animals and in their History, Habits, and Instincts* (London: W. Pickering, 1835), vol. 2, pg. 316.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 100-101.



Continental Army was “sick and crawling with vermin.”<sup>17</sup> In the nineteenth century, the presence of lice decreased for those not living in poverty. Although prevalent in times of war, lice had racial implications in times of peace. In the nineteenth century, South Carolina gynecologist and surgeon J. Marion Sims learned from his mother that lice “belong always to the black race.”<sup>18</sup> By the nineteenth century, it was well established that it was shameful to have the creatures on one’s skin or clothing. Lice and humans continued their close relationship in some places, but it was considered a problem for the destitute, the morally corrupt, and the nonwhite.

The changing relationship between lice and their hosts paralleled a redefining of physical comfort in Britain and early America, where the broader world of touch and skin had variable, contested patterns of meaning. Anglo-American consumers in the late-eighteenth century described hapticity in terms of comfort and discomfort. Over time the meaning of comfort changed from something abstractly moral and spiritual to haptic and material.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Scottish Enlightenment and the idea of “fellow feeling” or humanitarianism encouraged people to empathize especially in penal reform and abolitionism. Violence against the human, either as crime or punishment, became more loathsome in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. English prison reformer John Howard encouraged sympathizing with various types of captives. Prisoners of war, he argued, should expect to be kept in “*comfortable* Quarters and the Common Men be

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Brown, *Foul Bodies*, 173.

<sup>18</sup> James Marion Sims, *The Story of My Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1884), 69.

<sup>19</sup> John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 142.

disposed of in cantonments open and extensive enough for air and exercise, and lodged in barracks as roomly and good” as the guards.<sup>20</sup> For Howard, space made the difference between close, crowded quarters and comfortable ones.

Ideas about cleanliness and comfort paralleled changing conceptions of the sensitivity of human skin, particularly in the context of punishment and coercive labor. In the nineteenth century an international antislavery movement became the cultural inheritor of a new meaning of comfort fused with Enlightenment notions of individual rights. These groups first challenged the inhuman treatment of slaves and, ultimately, the institution of racial slavery itself. By the 1830s, abolitionist orators and editors regularly drew upon the corporal realities of slavery: raped women, the whip, lacerated and sun-scorched skin, chained hands, and other tactile metonyms for the violence of slavery and slaveholders. Frederick Douglass often used sensory language in antislavery writing and speeches on the animalization of human beings “impiously inserted in a *master’s ledger*, with horses, sheep, and swine.”<sup>21</sup> A slave could neither “eat the fruit of his labors” nor “clothe his person with the work of his own hands.”<sup>22</sup> He compared the “chains,” “burning sun,” “biting lash,” “cold, damp ground,” “coarse and tattered raiment,” and

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<sup>20</sup> Crowley, *Invention of Comfort*, 166-67. Emphasis in the original. Norman S. Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 2 (1976): 195-218; Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery, No. 1 delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, NY, on Sunday evening, December 1, 1850,” in Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), vol. 2, pg. 135.

<sup>22</sup> Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery, No. 1,” 135.

“wretched hovel” of African Americans under slavery to the international traveling, soft pillows, “purple and fine linen,” and the magnificent mansion of slaveholders.<sup>23</sup> For Douglass and other abolitionists, touch and feeling created the basis for the belief that universal rights included freedom from pain and inhuman coercion.<sup>24</sup>

For their part, pro-slavery ideologues defended slavery in a variety of ways that included appeals to comparative haptic comfort. Defenders of slavery argued on racial grounds that the supposed thickness of black skin made hard labor in hot climate easier and softened the sharp blow of a whip.<sup>25</sup> Proslavery southerners looked far and wide at laborers in northern states, in Europe, and Africa to argue that the comfort of southern slaves was comparatively high.<sup>26</sup> Yet even when proslavery writers defended the institution by comparing the comforts of slaves to urban workers in northern and European cities, they implicitly conceded the point that haptic comfort was a just measure of humane treatment. As a humanitarian mentality reflected changing conceptions of

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<sup>23</sup> Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery, No. 1,” 135.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth B. Clark, “‘The Sacred Rights of the Weak’: Pain, Sympathy and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America,” *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995), 463-465. On touch and slavery, see Mark M. Smith, *The Senses in America: A Roundtable* “Getting in Touch with Slavery and Freedom,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008), 382-387; Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 179-97.

<sup>25</sup> Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 23.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders’ New World View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 121-151. Randal McGavock, who later became a Confederate prisoner of war in 1862, is a good example of this argument comparative labor through comfort, *Slavery in White and Black*, 132-133, 138-139, 144-45.

comfort, punishment, and touch, these ideas intersected with and challenged notions of racial slavery.<sup>27</sup>

### Nonhuman Touch and Human Feeling in the Civil War

Civilian and military participants in the Civil War era wrote about the animal world consistently but often in passing. Valentine Burt Chamberlain kept a cat in the Richland County, South Carolina, jail in February 1864. The prison cat, Chamberlain wrote, “is full of life and affords us great amusement. We mean to take her over the lines when we go, provided she is not declared contraband of war.” The half-serious concern that the cat would be considered contraband, a liminal status in the Civil War that included material goods, animals, and people, implied the importance of the animal to the prisoners and possibly the guards. Chamberlain also situated the cat within the prison ecology, writing that even if his cat was contraband, “she is certainly a non-combatant for the mice play under her nose with security.”<sup>28</sup> Anthropomorphized references to a noncombatant but contraband cat gestured to the vast nonhuman world within prisons. Frederic James, a prisoner alongside Chamberlain at Columbia, made no mention of cats, but wrote at length about sharing their “chief trouble” with the Pharaohs and Egyptian subjects of the ancient world. The “genus creepus” had been a problem at the prisons in Richmond and Columbia for almost nine months and the prisoners “were obliged to form

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<sup>27</sup> Crowley, *Invention of Comfort*, 167-68.

<sup>28</sup> Valentine Burt Chamberlain to “Dear Friends at Home,” February 19, 1864, FA 380, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia. On animals in prison, see Jill Knight Garrett, ed. *The Civil War Diary of Andrew Jackson Campbell* (Columbia, TN: Author, 1965), 48, entry for August 7, 1862; J. L. J. Lear Diary, September 16, 1864, MSS #352, Emory University.

an intimate acquaintance.”<sup>29</sup> In a letter to his wife, he asked for shirts and drawers “of close woven flannel with the seams hemed or felled down so that the lice cannot hide in them.”<sup>30</sup> Chamberlain hinted and James wrote plainly that even the smallest creatures had a role in shaping the prison environment as well as the haptic experiences of captivity.

Larger animals such as Chamberlain’s cat were important components of the nonhuman world, but they did not have as great an impact as some of the smallest creatures, mostly insects. Ticks, flies, lice, cockroaches, mosquitoes, and sometimes rodents were threats to skin, and the metaphor of being eaten alive, as opposed to the twentieth-century metaphor of infection, was commonplace.<sup>31</sup> Vermonter Wilbur Fisk wrote that flies hovered around the men’s faces, flying into mouths and noses, “and with their little tickling feet irritate the flesh wherever the saucy imps can find it.... They bite almost as quick as a bee can sting, and their bite is almost as painful.” Comparing the flies to Confederates, Fisk concluded that “rebels could never boast of being more troublesome” than insects.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Frederic Augustus James diary, February [no day], 1864, Massachusetts Historical Society [MHS]. See also Stephen Minot Weld diary, August 6, 9, 11, 1864, Ms. N-2378, MHS.

<sup>30</sup> Frederic Augustus James to “My Dear Wife,” Salisbury, N.C., January 22, 1864, MHS, emphasis in the original. On Salisbury and lice, see also Florence C. McLaughlin, ed., “Diary of Salisbury Prison by James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56, no. 3 (July 1973), 229.

<sup>31</sup> Dates of individual associations vary, but typhus was not considered a carrier of Typhus until the twentieth century. George Rosen, “Tenements and typhus in New York City, 1840-1875,” *American Journal of Public Health* 62, no. 4 (April 1972), 592.

<sup>32</sup> Emil and Ruth Rosenblatt, *Hard Marching Every Day: The Civil War Letters of Private Wilbur Fisk, 1861-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 132-33; See also C. Looby, *The Complete Civil War Journal and Selected Letters of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (Chicago, 2000), 132; Doyle, Smith, and McMurtry, *This Wilderness of War*, 56. On ticks, see Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna*, 135; J. H. Westervelt

In camps, hospitals, and prisons there developed a give-and-take relationship between humans and the nonhuman world, and neither completely controlled the outcome of that bond. Adapting to the opportunities posed by concentrations of food and warm bodies, insects thwarted attempts of humans to shield their food and their skin. Flies took advantage of unprotected stores of food. As one Union soldier in Virginia estimated, camp flies would “eat up a pint of sugar in half a day if it is left uncovered.”<sup>33</sup> Confederate soldier and soon-to-be-prisoner Edward William Drummond noted during the siege of Fort Pulaski in spring 1862 that Union soldiers kept fires burning on opposite side of the Savannah River. Seeing the fires or smelling the smoke suggested to Drummond Union soldiers intended to clear the land or rid themselves of mosquitoes.<sup>34</sup> Prisoners at Andersonville made few entries about mosquitoes until late summer, when as James Vance put it, the insects began “to claim strong relationship but [it is] not accepted.”<sup>35</sup>

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and A. Palladino, eds., *Diary of a Yankee Engineer: The Civil War Story of John H. Westervelt, Engineer, 1<sup>st</sup> New York Volunteer Engineer Corps* (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996), 7-8. On chiggers, see O. O. Winther, ed, *With Sherman to the Sea: The Civil War Letters, Diaries, and Reminiscences of Theodore F. Upson* (Bloomington, IN, 1958), 59.

<sup>33</sup> Julie Holcomb, *Southern Sons, Northern Soldiers: The Civil War Letters of the Remley Brothers, 22<sup>nd</sup> Iowa Infantry* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>34</sup> Roger S. Durham, ed., *A Confederate Yankee: The Journal of Edward William Drummond, A Confederate Soldier from Maine* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>35</sup> James Vance diary, August 21, 1864. See also Unknown Diary #2, August 24, 25 1864, Andersonville National Historic Site [ANHS]; George A. Clarkson diary, August 23, 1864; Alonzo Tucker Decker Diary, August 26, 1864, ANHS; George W. Pennington Diary, 26 August, 1864, ANHS. John B. Gallison diary, August 6, 1864, Ms. N-1266, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; Frederic Augustus James diary, August 16, 1864, MHS.

Although flies and mosquitoes were a haptic nuisance, their presence was less emotionally important than the resurgence of lice because only the latter had connotations of laziness and personal impurity. The itching sensation of lice and their cultural undertones of uncleanness, not fear of disease, made lice physically and emotionally important to soldiers and civilians who practiced hygiene or “self-care” to prevent becoming overrun with vermin.<sup>36</sup> Both civilians and soldiers, not accustomed to lice, felt for the first time their crawling feet and mouths upon them in hospitals and camps. Working as a nurse in Washington, D.C., Hannah Ropes warned her daughter not to leave Boston, for fear of confronting lice, which crept into folds of clothing in search of skin. “My needle woman found nine lice insider her flannel waistcoat,” she wrote, “And I caught two inside my drawers!”<sup>37</sup> Few would have been mortified by the biting of mosquitoes, but shame and disgust accompanied contact with lice. Expressing the continued association of lice and personal uncleanness, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., wrote to his father from Virginia: “Shall I confess a frightful fact? Many of the officers including your beloved son have discovered themselves to have been attacked by body lice.”<sup>38</sup> Expressing disgust at catching a louse inside the drawers or being attacked by lice spoke to participants’ unpreparedness for the haptic experience of resurging lice.

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<sup>36</sup> Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature’s Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 54-55.

<sup>37</sup> John R. Brumgardt, ed., *Civil War Nurse: The Diary and Letters of Hannah Ropes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 115-116.

<sup>38</sup> Mark de Wolfe, ed., *Touched by Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., 1861-1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), 53.

Others who first encountered lice in the Civil War initially reacted with similar shame and embarrassment. Some hid the fact that they suffered from lice or distinguished themselves as separate and above the lousy among their ranks. Robert Kennedy, a captain in a Louisiana regiment, remarked that some his men “prefer to stand the *biting* than acknowledge they were lousy like the ‘Yahoos,’” a term that referred to the brutish, filthy Yahoos of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.<sup>39</sup> Some Union soldiers, too, took great pains to distinguish themselves in letters home from the lousy in the ranks. Herbert Carpenter of Connecticut called out by name the lousy “dead heads” in a letter to a friend at home. In addition to being lazy in cooking and wood duties, he wrote, “They are nasty, and Lousy, they never wash their persons &c or clothes.” Carpenter described dead heads as being “as lousy as the old cat,” and asserted that he and most of the others were not suffering from lice because they practiced good hygiene. They might find an occasional louse, but clean men had the discipline to strip, wash clothing, and apply a lice repellent as needed. Although never as clean as at home, Carpenter argued that there existed a vast difference between the dead heads and the rest. Another man from the same company called out the dirty ones as well and wrote that the hygienic among them took it upon themselves to throw the lousy into the river to force them to wash themselves clean.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Kennedy to mother, November 7, 1862, Kennedy Letters, University of Southwestern Louisiana, quoted in Larry J. Daniel, *Soldiering in the Army of Tennessee: A Portrait of Life in a Confederate Army* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert E. Carpenter to “Dear Friend Martin,” January 25 1863, Herbert E. Carpenter letter, #38835, Library of Virginia, Richmond [LV]. Henry T. Sellow to “Kind Friend Martin,” February 27, 1863, Martin L. Roberts letters, 1863-1864, #42191, LV. On discipline, cleanliness, and manhood, see Lorien Foote, *The Gentleman and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 47-51; Meier, “The Man Who Has Nothing to Lose,” 86.



The relationships between lice and their human hosts changed with time. Those who continuously experienced the crawling, biting sensation of lice began anthropomorphizing the insects, but at the same time situated themselves within, rather than apart from, the nonhuman environment. Jacob Harrison Allspaugh described the lice not as infesting but as “thickly inhabiting” his clothes, a subtle distinction that suggested the normalcy of humans as a louse’s habitat.<sup>41</sup> Acknowledging that lice inhabited rather than infested, the lousy did not shy away from killing the inhabitants. Boiling thickly inhabited clothing was the most effective way to kill tiny vermin. Charles Ackley downplayed the vermin in a letter to his wife as common, but noted they were working to get the upper hand on the population of lice. “The only way we can keep them off is to have our clothes washed often and scalded, but on campaign we can’t have it done very often and the last one hardly at all, and when we got here they were quite thick, but we are getting the start of them now.”<sup>42</sup> When lice appeared, messes and companies responded quickly by washing out their clothes, boiling them, and checking their skin and hair for the creatures. War was lousier than peace, but soldiers who practiced disciplined self-care had remarkable success in staying clean.

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<sup>41</sup> Jacob Harrison Allspaugh diary, June 8, 1862, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries. One prisoner at Andersonville described lice as finding “6 old settlers” while checking himself for lice. William T. Peabody diary, June 27, ANHS.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Ackley to “Dear Wife,” January 3, 1865, Charles Thomas Ackley letters to his wife, January 1864 – March 1865, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries. See also Ackley to “Dear Wife,” June 2, 1864, Ackley letters, Iowa Digital Library.

### The Lice Return to Stay

The feeling of lice was not unique to prisoners of war—some had felt them in camp before captivity—but the insects came to symbolize the uncleanness of prison life, and, in terms of scale, there were no lousier places in the war than prisons. If it were possible to faithfully examine prison environments from the louse's perspective, it would probably be a bonanza fraught with danger but also unparalleled opportunity for expansion and colonization. Lice were participants in a relational network that also included prisoners and the choices of government officials to concentrate into camps large numbers of sick and destitute prisoners. The population of prison lice grew exponentially with the influx of prisoners.

Prisoners continued to dislike the feeling of lice, and many stepped up their efforts of personal cleanliness to remain clean within the lousy environment. Yet they tempered their disgust, moderating their cultural attitudes and prejudices towards the insects. The primary adaptation that began outside captivity but became much clearer inside prisons was that being lousy was not itself a mark of flawed character. Prisoners first experienced a transitory phase of shock of revulsion, followed by a grudging acceptance of the lice's ability to outwit the nit-pickiest prisoner. In the process, the feeling of lice animalized human captivity, but lousy prisoners in turn humanized the insects and acknowledged the oversized role played by them. As Annihilation of lice was impossible, prisoners had to compromise on antebellum mores of cleanliness. Publicly picking lice from one's skin, which had been marked for a century as evidence of private uncleanness, shame, and possible moral or racial impurity, became a performance that projected personal cleanliness inside prisons.

Even though there were opportunities to experience lice outside prison, many attached meaning to the feeling of prison lice. Thomas Baker, a southern captain from the privateer *Savannah* accused of piracy in June 1861, wrote that the lice, cockroaches, and other bugs greatly bothered the prisoners until they were allowed to bring in new bedding and scrub and whitewash the surfaces.<sup>43</sup> George C. Parker was among the first Union prisoners to experience the tobacco warehouses in Richmond as a prisoner. He wrote of having no prior experience with lice in civilian life and remarked in a letter home what a “novel sight” it was to see poorly clothed men “sitting in the windows picking lice off their shirt.” The feeling of lice and the floor prevented Parker from sleeping because he “felt crawly all over and as I had to take my blouse and boots for a pillow, I was all of a shiver all night.” The itching sensation of lice combined with the stickiness of the floor that adhered to his skin and made him feel “like pulling sticking plasters apart.” Within a short time, however, the novelty had become part of Parker’s daily rituals of personal grooming and wrote to his parents and sister that he had “picked such lice out of my breeches as you would like to get your finger nail on.”<sup>44</sup> Although he felt the creeping sensation of lice alongside a host of haptic experiences, the insects quickly changed from a novelty to part of daily hygiene. Parker’s acquiescence to the felt experiences of imprisonment was a process experienced by many prisoners, particularly Union prisoners who wrote about lice more consistently than Confederates.

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<sup>43</sup> “Letter from Captain Baker,” July 10, 1861, *Official Records* ser. II, vol. 3, pg. 37.

<sup>44</sup> George C. Parker to family, October 16, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 21, Army Heritage Education Center. See also Anonymous diary, 1863, no pp.; Connecticut Historical Society; “Army Life and Prison Experience of Major Charles G. Davis,” pg. 12, MS 290, University of Tennessee.

Prisoners first experienced what Parker considered a “novel sight” as a shocking embarrassment. As Parker’s transition from novelty to horror to routine suggested, prisoners adjusted to the haptic experiences of lice over time. By January 1862, at least some of the Richmond prisoners had incorporated the insects into a seal for the “Richmond Prisoner’s Association” with the motto “Bite and Be Damned.” Another prisoner remembered that as the “constant companion” of prisoners, the body louse was the natural choice for such an organization.<sup>45</sup> Government worker James Bell of Delaware felt Libby prison’s environment in September 1862, and “the climax of all horrors to a decent man was the lice.” Bell’s word choice—decent—was intentional; he had previously considered lice a problem for the more barbaric members of humanity such as Confederate soldiers and political officials. Along the way to prison, Bell has observed Confederate soldiers in fields and woods “sitting naked oblivious to our presence, while they pursued their ragged garments in search of vermin. But we had escaped the abomination till now.” The environmental realities of Libby subjected everyone to the crawling creatures that covered floors, walls, food, and, more significantly to Bell, his skin and clothes.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> “Humors of Prison Life,” Richmond *Enquirer*, January 4, 1862; Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole, 1997), 25; Charles Bryant Fairchild, *History of the 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment N.Y. Vols* (Binghamton, NY: Carl & Matthews, 1888), 203.

<sup>46</sup> Bell to “My dear Brother,” September 30, 1862, Bell papers, DHS. On the lice, vermin, and varmints in 1864, see Ellery H. Webster diary, June 25, 1864, University of Vermont, Burlington [UV].



Figure 3.2. The Richmond Prison Association Seal. From near the beginning of the Civil War, lice were considered powerful contributors to the experience of captivity. Charles Bryant Fairchild, *History of the 27<sup>th</sup> Regiment N.Y. Vols* (Binghamton, NY: Carl & Matthews, 1888), 203.

Many Union captives in the western states of the Confederacy also had their first lousy experiences in southern prisons. In Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Elisha Rice Reed had the rare privilege of receiving new clothes in prison in early 1862, and he hoped to get home before lice moved in. Generally, Reed did not mind captivity as much as others and he enjoyed the time he had to carve jewelry, but he admitted having “a deep feeling of “Homesickness” when I have to skirmish with these devils. Will Abe in great mercy bless us with an exchange? I shall get to swearing if I write any more.”<sup>47</sup> For Reed the feeling

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<sup>47</sup> Elisha Rice Reed, January 15, 1862, Elisha Rice Reed Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society [WHS].

of lice made the realization of his place as a prisoner in the Confederacy more difficult to bear. Shortly before being exchanged in July 1862, Frank Hughes of Indiana described the collective embarrassment. He wrote, “officers are now seated around their bunks searching eagerly in the seams of their unmentionables for something they dont want to find.”<sup>48</sup> Further west at Camp Ford, Texas, a prisoner initially thought it amusing to see others initially hunting for lice, but within three days he considered it a normal part of the daily routine.<sup>49</sup> Although a reality in prisons, feeling lousy was a learned experience for people who did not normally experience lice.

As suggested by Bell’s insistence that Confederates were lousy and Reed’s connection between lice and place, prisoners argued that lice were endemic not just to the individual prisons, but the part of the sectional environment. In late spring of the same year, Charles L. Sumbardo first encountered what he called a “Southern Grayback” in a Mobile cotton warehouse, which he described as “one of the most touching episodes of army experience.” Sumbardo stated that “at first it seemed impossible to regard him with familiarity, but soon he became a constant bosom companion.”<sup>50</sup> Variations of the term, “grayback,” which implied similarity between lice and Confederate soldiers, were common in the Union army, but especially in prisons. William J. Flowers wrote from Camp Parole, Maryland, and described returning prisoners as covered with “Confederate

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<sup>48</sup> Norman Niccum, ed., “Documents: Diary of Lieutenant Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45, no. 3 (September 1949), 284, entry for July 7, 1862.

<sup>49</sup> [Anonymous,] “Diary of a Union P.O.W. (Captain Thompson?),” Hensch Papers pertaining to the Civil War, 1861-1865, 8474-u, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>50</sup> Genoways and Genoways, *A Perfect Picture of Hel*, 31.

creepers.”<sup>51</sup> The use of lice to animalize enemies was not new. During the Black Hawk War of 1832, a member of the same militia unit as Abraham Lincoln advocated killing Indian children with the grim maxim: “kill the nits and you’ll have no lice.”<sup>52</sup> Some Confederate prisoners believed that lice in the north were more vicious. When James Franklin encountered “swarms” of lice at Point Lookout, he commented that “they appear to be a larger and more ferocious breed than any I have seen in Dixie (this for the benefit of the naturalists).”<sup>53</sup> Writing about the experience of encountering lice, prisoners sought to contextualize it within the nature of the region and its people.

Confederate or southern-sympathizing prisoners, such as Franklin, wrote about lice in northern prisons less frequently, perhaps because they were more likely to have already experienced them in the army. Yet Confederates, too, considered lice the essential inhabitant of prison environments. When Tennessean James L. Cooper entered the barracks at Camp Chase in April 1862, his new messmates warned him about “the number and size of the lice and vermin of all kinds abounding in the prisons.” For the new arrivals like Cooper this news “was sickening to us, as we were just being initiated, but to them it seemed to afford infinite amusement.”<sup>54</sup> Randal W. McGavock, another new arrival from Tennessee, wrote that the barracks or “shanties” were places “where

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<sup>51</sup> William J. Flowers to “Friend Isham,” October 11, 1862, Hubbard Family papers, UV.

<sup>52</sup> John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press 2012), 332.

<sup>53</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary,” no pp., no date, p. 8 in my copy of the typescript.

<sup>54</sup> James L. Cooper memoir, 1866, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, Box 12, folder 11, pg. 13, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

vermin and all manner of creeping things infested.”<sup>55</sup> Some compared lice to the biblical plagues. Mary M. Stockton Terry received a letter at Fitchburg, Massachusetts, from a friend released from Fort McHenry after fourteen days where he had been “troubled by chinchies and one of Pharaoh’s plagues.”<sup>56</sup> James Franklin wrote that Confederates at Fort Delaware struggled to mediate the lice problem. “The lice have become a perfect plague to me. They appear to be omnipresent and crawl over everything and it is impossible to get rid of them.”<sup>57</sup> Hoping to swim the river and escape, he longed to get away from the island and the lice.<sup>58</sup>

Describing lice as native inhabitants, prisoners used the omnipresence of lice to make sense of their haptic environment. When Harlan Smith Howard first encountered lice, he lamented, “Boys are busily engaged in destroying body lice, Ugh.” Two days later he estimated that in a room of 278 prisoners, there were approximately 27,800 body lice.<sup>59</sup> John Harrold recalled that Libby prison was “‘alive’ with them—every crack and crevice filled—*working* with these disgusting insects.” In addition to inhabiting the walls, lice “lodged in our clothing, in our hair and whiskers, making a continual war upon us;

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<sup>55</sup> Jack Allen, ed., *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1959), 599, entry for March 1, 1862.

<sup>56</sup> Mary M. Stockton Terry diary, August 1, 1864, Mss5:1T2795, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond [VHS]. See also James J. Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier,” *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1957), 239-240.

<sup>57</sup> James H. Franklin, “Prison Diary Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” August 1, 1863, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond [MC]. See also Edmund E. Ryan diary, February 21, 1864, Peoria Historical Society Collection, Bradley University Library.

<sup>58</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” August 13, 1863, MC.

<sup>59</sup> Warren A. Jennings, ed., “Prisoner of the Confederacy Diary of a Union Artilleryman,” *West Virginia History* 36, no. 4 (July 1976), 314, entries for October 1, 3, 1863.



and, in spite of our best efforts, they maintained the mastery.”<sup>60</sup> A diarist at Libby in February and March, 1863, Charles B. Stone wrote about battling, fighting, routing, and anticipating the return of “the natives,” his nickname for lice. Stone won individual “skirmishes,” but the lice returned larger in size and in greater numbers as if vowing to bite another day. As the conditions deteriorated, Stone learned that one hundred prisoners had taken the oath of allegiance to the Confederacy simply to escape the prison conditions. Stone fumed, vowing to take his chances with the lice. He wrote, “Rather let me rot & be carried from the prison by the vermin that infest it than take the oath to such an unholy alliance.”<sup>61</sup> A former prisoner at Andersonville recalled a dream in which Confederates hooked up a wagon to a team of lice to carry the bread into the stockade.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> John Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence...* (Philadelphia, 1870), 34. See also George Clarkson diary, June 21, 1864, ANHS. On Belle Island, see John L. Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, introduction by Bruce Catton (New York: Paul S. Ericksson, 1963), 11. On the Pemberton building in Richmond, Ransom writes: “The lice are very thick. You can see them all over the floors, walls, &c. in fact everything literally covered with them; they seem much larger than the stock on Belle Isle and a different species.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> Stone diary, February 25, 28, March 2, 1863, UV.

<sup>62</sup> Ransom, *Ransom's Diary*, 80.



Figure 3.3. Searching for lice in clothing. Henry Vander Weyde, “Prison Realities” (left) and “Flanking the Enemy” (right). Courtesy of the Danville Museum of Fine Arts and History, Danville, Virginia.

Describing the relationship with lice as a struggle, a fight, or a skirmish, prisoners approached the subject of the lice themselves with a degree of humility unseen in the antebellum mores of cleanliness. They humanized the lice, often through military metaphors, in a faltering effort to preserve their own humanity. At Macon, Georgia, Asa Dean Matthews compared fighting the tenacious “graybacks” on his clothes to “the success of the Union army.... I drive them from my pants and they attack me in force on my shirt. Then I turn and fight them there and they are massed for a break on my other flank.”<sup>63</sup> George Harry Weston was different from many Confederate prisoners in that he called lice by their northern nickname graybacks, apparently not considering the comparison of lice to rebels derogatory. Weston fell into Union hands when Cumberland Gap in east Tennessee surrendered in 1863, and when he arrived at a Union prison he

<sup>63</sup> Asa Dean Matthews diary, July 14, 1864, MSA 371:12, Vermont Historical Society, Barre [VTHS]. See also Eugene Forbes, *Diary of a Soldier and Prisoner of War in the Rebel Prisons* (Trenton, NJ: Murphy & Bechtel, 1865.), 12, entry for May 25, 1864.

found “5 large Lice, the regular Grey Backs & Quite puffed up by the blood brought from my poor Dilapidated body.”<sup>64</sup> Weston’s morning ritual compared to that practiced by Union prisoners. After “feeling something nibbling at me last night,” he checked his clothing skeptically because there were no clear hiding places on his clothing. In the process he discovered sixteen “large Greybacks” in the seams of his shirt. Although Weston “succeeded in dispatching them,” he concluded that “it is no use to kill a louse, a dozen will come to his funeral.” Still, the nibbling sensation preoccupied him and he finished his entry by writing, “I feel a bite now & have to quit this & go to hunting.”<sup>65</sup> That Weston and some other Confederates used the term grayback suggests that there was no shame in being a louse. The insects were natural enemies, but prisoners wrote about them as though they were, if not equals, a tenacious match for their human hosts.

Coming to terms with the oversized power of lice required loosening and redefining cultural standards of cleanliness. Prisoners resisted being lousy and resented those around them whom they considered dirtier than themselves. At Libby prison, William D. Wilkins held onto his association of lice and uncleanness, writing that a neighbor “is actually alive with *lice* & spends nearly all the day, & sometimes, part of the night, in picking them off him.” While Wilkins held his neighbor to the standards of antebellum cleanliness, he thought himself relatively clear of them through strict discipline that kept the lice in check. At each morning delousing ritual, during which time the men sat naked and policed their clothing and skin, Wilkins only found an average of

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<sup>64</sup> George Harry Weston diary, October 5, 1863, Duke University [DU].

<sup>65</sup> Weston dairy, October 14, 1863, DU.

four each day.<sup>66</sup> On one hand, Wilkins's disgust towards his neighbor suggested an older understanding of lice and uncleanness; on the other, the synchronized, public delousing characterized a cultural compromise on cleanliness. It was no longer the presence of lice itself that carried a mark of shame. Wilkins reserved the social stigma for those who either gave up policing their skin and clothes or became overrun by the insects so that daily discipline no longer sufficiently, if temporarily, freed them of the feeling of lice.

Picking lice from the hair, clothes, and skin began as a sign of uncleanness worthy of embarrassment and transformed into a display of pride and self-discipline. James Sawyer experienced this shift when he wrote that he initially felt "rather ashamed at first" to groom himself, but in a short time "it became a disgrace not to do it."<sup>67</sup> The population of lice made it "impossible to keep them off you" because they covered the ground. Prisoners who did not search and kill lice "would be almost devoured with them."<sup>68</sup> The number of times prisoners deloused each day differed by time and place, but many prisoners agreed that twice daily was adequate.<sup>69</sup> James W. Eberhart described his process of "bugging" at Salisbury in which he held his clothes over a fire. On Christmas Eve in 1864, Eberhart wrote, "Oh how they do crack."<sup>70</sup> Lice picking among Confederate

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<sup>66</sup> Wilkins diary, September 5, 1862, LC.

<sup>67</sup> James H. Sawyer record book, pg. 106, Connecticut Historical Society. See also Daniel G. Kelley, *What I Saw and Suffered in Rebel Prisons* (Buffalo, 1868), 26.

<sup>68</sup> James H. Sawyer record book, pg. 106, CHS.

<sup>69</sup> Horace Smith diary, July 26, 1864, SC 504, WHS; William L. Tritt diary, February 16, 1864, M92-141, WHS.

<sup>70</sup> McLaughlin, ed., "Diary of Salisbury Prison by James W. Eberhart," *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 243, entry for December 24, 1864.

prisoners at Fort Delaware was also omnipresent. “Around the yards, by the sides of the barracks, inside the barracks, in the bunks, everywhere,” Franklin wrote, “are to be seen groups of men busily engaged, searching the hems and seams of their garments for that loathsome little persecutor which annoyed the Egyptians so much.”<sup>71</sup> By thriving, lice pushed prisoners to adjust their antebellum standards of cleanliness.

Prisoners who did not delouse themselves became the objects of disdain among other prisoners. James J. Gillette wrote his parents in November that although the food was sufficient he longed to be “in the open air unaccompanied with filthy clothing and other men’s animal life.”<sup>72</sup> Nehemiah Solon wrote, “Some here neither louse nor wash and they are one mass of filth, some are entirely discouraged and do not even care to live and there is no shame for them to do so after they lose their ambition.”<sup>73</sup> An anonymous prisoner at Belle Island remembered that anywhere else “we would be ashamed to be seen looking for lice in our clothes, but it is a matter of course to have lice in Richmond. Any one who expects to be free of them while he is a prisoner of war will be very much disappointed.”<sup>74</sup> However, it was a disgrace to “allow them to breed and accumulate on our clothes. Any one by diligent searching can keep them from breeding on him and thus keep considerable [sic] free of them. Some however are so lazy that they allow the lice to

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<sup>71</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” July [no day], 1863, Museum of the Confederacy.

<sup>72</sup> James J. Gillette to “Dear Parents,” November 27, 1861, Gillette papers, Library of Congress [LC].

<sup>73</sup> Nehemiah Solon diary, June 1, 1864, CHS.

<sup>74</sup> “Anonymous Diary,” June 24, 1863, CHS.

get so thick on them as to be seen crawling on the outside of their clothes.”<sup>75</sup> The Civil War and captivity in particular transformed the meaning of publicly delousing the hair, skin, and clothes. It became a way to preserve culture in places where lice reigned.

The prisoners’ relationships with lice also reflected broader concerns about clean skin in captivity. The prisoners who carefully searched their skin and clothing for lice were likely the same who attempted to maintain antebellum bathing regimes, which by the nineteenth century were well established in cultural mores of cleanliness. Mornings for John Baer at Andersonville included shaking from his clothing and performing “the necessary ablutions for cleansing the hands and face.” Baer and many other prisoners knew the water to be of poor quality, and he admitted “the washing is more from force of habit than any particular good that arises from it.”<sup>76</sup> Those who did not wash their hands, faces, and clothing had skin blackened with smoke and dirt. Baer considered degeneration as gendering, noting that those in captivity of ten months “have lost all principles of manhood and become perfectly childish.”<sup>77</sup> When exchanged prisoners came back in such a filthy state, Assistant Surgeon William S. Ely thought it was impossible to remove. “The functions of the skin are entirely impaired,” he stated, “and in many cases they are encrusted with dirt, owing as they say, to being compelled to lie

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<sup>75</sup> “Anonymous Diary,” 1863, no pp, CHS.

<sup>76</sup> John Baer Diary, July 12, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>77</sup> Baer diary, August 7, 1864, ANHS. See also James diary, February [no day], 1864, MHS; Charles Chaplin diary, June 22, 1864, VHS; Peabody diary, July 8, 1864; Forbes, *Diary of a Soldiers*, 15; U.S. Congress, *Prisoners of War*, 34, 37, 39, 69; New York *Herald*, November 26, 1864. On bathing, see Kathleen Brown, *Foul Bodies: Cleanliness in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

on the sand at Belle island [sic]; and the normal function of the skin has not been recovered until the cuticle has been entirely thrown off.”<sup>78</sup>

The sick and wounded became perpetually lousy, adding to the problems of the prison environment and earning a combination of sympathy and scorn from the rest. Jacob Heffelfinger, wounded and captured outside Richmond in 1862, described his first encounter with lice in a hospital for captured Union soldiers. “The house is becoming infested with lice. How repulsive! To be compelled to lie here, lousy, and no means of avoiding it.”<sup>79</sup> As Horace Smith’s health declined at Belle Island, he confessed that he could barely “muster strength enough to crack a louse but necessity compels me to muster all the strength I can twice a day for that purpose.”<sup>80</sup> At Danville prison, Henry H. Ladd found it too cold in November to take off his clothes in search of lice. Two days later, he wrote, “Suffering with cold. Nearly naked. Covered with lice. Oh, what a fate! Must we die? Will not God deliver us from this hell?”<sup>81</sup> Some prisoners took it upon themselves to groom the prisoners who were too sick or demoralized to do so themselves. In May 1864, Nehemiah Solon described the desperate condition of a man who no longer had the strength to fight the lice. “They had eaten holes into his flesh,” he wrote,” and the

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<sup>78</sup> 38<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Report no. 67, *Returned Prisoners*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Entry for July 9, 1862, Jacob Heffelfinger Diary, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 14, Army Heritage Education Center, Carlisle, PA [AHEC].

<sup>80</sup> Entry for August 15, 1863, Horace Smith Diary, SC 504, WHS. See also Michael Dougherty, *Prison Diary, of Michael Dougherty...* (n.p.: p.p.), 43; Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 228; Jennings, ed., “Prisoner of the Confederacy,” *West Virginia History*, 315.

<sup>81</sup> Henry H. Ladd diary, November 23 and 25 (quote), 1864, in Orson Blair Curtis, *History of the Twenty-fourth Michigan of the Iron brigade* (Detroit: Winn & Hammond, 1891), 434-35.

holes were full of loathsome crawling lice eating his very life away.” Sick and depressed, “he had given himself up to die but they had taken him to the brook and were trying to get him clean.”<sup>82</sup>

Others viewed those crawling with unchecked vermin with indifference, suspicion, and contempt. Robert Sneden asserted that the German and Irish immigrants were the “dirty and unkempt” because they practiced no daily or even weekly ablutions. They also made no attempt to wash their floors, which created a breeding ground for the vermin that affected the whole building. And some gave up. Sneden wrote, “The sick lay upon the dirty floors crawling with vermin and too lazy or helpless to keep themselves clean as they had lost all ambition to do so.”<sup>83</sup>

The dying not only gave up on fighting vermin, they increasingly crawled like animals—even insects—about the prison ground. Revulsion to crawling as animalistic, even by small children, went back at least to the eighteenth century in the American colonies.<sup>84</sup> At Andersonville when the “sick call” sounded, prisoners “had to hobble, crawl, or were borne the rest of the way.”<sup>85</sup> John Harrold wrote that sick prisoners at

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<sup>82</sup> Nehemiah Solon diary, entry for May 28, 1864, Connecticut Historical Society. See also Alonzo Tuttle Decker diary, August 23, 1864, ANHS; Wayne Mahood, ed., *Charlie Mosher’s Civil War* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1994), 240.

<sup>83</sup> Sneden, *The Eye of the Storm*, 170. See also testimony of Henry Davidson, *Prisoner of War Treatment*, 40.

<sup>84</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 16; Classen, *The Deepest Sense*, 104-105.

<sup>85</sup> Henry W. Tisdale diary, July 10, 1864, ANHS.



Andersonville reverted to “crawling and creeping...unable to stand erect.”<sup>86</sup> Daniel Kelley, who became paralyzed for the rest of his life in captivity, lost the use of his lower limbs in October 1864, at Millen, Georgia. For a while he could crawl on his hands and knees, but eventually he could not even draw up his knees.<sup>87</sup>

### Desensitization of Touch

While prisoners described the actions of lice as important to the haptic environment, they also describe the proclivities of fellow captives as desperate, instinctual, and animalistic. The susceptibility of human skin to colonization by lice paralleled the increased vulnerability of skin to the hands of other prisoners. Prisoners often lacked fellow feeling and both lice and men threatened skin in a world of poverty, gangs, and thieves who lived by taking sustenance from other prisoners. At Fort Delaware, James Franklin complained, “We still continue to be crowded and jostled by rogues, blasphemers and ---- (ah! Adversity makes strange bedfellows) lice.”<sup>88</sup> Franklin categorized lice and rogues together because both groups violated skin. Lice, individual thieves, and organized gangs were all threats against the skin that thrived by taking sustenance from others. The prevalence of robbery, assault, and murder made it sometimes difficult to believe that prisoners were supposed to be comrades under the same flag. Although many postwar narratives sought to highlight community solidarity,

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<sup>86</sup> Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence*, 44. See also Daniel G. Kelly, *What I Saw and Suffered in Rebel Prisons* 68.

<sup>87</sup> Daniel G. Kelley, *What I Saw and Suffered in Rebel Prisons* (Buffalo: Matthews & Warren, 1868), 78.

<sup>88</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary,” August 9, 1863, MC

wartime writers had a much more grim understanding of human nature when put under pressure. Charles H. Blinn of Vermont described the near murder of a would-be pickpocket before the guards pulled him from a mob. When the guards assumed the crowd had cooled down, they released him and found they were mistaken. The mob “pitched into him, knocking him down and beating him fearfully,” and they may have killed him had the guards not stepped in again. The mob then turned on itself, degenerating into a series of fights in which Blinn had the skin scraped from his knuckles.<sup>89</sup> Pickpockets drained money and valuables from prisoners and those caught were roughly handled.

As populations of prisoners and lice grew in 1864, the level of violence directed against the skin increased with the desperate prison conditions. Comparing fellow prisoners to “ravenous wolves,” George Crosby thought that captivity provided a window to “see human nature in its true light” because “the men with brussels [bristles] on their backs got crackers, the smoothbacks got none. I was one of the smoothbacks this time.”<sup>90</sup> Walter Graham, at Danville prison, wrote that during a fight in August 1864 one prisoner bit another’s ear off.<sup>91</sup> At Andersonville, James H. Dennison remarked that there “is very litel human nature hear among the prisoners” and John Baer noted that “selfishness takes

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<sup>89</sup> Charles L. Blinn diary, June 30, 1862, University of Vermont, Burlington.

<sup>90</sup> George Richardson Crosby diary, May 9, 1864, VTHS; John A. Baer diary, July 20, 22, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>91</sup> Walter Graham diary, August 19, 1864, MSC – 194, VTHS.

precedence.”<sup>92</sup> George M. Hinkley surmised that at Andersonville, “Every man is for himself here, one man will hardly accommodate another to a drink of water out of his cup when he is at the spring.” That same day there was excitement in the camp over the capture of the so-called raiders, at least one of the gangs that preyed on other prisoners. Hinkley wrote that within their tents they had buried “watches, jewelry, blankets, clothing and camp dishes.”<sup>93</sup> Nehemiah Solon recalled that four or five hundred men in Andersonville “make a business of plundering and robbing” and “every night we have to lay with a club in our hand to protect ourselves and blanket.”<sup>94</sup> Solon noted that not even Sunday provided a respite from fighting and gambling, making it seem just like any other day.<sup>95</sup>

Confederates in the North also felt a declining solidarity among the prison population. At the Old Capitol Prison, E. L. Cox wrote that small gangs coordinated robberies by “by getting the party in their cell then one catches his hands behind him while another throws a blanket over his head then the third one rifles his pockets.”<sup>96</sup> Iowan Bryon McClain described a small prison in Memphis that held a mix of Union soldiers accused of desertion and other crimes, civilians, and Confederates. McClain wrote that if a new prisoner had no friends they were “initiated,” or robbed, in ways

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<sup>92</sup> James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, ed. Jack Klasey (Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Historical Society, 1987), 46, entries for July 6, 7, 1864; John A. Baer diary, July 15, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>93</sup> George M. Hinkley Diary, June 30, 1864, #File 1864 April 11, WHS.

<sup>94</sup> Nehemiah Solon memoir, undated, unpaginated, Connecticut Historical Society.

<sup>95</sup> Solon memoir, unpaginated, attributed to May 29, 1864.

<sup>96</sup> Cox diary, July 11, 1864, VHS. See also entries for July 13, 14, 1864.

similar to those robbed by guards. The initiation, McClain wrote, “consists of one strong man getting behind them and puting [sic] his arms around their necks and choking them while the others strip them of all good clothing and other valuables if there are any after which they are given an old suit.”<sup>97</sup> Many fights were petty. In a fight between Union prisoners from Kentucky and New York at Belle Island in 1863, three men died.<sup>98</sup> A hungry and jealous prisoner in James Eberhart’s mess at Salisbury yelled “blood money” at a man walking by with mutton, and the man returned with 30 or 40 of his friends to fight. Grabbing pieces of wood, bricks, and “anything we could get our hands on,” Eberhart’s mess. It took intervention by the Confederate guards to stop a general melee.<sup>99</sup>

Others killed and mutilated for revenge. At Elmira in 1864, prisoners killed an “oath taker” suspected of informing on an escape plan.<sup>100</sup> Union prisoners nearly murdered a prisoner for the same accusation. After “arresting” the man, a vigilante guard clubbed him and left tied him up in one of the many holes jutting out of the side of the hill at Andersonville. The next day they paraded the man around camp with his head shaved and a large “T” marked in his forehead and “Trater” marked on his back.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Bryon McClain to “Dear mother,” March 1, 1864, Bryon McClain letters, 1863-1864, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries.

<sup>98</sup> Heslin, “Diary of a Union Soldier,” *New York Historical Quarterly*, 243, entry for October 24, 1863.

<sup>99</sup> McLaughlin, ed., “James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 240, entry for December 3, 1864.

<sup>100</sup> Marcus Toney diary and letter book, October 26, 1864, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, box 7, folder 9, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>101</sup> John B. Gallison papers, July 16, 17, 18, 1864, Ms. N-1266, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston

Another onlooker wrote they shaved his head and “pricked a large T” into his forehead with India ink.”<sup>102</sup> Confederate guards took him outside the walls to prevent his own men from killing him. With beatings, head shavings, and brandings, retribution could be merciless.<sup>103</sup> Prisoners suspected of wishing to take the oath of allegiance to their captors were commonly whipped and beaten.<sup>104</sup>

Entrepreneurs in the north and prison officials in the south acknowledged the presence of vermin and the inhumanity shown between prisoners. Northern entrepreneurs took financial advantage of civilian interest in gazing at filthy Confederate prisoners. One advertisement for the observation deck stated that with a telescopic lens one might see the lice crawling on the prisoners’ skin and clothes.<sup>105</sup> A Confederate congressional committee, in reaction to assertions from the United States Sanitary Commission and released prisoners, asserted that lice came into their prisons on the backs of Union prisoners. The committee reported that even though they made great efforts to keep the

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<sup>102</sup> James Hoster diary, July 18, 1864, Emory University. See also Baer diary, July 17, 1864, ANHS. See also Paul C. Helmreich, “Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41, 1 (January 1976), 21, entry for 18, 19, 1864.

<sup>103</sup> Gallison papers, July 20, 1864, MHS. While some were horrified by the violence, others found it amusing. See John Alexander Gibson diary, November 29, 1864, Gibson Family papers, VHS.

<sup>104</sup> Baer diary, August 9, 1864, ANHS; James diary, June 15, 1864, MHS.

<sup>105</sup> Rochester (New York) *Daily Union and Advertiser*, August 12, 1864, quoted in Michael P. Gray, *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2001), 23. On the “business” of excursion trips and viewing stations, see Gray, “Captivating Captives: An Excursion to Johnson’s Island Civil War Prison,” in *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War*, ed. Ginette Aley and J. L. Anderson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 16-32.

prison free of vermin, “it was the result of their own habits, and not of neglect in the discipline or arrangements of the prison.” Attributing the insight to imprisoned Union officer Neal Dow who visited the Belle Island to deliver clothing, the officials argued that Confederate prisons contained “‘the scrapings and rakings of Europe.’ That such men should be filthy in their habits, might be expected.”<sup>106</sup> The report also contextualized the unfeeling of prisoners towards each other as a product of that filth. Attempting to quell the accusation that Union prisoners froze to death at Belle Island, the report argued “only one of them was ever frozen to death, and he was frozen by the cruelty of his own fellow-prisoners, who thrust him out of the tent in a freezing night, because he was infested with vermin.”<sup>107</sup> Gesturing back to nineteenth-century expectations of cleanliness, the supposed filthy habits of prisoners could draw paying spectators or justify the freezing to death of a lousy prisoner.

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The feeling of lice had staying power in memories of the Civil War for soldiers, especially for prisoners who described humans as a habitat, challenging the anthropocentric notion of humans being apart from, and superior to, the nonhuman world. Memoirist John D. Billings described the fluid relationship: “Perhaps he would find only *one* of the vermin. This he would secretly murder, keeping all knowledge of it from his tent-mates, while he nourished the hope that it was the Robinson Crusoe of its race cast

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<sup>106</sup> Confederate States of America Congress, *Report on the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Investigate the Condition and Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Richmond: Congress, 1865), 10.

<sup>107</sup> C.S.A. Congress, *Report on the Joint Select Committee*, 12.

away on a strange shore with none of its kind at hand to cheer its loneliness.”<sup>108</sup> Billings also used an agricultural metaphor comparing soldier to crops. “What the Colorado beetle is to the potato crop,” Billings continued, “they were to the soldiers of both armies.”<sup>109</sup> Billings’ point seemed to be that human hosts, though prone to murdering their insect guests, were susceptible to the same whims of nature that governed agriculture.

Former prisoners who wrote from memory had poor accuracy for events and dates, but they wrote about the feeling of lice in ways that mirrored wartime writings. John Ransom’s “diary,” which was probably written entirely from memory and borrowings from other writers, described the haptic experience of captivity. Ransom recalled hunting for “big grey backs” each morning at Belle Island and that the lice became worse while en route to Andersonville because in their crowded condition it was difficult to pick nits and lice from clothing.<sup>110</sup> Ransom also used lice to distance the North from the South. He wrote that prisoners played a game called “odd or even” in which players guessed how many lice another had pulled from some part of his clothing. “Think this is an original game here,” Ransom wrote, “never saw it at the North.”<sup>111</sup> Some years after release, Jonathan Boynton described daily grooming as a necessary but always incomplete task, as the “graybacks...seemed to thrive on the lean Yankee bodies.”

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<sup>108</sup> John Davis Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee, or, the Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 80; Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna*, 136.

<sup>109</sup> Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee*, 82, see also 81, 85; Sam Settles quoted in Daniel, *Soldiering*, 85; J. G. Barrett, *Yankee Rebel: The Civil War Journal of Edmond DeWitt Paterson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 84.

<sup>110</sup> John L. Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, introduction by Bruce Catton (New York: Paul S. Ericksson, 1963), 11, 51.

<sup>111</sup> Ransom, *Ransom’s Diary*, 92.

Boynton remembered being “fairly alive with them” before even realizing it and “had my hair cut as short as possible to dispose of a fine crop of head lice.” Those who neglected to “skirmish” with lice, Boynton said, were “doomed to endless torture, misery, and death.”<sup>112</sup> When survivors thought back to captivity, they remembered the experience of being crawled upon, bitten, and nibbled upon by the small but tenacious and unrelenting louse.

At least one man who traveled through lousy western prisons in the Confederacy became a well-known entomologist and strong proponent of using chemicals to counteract insects in the early twentieth century. Stephen Alfred Forbes, who spent four months as a Union prisoner in 1862, later became a professor of zoology and entomology at the University of Illinois. In 1914, Forbes spoke about insects as many prisoners had written about lice in the 1860s: natural competitors and enemies, but also beings whose agency should not be underestimated. “We commonly think of ourselves as the lords and conquerors of nature,” he admitted, “but insects had thoroughly mastered the world and taken full possession of it long before man began the attempt.” Plants, animals, homes, and even human skin was ever vulnerable to insects. He cautioned, “We can not even protect our very persons from their annoying and pestiferous attacks, and since the world began we have never yet exterminated—we probably never shall exterminate—so much

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<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Boynton Memoirs, pg. 28, Box 13, Folder 11, Civil War Document Collection, AHEC. See also Frederick E. Schmitt reminiscence, ca. 1914, pg. 4, Wis Mss 179S, WHS; A. A. Van Vlack, “A Glimpse of Life in a Rebel Prison in 1864 & 1865,” Box 1, Van Vlack family papers, #89210, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.



as a single insect species.”<sup>113</sup> What changed between the 1860s and the 1910s, however, was the ability to deploy chemical weapons against insects and, simultaneously, humans. The congruence of wartime enemies and insects did not emerge in the twentieth century, but as a mode of thinking in an age of chemical warfare it facilitated the extermination of insects and humans.<sup>114</sup>

What diarists experienced and memoirists remembered was a moment when the relationship between lice and humans was in flux, altered by conflict, concentration, and confinement. The Civil War created the right environmental and social conditions for lice to thrive, and civilians and soldiers recognized the resurgence of lice. Prisoners in particular described places of captivity as the quintessential lousy environment, and the omnipresence of creeping insects on walls, floors, and skin forced the human participants to adapt to the feeling of lice. In the process, prisoners altered their cultural predisposition to internalize embarrassment and disgust. Prisoners also perceived lice as agents contributing to the haptic environment that might be managed with hygiene but not eradicated. Violence, competition, or grudging respect marked the relationship of lice and men and the actions of both shaped the felt environment of captivity.

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<sup>113</sup> Stephen Alfred Forbes, *The Insect, the Farmer, the Teacher, the Citizen, and the State* (Urbana: Illinois State Laboratory of Natural History, 1915), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen A. Forbes, quoted in Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 23.

## CHAPTER 4:

### “I OFTEN DREAM OF YOU AND HAM & EGGS”: THE FAR REACH OF HUNGER

They feed us here but once a day  
And so little a bird could take it away  
With stinking meat & muddy soup,  
Twill give you Measles or the Croup.

—“Song of Belle Island,” Newell Burch  
Diary, undated, Wisconsin Historical  
Society.

James Franklin felt hunger pangs in November 1863. Born about 1840 in Allonby, an English town on the Irish Sea known for its sea-bathing resorts, Franklin emigrated to Alabama and left a clerkship in Selma to fight for the Confederacy. Wounded and captured at Gettysburg, he ended up at Point Lookout, Maryland, a small strip of land where the Potomac River meets the Chesapeake Bay. Franklin had previously enjoyed the visual and auditory beauty of the Irish Sea, “listening to the lovely swash of the waves upon the shore, and to the song sung by them in the dying sunlight.” Yet Franklin’s senses did not register pleasure at Point Lookout. “The old sea music,” Franklin wrote, “ceases to gladden my heart. I hear no more the sad refrain breathed by the murmuring waves.” It seemed to him that hunger impaired his ability to make aesthetic judgments. He admitted, “The truth of the matter is that I am hungry, and I am almost ashamed to say it, visions of a nice and appetizing meal, kept obtruding themselves in a vulgar manner between me and Nature’s beauties.” Generalized hunger

expressed itself in specific cravings, including visions of “dainty mutton chops, eggs, and nice hot rolls, swimming in a sea of butter.” The once swashing, now silent, waves “kept forming into breakers of meat, and breaking down into early roasted chickens, with green parsley scattered over, and around them.”<sup>1</sup> The distress prevented Franklin from appreciating nature’s aesthetics.

As Franklin’s distressed diary entry suggests, food filled the private thoughts of the hungry. Twenty-first century readers would not be wrong to point out that Franklin craved macronutrients—protein, carbohydrates, and fat—but this insight would not have resonated with Franklin. Even such expressions as sweet, sour, salty, and bitter were not rigid subcategories of taste until after the microscope helped rationalize taste by identifying and describing microscopic taste buds in 1867.<sup>2</sup> Judging the wholesomeness of food in the present is a multisensory act but modern western society gives considerable authority to vision. Franklin saw no nutritional labels blasting the number of calories, no list of nutrients and ingredients, and no expiration dates. These labels visualize eating with the goal of allowing consumers to make rational choices about what they should consume, when they should say no to appetite, and how to maintain a trim visual appearance. In a time where dieting and gluttony comeingle, vision has become more important for eating in the last hundred and fifty years. Often described as the most

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<sup>1</sup> Franklin, “Prison Diary,” October 30, 1864, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> Janet A. Flammang, *The Taste for Civilization: Food, Politics, and Civil Society* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 168; Robert Jütte, “The Senses in Philosophy and Science: From the Senses to Sensations,” in *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Age of Empire*, ed. Constance Classen (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 132-34.

rational of the senses, vision is increasingly the body's *de facto* gatekeeper of eating, a function that historically fell to the so-called lower senses. Franklin and his contemporaries judged the wholesomeness of food on vision as well, but they gave considerable weight to smelling, tasting, and feeling to navigate the world of food. Consumers in the past experienced food differently than in the present because eating required entrusting the lower senses with more responsibility in achieving the tactical and strategic goals of satiety and survival.

Prisoners gave meaning to the food they ate through a multisensory experience grounded in taste but closely associated with touch and smell. Essential for judging food, these senses have been typically grouped together as the “lower” or bodily senses in contrast to the “higher” or cognitive senses of sight and hearing. In many ways, the “emotional” and imprecise sense of taste has historically served as the antithesis of rational vision, which some modern scholars point out genders the senses and distances women from men. Several philosophers from Aristotle to Immanuel Kant downplay literal taste and prefer to use it only as a metaphor to describe visual or auditory artistic appreciation.<sup>3</sup> Yet the subjectivities of taste and the meanings embedded in historical digestion are important for understanding lived experiences in the past, even after the “great divide” during the Enlightenment, which some sensory scholars identify as the period when vision became idealized as the conduit for reason and rational experience. If taste, touch, and smell were considered more inherently animalistic than the rational

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<sup>3</sup> Flammang, *The Taste for Civilization*, 168; Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 3, 13-26; See also, Korsmeyer, ed., *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 75-91.

senses of hearing and seeing, it made them all the more sensitive to degradation and animalization. Eating distinguished the epicures from the masses and the humans from the animals. Gastronomer Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's self-aggrandizing aphorisms, "Animals feed; man eats; only the man of intellect knows how to eat" and "Tell me what you eat: I will tell you what you are," suggested the need to use taste to distinguish class and humanity.<sup>4</sup> In times of hunger, however, the cravings of appetite made a fool of the epicurean.

This chapter argues that taste, smell, and touch helped prisoners navigate and explain a transition from eating like humans to feeding like animals. Yet the animalization of eating was unequal. Experiences of eating varied by location, status, and the ability to engage in prison markets. Organized thematically, the first section focuses on the context of hunger during the Civil War, the multisensory experience of prison rations, and the gustatory transition from freedom to captivity that blunted the sense of taste. The second section builds from the first, focusing on the long-term changes affecting the hungry and the animalizing effect of prolonged hunger. Drawing on Union and Confederate accounts, these two sections also trace the overlapping and diverging patterns of eating experience. A third section then follows the strategies prisoners used to satisfy appetites. Location and, especially, class distinguished the full from the starving. The final section turns to visual representations of hunger outside prisons, following how the North visualized starvation and Confederates undermined the veracity of this argument by casting doubt on the connection between eye-witnessing and objective truth.

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<sup>4</sup> Flaming, *Taste for Civilization*, quotes on 167. See also Brillat Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste, Or, Transcendental Gastronomy*, trans. Fayette Robinson (Waiheke Island : The Floating Press, 2008), 12.

### Denigration of the Palate

Patterns of eating reflected antebellum tastes and wartime shortages. The diet of people living in the United States generally consisted of meat, bread, and, to a lesser extent, vegetables. Despite some consistency, social categories influenced ideas about taste and patterns of consumption. A contributor to *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1855 racialized taste, describing the lips of blacks as "thick, fleshy, and protruding," indicative of "a much duller, more material nature of mind and of senses." The writer furthermore noted that many women ate alone, either because it was an "unpoetical process" or because lips were sexualized.<sup>5</sup> Although pork was widespread and eaten nationally on the Fourth of July, some planters and doctors considered hog meat more suited for black slaves and other hard laborers because it was difficult to digest and unfit for more delicate stomachs. Planters ate less pork than slaves and a more diverse, sometimes international, diet. Southerners ate cornbread alone or sometimes with wheat bread, the grains for the latter having a poorer yield in the southern climate than the north. In contrast, New Yorkers and New Englanders preferred wheat bread and beef over corn and pork. Between 1854 and 1860, New England farmers raised more sheep than pigs and consumers bought on average two and a half times more cattle than pork.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "The Senses. I. Taste," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 12, no. 67 (December 1855), 75, 76-77; Flammang, *Taste for Civilization*, 159-161; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa* (1988; reprint, New York, Vintage Books, 2000), 84-94.

<sup>6</sup> Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Sold South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 48-51, 63;

The Civil War affected food supplies and patterns of eating and shortages affected armies and civilians, especially in the South. Traveling soldiers also scavenged, fished, and sampled local fares.<sup>7</sup> White women led at least thirteen bread riots in southern cities, in part because Union and Confederate soldiers took food from civilians, sometimes targeting houses of opposite loyalties but other times willing to take from anyone.<sup>8</sup> A

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Joe Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 56-60; Marvin Harris, *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 115, 116. See also John C. Gunn, *Gunn's Domestic Medicine...* (Madisonville, TN: Johnston & Edwards, 1836), 147-148; Herbert C. Covey and Dwight Eissach, *What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways from the Slave Narratives* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009). On race, gender, and sexuality, but less on taste and the mouth, see Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2012), 121-133; Anthony M. Keiley, *In Vinculis; or, the Prisoners of War* (Petersburg, VA: Petersburg Daily Index, 1866), 31. By hunting, soldiers expressed a continuation of antebellum food and game culture. Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White: Nature, History, and Ritual in a Carolina Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 17-37, 45-51.

<sup>8</sup> Joan E. Cashin, "Hungry People in the Wartime South: Civilians, Armies, and the Food Supply," in *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War's Ragged Edges*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 161-162. See also Mark Fiege, "Gettysburg and the Organic Nature of the American Civil War," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of Warfare*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 93-109; Barbara Bellows, *Ersatz in the Confederacy: Shortages and Substitutes on the Southern Homefront* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); William C. Davis, *A Taste for War: The Culinary History of the Blue and the Gray* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003). On hunger in the armies, see James I Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 71-72. Several special issues of *Repast: Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor* focus on Civil War foodways. See *Dealing with Deprivation: Responses to Foodstuff Scarcities in the Civil War* 27, no. 3 (Summer 2011); *The Home Front: Domestic Food Customs of the Civil War Era* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2011); *Civil War Battle Front! Keeping Troops Fed on the Fields of Combat* (Summer 2012); *A Spur to the Food Trade: Edible Legacies from the War Between the States* 29, no. 1 (Winter 2013).

Confederate soldier compared the appetite of an army to an aptly named armyworm, slinking through gardens and devouring vegetables.<sup>9</sup> In doing so they adapted to wartime shortages by preserving antebellum patterns of supplementing staples of meat, corn, and vegetables.

Purchasing, foraging, and stealing food, participants underscored that eating was part of a relational network between humans and nature. Moreover, the abandonment of agricultural fields, the footprint of armies on forests and fields, and the destructive force of battles simultaneously ruined landscapes but also stimulated regrowth.<sup>10</sup> As populations of insects, rodents, and other animals participated in shaping the environment of the Civil War Era, pioneering plant species recolonized what humans called ruined land. Blackberries grew quickly on cleared land and damaged ecosystems, making old fields, campsites, and battlefields all likely habitats for rapid expansion. Illinoisan John M. King noted the resurgence of blackberries on the Resaca battlefield in Georgia “as if human blood had fertilized the soil.”<sup>11</sup> Blackberry bushes also lured human stragglers

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<sup>9</sup> Bell Ivrin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Cincinnati and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1943), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Claire E. Swedberg, ed., *Three Years with the 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois: The Civil War Diary of John M. King* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1999), 218-219. See also Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental Reference Guide* (Baton Rouge, 2012), 25; Oscar Osburn Winther, ed, *With Sherman to the Sea: The Civil War Letters, Diaries, and Reminiscences of Theodore F. Upson* (Bloomington, IN, 1958), 122; J. M. Greiner, J. L. Coryell, and J. R. Smither, eds., *A Surgeon's Civil War: The Letters and Diary of Daniel M. Holt, M.D.* (Kent, OH, 1994), 125; William Burson, *A Race for Liberty; or, My Capture, Imprisonment, and Escape* (Wellsville, OH: W. G. Foster, 1867), 30-31. On ruination see Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).



from both armies, leading to exchanges, sometimes friendly and sometimes not, between enemies.<sup>12</sup> In many ways blackberries symbolized the broader linkages in which humans and nature acted in relation to each other within the context of war, ruination, and renewal. By looking for opportunity and to nature, soldiers preserved the liberty and discrimination of choosing what to eat.

Imprisonment changed the relationship between prisoners, nature, and food by narrowing opportunities. As food became scarce, prisoners thought about eating more than they had before the onset of hunger. Henry Stone admitted at Andersonville that he could “now only think of my belly.”<sup>13</sup> The subject of food and hunger filled diaries, occupied conversations, and stayed fresh in the minds of memoirists. Confederate John C. Allen of Virginia fell into Union hands near Romney, West Virginia, in February 1864, and he recorded little on food in the early days of confinement. When Allen arrived at Fort Delaware, however, he recorded only what he ate for long stretches of time. Interspersed with admissions of hunger, Allen’s pocket diary became in practice a repetitive food journal: coffee, bread, and beef for breakfast; soup, potatoes, and bread for dinner; and coffee, bread and beef for supper.<sup>14</sup> Union prisoner Bryan Parsons had

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<sup>12</sup> Swedberg, *Three Years with the 92<sup>nd</sup> Illinois*, 99; John F. Brobst, *Mary Well: Civil War Letters of a Wisconsin Volunteer*, edited by Margaret Brobst Roth (Madison, WI, 1960), 80. See also Julie A. Doyle, John David Smith, and Richard M. McMurry, *This Wilderness of War: The Civil War Letters of George W. Squire, Hoosier Volunteer* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 72; K. J. Bauer, ed., *Soldiering: The Civil War Diary of Rice C. Bull, 123<sup>rd</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry* (New York, 1988), 130-31; Davis, *A Taste for War*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Henry H. Stone diary, August 22, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>14</sup> John C. Allen diary, March 29, 1864, Ms5:1AL536:1, Virginia Historical Society. This was also documented in the Minnesota Starvation experiment, which, although anachronistic to my period of study, generally affirms similar behavior and

similar devotion to food journaling as a prisoner in the South. It was not until his capture near Richmond in 1864 that Parsons began taking meticulous notes on the size, taste, and smell of everything he ate. He wrote, “Had a piece of stinking ham and corn bread for breakfast,” he wrote in August, and for dinner he scooped up “some more of the celebrated Bean Soup.”<sup>15</sup> James Cannon, captured in August 1864 in Virginia, spent the final months of the war imprisoned at Libby, Belle Island, and Salisbury. In his diary he appealed to God for meat. In December he wrote, “a little corne Bread for Breakfast...O my god Send me Some meat and Deliver me from this place.” Cannon occasionally scraped together enough money to buy an extra ration of bacon, but his continual prayers for meat suggest his calls often went unsatisfied.<sup>16</sup>

While hungry prisoners catalogued their meals in diaries, food intruded into conversations and dreams as well. They shared memories of repasts and cooking recipes. Commenting on the absurdity of it, George Hegeman wrote, “It is laughable to hear some of the young men and boys from the rural districts talk of the goodies, pies and puddings their mothers made at home, and actually smacking their lips over the recollection.”<sup>17</sup>

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preoccupations. See Ancel Keys, et al., *The Biology of Human Starvation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1950), vol. 2, pg. 833-835, 837.

<sup>15</sup> Bryon Parsons diary, entry for August 22, 1864, Bryon Parsons Collection, LC. See also Stone diary, memoranda pages, ANHS; Florence C. McLaughlin, ed., “Diary of Salisbury Prison by James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56, no. 3 (July 1973), 211-251.

<sup>16</sup> James Canon Diary, January 1, 1865, Wis Mss 178S, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>17</sup> James J. Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” *New York Historical Quarterly* 41 (1957): 247, entry for December 19, 1863. See also Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *Camp Morton, 1861-1865, Indianapolis Prison Camp* (1940; reprint, Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society, 1995), 123.

Ezra Hoyt Riddle recalled a prison scene in which his mess carefully wrote down each other's recipes and resolved to "have a big lot of those things cooked, baked, boiled or fried under our own supervision and give them a good soul-satisfying test ourselves."<sup>18</sup> Some prisoners regularly recorded having food dreams. Addressing his diary entry to "Hannah," William Peabody wrote, "I often dream of you and Ham & Eggs." Four days later Peabody recorded dreaming of coming home to a table of ham and eggs, but it turned into a nightmare because even in his dream he could not eat them<sup>19</sup> Peabody, like thirteen thousand other prisoners at Andersonville, never left Georgia. Thinking, writing talking, and dreaming about food became a chief occupation for the hungry and the dying.

Quantity was not the only problem, as prisoners also went hungry because the food they received smelled and tasted foul. In September 1863, Virginian Unionist William S. Tippet wrote that the soup at Belle Island had a "bitter nasty taste."<sup>20</sup> Bryan Parsons at Danville, Virginia, could not stomach the bean soup because it "tasted flat like dishwater."<sup>21</sup> At Point Lookout, James Franklin could not identify "the extraordinary flavor which our soup has" until he found what he and his messmates concluded was a

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<sup>18</sup> Ezra Hoyt Riddle, *Dancing along the Deadline: The Andersonville Memoir of a Prisoner of the Confederacy*, ed. Mark A. Snell (Novato, CA: Preside Press, 1996), 12. See also Ransom, *Ransom's Diary*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> William Peabody T. Peabody diary, July 28, August 1, 1864, ANHS. See also John L. Ransom, *John Ransom's Diary*, introduction by Bruce Catton (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1963), 10.

<sup>20</sup> William S. Tippet diary, September 17, 1863, #39949, reel #2698, Library of Virginia.

<sup>21</sup> Parsons diary, October 21, 1864, LC.

used tobacco chew.<sup>22</sup> Allen O. Abbot recalled that in addition to the “strong, rancid, and maggoty” bacon they received beans that were “were small, red or black, a little larger than a pea, with a tough skin, a strong bitter taste, emitting a flavor much like an old blue dye-tub.”<sup>23</sup> Drawing on comparisons to articulate taste, prisoners described prison rations as repulsive.

In expressing flavor, prisoners treated smell and taste interchangeably. Foul, sour, rancid, strong, tainted, and similar language spoke to the interconnected experiences of taste and smell. Prisoners often complained of sour cornmeal.<sup>24</sup> David Kennedy at Andersonville drew buggy rice that had been transported in old soap barrels. It exuded a strong presence of soap and was “enough to make a body puke to look at.”<sup>25</sup> Allen Abbott described the “thick, strong, and almost black” soup as “unpleasant to smell, much more to eat.”<sup>26</sup> The nose and the mouth arbitrated the difference between wholesome and repulsive.

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<sup>22</sup> Franklin diary, pg. 11, MOC.

<sup>23</sup> Abbott, *Prison Life*, 26. See also Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 171.

<sup>24</sup> McLaughlin, ed., “James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 232, 233, entry for June 20, 1864; Merton Coulter, ed., “From Spotsylvania Courthouse to Andersonville: A Diary of Darius Starr,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 41, no. 2 (June 1957), 186.

<sup>25</sup> David Kennedy diary, entry for May 24, 1864, MNHS. See also Robert H. Kellogg diary, June 24, 1864, Robert H. Kellogg papers, 1862-1931, Ms68013, Connecticut Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup> Abbott, *Prison Life*, 41. See also Franklin J. Krause diary, June 4, July 12, 1864, MS #14096, UVA; George Hegeman, “The Diary of a Union Soldier,” ed. James J. Heslin, *The New York Historical Society Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1957), 240; Warren A. Jennings, ed., “Prisoner of the Confederacy Diary of a Union Artilleryman,” *West Virginia History* 36, no. 4 (July 1976), 318, entry for November 7, 1863.

Taste also had a strong haptic dimension. Northern travel writers before the Civil War often criticized the texture of cornbread, and prisoners continued this tradition. An antebellum traveler compared cornbread to a pioneer because it cleared a path “scratchingly down the throat.”<sup>27</sup> Stressing the haptic and gustatory realities of slavery, Frederick Douglass compared the coarse “unbolted meal” that slaves ate to the refined flour used for the bread of slaveholders.<sup>28</sup> The cornbread eaten by Union prisoners was likely closer to what Douglass remembered than northern travelers experienced. The higher quality cornbread included eggs, milk, and wheat flour. In contrast, prison corn bread was more specifically a “corn dodger,” “hoecake,” or “pone,” consisting of water and cornmeal, with or without salt.<sup>29</sup> Union prisoners believed that abrasive cornmeal caused the severe bowel complaints and diarrhea in prisons. It was coarse, often indigestible, and unfit for human consumption. At Montgomery, Alabama, Nathaniel C. Kenyon described the cornmeal as a coarse mixture of corn and cob “making a very good food for horses and cattle but poor feed for human beings unless in a starving

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<sup>27</sup> Cyprian P. Willcox diary, November 18, 1844, cited in Plaag, “Strangers in a Strange Land,” 262. One strong theme in sensory accounts is, strangely enough, humor. James Vance wrote in his diary that Confederates must be attempting to turn them into “Cornfeds” because “we are stuffed with Corn in various ways,” Vance diary, July 6, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Lecture on Slavery, No. 1 delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, NY, on Sunday evening, December 1, 1850,” in Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (New York: International Publishers, 1950), vol. 2, pg. 135.

<sup>29</sup> On cornbread and pones, see Richard J. Hooker, *Food and Drink in America, A History* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1981), 46-47; Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting*, 20-21; Covey and Eisnach, *What the Slaves Ate*, 80-82. Prisoners seemed to use cornbread, corn dodgers, and pones interchangeably.

condition.”<sup>30</sup> At Andersonville in June 1864, Eugene Sly wrote that he “lost all my appetite for cornbread” and Henry Stone compared it to horse feed.<sup>31</sup>

Prisoners believed severe bowel complaints resulted from the abrupt change in diet, and at least some Confederate doctors agreed. Dr. Joseph Jones’s medical inspection of Andersonville concluded that much of the suffering at Andersonville resulted from a change in diet from Irish potatoes and wheat bread to Indian corn. The cornmeal was not only “disagreeable and distasteful” to the prisoners; it ravaged their intestines. Although he reasoned that the increase of the African American population indicated “indian meal” was wholesome, he admitted that it had a “decided irritant effect” on the bowels of newcomers. He wrote, “Those who have not been reared upon corn-meal, or who have not accustomed themselves to its use gradually, become excessively tired of this kind of diet when suddenly confined to it without a due proportion of wheat bread.” Prisoners slowly starved amid piles of cornbread because they feared what would happen if they ate it.<sup>32</sup>

Many noticed that hunger blunted the smells, tastes, and feeling of prison food over time. Seasoned prisoners relished what new arrivals found revolting. Prisoners

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<sup>30</sup> Nathaniel Kenyon diary, May 25, 1862, University of Alabama; See also Alfred D. Burdick diary, May 19, 1864, P82-2504, Wisconsin Historical Society; Norman Niccum, “Documents: Diary of Lieutenant Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45, no. 3 (September 1949), 277; Ransom, *Ransom’s Diary*, 81; Davis, *Taste for War*, 95; Edmund E. Ryan diary, February 21, 1864, Peoria Historical Society Collections, Bradley University Library.

<sup>31</sup> Sly diary, June 1 and 2, 1864; Henry F. Stone diary, June 20, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases of the Federal Prisoners Confined to Camp Sumpter, Andersonville, Ga.,” in United States Sanitary Commission, *Sanitary Memoirs of the War of the Rebellion* (2 vols., New York, 1867-1869), vol. I, pg. 647.

traced the transition from a new arrival, or “fresh fish,” to a seasoned prisoner through taste. James Franklin could eat crackers and meat from the beginning, but he and the new prisoners could not stomach the maggoty soup, which they “abandoned at the first taste of it.” However, Franklin noticed that seasoned prisoners “appeared to enjoy it amazingly,” and within a few days he “devoured it with as great relish as any one of the rebels.”<sup>33</sup>

Union prisoners also noted that hunger affected their sense of taste. At Belle Island, Horace Smith complained about the absence of salt in the meat and the presence of bugs in the rice. Yet he confessed, “it tastes good for we are about half starved and we are not allowed to buy anything here at any price.”<sup>34</sup> An anonymous prisoner temporarily at Tallahassee, Florida, described how hunger and humor helped prisoners give up their revulsion to boiled pigs heads. He wrote that they were “putrid, sickening, [and] loathsome; and we thought we *could not* eat them: but hunger at length overcame our disgust and we were glad to get anything, even if alive with maggots.” A grim joke that the heads were those “of the pigs we had killed just before our capture,” helped them swallow the meat.<sup>35</sup> Hunger and even symbolic cannibalism helped prisoners adjust to food they could not change.

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<sup>33</sup> James Franklin, “Prison Diary Fort Delaware and Point Lookout,” no page numbers, transcription pg. 8, Museum of the Confederacy. See also King, *My Experiences*, 29; John C. Allen diary, May \*\*, 1864, VHS. After twenty-four weeks of semi-starvation, the Minnesota Experiment found that 47 percent of participants were “indifferent about the taste of food.” Keys, *Human Starvation*, vol. 2, 824.

<sup>34</sup> Entry for July 25, 1863, Horace Smith Diary, SC 504, Wisconsin Historical Society. See also Stone diary, August 20, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>35</sup> *A Voice from Rebel Prisons*, 6. At Libby, see Bryon Parsons, September 1, 8, 1864, Parsons collection, LOC.

## Animalizing Taste

Soldiers and prisoners brought with them a habit of drawing on metaphors of familiar domestic and wild animals to describe the experience of eating that was common in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Sterns of Wisconsin described his pleasant camp quarters in northern Mississippi to his wife. He wrote that the abundance of provisions and a nearly unlimited supply of coffee made him “as happy as a skunk in a hen’s nest.”<sup>36</sup> In spring 1863, James L. Hoster argued with the wife of a Confederate soldier over the fitness of cornmeal and beans for human consumption. While she was proud Confederates could fight on cornmeal, he replied that he knew “Southern Soldiers could live on anything that a hog could, being so near like that animal.”<sup>37</sup> David McRaven, a Confederate guard at Salisbury, North Carolina, described taking squads of Union prisoners “like cattle” to get water from the creek outside the prison walls.<sup>38</sup> Using the natural world as a source of comparison—good and ill—with human conditions, prisoners described the sensory experience of eating in prison as animalistic.

Prisoners blurred the nineteenth-century line between human and animals by comparing their food to animal feed. Although David Kennedy disliked the strong-smelling beef, he saved his ire for the half-cooked mush. He wrote that his own hogs ate

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Rescum Sterns to “My dear wife,” December 3, 1862, Stern family papers, September – December 1862, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries.

<sup>37</sup> James L. Hoster diary, April 27, 1863, Manuscripts, Archives, Rare Books Library, Emory University.

<sup>38</sup> Louis A. Brown, ed., “Correspondence of David and Amanda McRaven,” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 26, no 1. (January 1949), 53.



better cornmeal and what he was issued was “good to give a hog the colic.”<sup>39</sup> Eugene Sly compared his living and eating to hogs. “We are liveing [sic] like hogs,” he wrote, “and our rations are not fit for good *hog* feed.”<sup>40</sup> John Ransom remembered a ration of cornbread and rice soup at Belle Island as feeling “coarse,” tasting “sour,” smelling “musty,” and unfit for even the “swine at home.”<sup>41</sup> Describing the cornbread, beans, and maggoty bacon with a sickening stench, John Harrold could only eat the cornbread even though its texture betrayed the presence of corncob and hulls “scarcely fit for horse feed.”<sup>42</sup> The tastes, smells, and feeling of prison food culminated in the belief among prisoners that their conditions punctured the line between human and nonhuman existence.

Other prisoners ate raw food, scavenged through refuse, and preyed on the nonhuman population for sustenance. Frederic Augustus James noted that some of the prisoners at Salisbury Prison had “‘gone to grass’ & eat *boiled clover* for greens.”<sup>43</sup> George Hegeman, a Union prisoner at Belle Island admitted in his diary to eating raw cornmeal because he “could not wait to cook it” even though the coarse pieces of meal

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<sup>39</sup> Kennedy diary, entries for June 27, July 1, and July 2, 1864, MNHS.

<sup>40</sup> Eugene Sly, June 2, 1864. See also entries for August 9, September 19, November 4, 25, 1864. See also Paul C. Helmreich, “Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41, 1 (January 1976), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ransom, *John Ransom’s Diary*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> John Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence...* (Philadelphia, 1870), 34. See also Forbes, *Dairy of a Soldier*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Frederic Augustus James diary, May 14, 1864, MAHS.

and husk “felt like eating tacks.”<sup>44</sup> He later pondered the thought of eating a cat if he could get his hands on one.<sup>45</sup> That November Hegeman’s mess caught and slaughtered a hog and in December, a dog. “This is the first time I ever tasted dog,” he wrote, and “I consider it wholesome and nourishing without the taint one would naturally suppose dog meat had.”<sup>46</sup> The belief that he had eaten the prison commandant’s dog was a common story at Belle Island, and the belief that it was revenge might have it more palatable.

Hunger unmoored the distinction between edible and inedible in the North as well. Recalling his experience at Camp Chase, Arthur Pue Gorman recalled the prisoners taking note of a fat cat in the prison “filled with food that should have been ours,” and they skinned and cleaned it like a rabbit, soaked it in water, and made stew with onions and potatoes. Gorman enjoyed the taste of it while in prison, but it affected him so much after the war that he could no longer stomach rabbit.<sup>47</sup> E. John Ellis found a cat cooking at Johnson’s Island and wrote, “Oh! Epicurus, a cooked cat. I placed it close enough to my olfactories to get the scent and was tempted to taste it, but my prejudices were too

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<sup>44</sup> Hegeman Diary, entries for October 26 and 30, 1863, in Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” 243.

<sup>45</sup> George Hegeman Diary, entries for October 24, 1863, in James J. Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” *New York Historical Quarterly* 41 (1957): 242.

<sup>46</sup> Hegeman Diary, entries for November 10 and December 26, 1863, in Heslin, “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” 244.

<sup>47</sup> John R. Lambert, Jr., “The Autobiographical Writings of Senator Arthur Pue Gorman,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 58, no 2 (June 1963), 164. See also D. E. Gordon Diary, entry for January 15, 1865, Museum of the Confederacy.

strong.”<sup>48</sup> Although Ellis was not hungry enough to eat the cat, his desire to do so pointed to the denigration of taste and the animalization of the human palate.

Confederate prisoners turned to rat eating considerably quicker than Union prisoners, perhaps because rat eating was already occurring in parts of the Confederacy. Jefferson Davis had tried to make rat sound more wholesome by comparing them to another rodent, the squirrel, but Confederate soldiers disagreed on whether they could stand the taste of rat.<sup>49</sup> Growing accustomed to the beneficial presence of humans in prisons made rats easier to catch when hunger compelled prisoners to alter the interspecies relationship. On Johnson’s Island, John Dooley of Virginia described the process of rat hunting as a night activity in which hunters reached into drains and under barracks. The rats were “so tame,” he wrote, “that they hardly think it worth while to get out of our way when we meet.”<sup>50</sup> Dooley wrote that the rats were “very good for food, and every night many are captured and slain. So pressing is the want of food that nearly all who can have gone into the rat business, either selling these horrid animals or killing them and eating them.”<sup>51</sup> Rat eating was also common at prisons for noncommissioned officers and enlisted men. At Camp Chase, three members of Thomas Sharpe’s mess with

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<sup>48</sup> Martina Buck, “A Louisiana Prisoner-of-War on Johnson’s Island, 1863-65,” *Louisiana History*, 4, no. 3 (summer 1963), 239-240.

<sup>49</sup> Cashin, “Hungry People in the Wartime South,” 167; Bellows, *Ersatz in the Confederacy*, 62-63.

<sup>50</sup> J. T. Durkin, ed., *John Dooley, Confederate Soldier: His War Journal* (Notre Dame, IN, 1963), 163. See also Winslow and Moore, *Camp Morton*, 124.

<sup>51</sup> Durkin, ed., *John Dooley*, 163.

nothing to eat made breakfast “on a big grey rat caught in a dead fall.”<sup>52</sup> Curtis R. Burke wrote that Confederates at Camp Douglas cleaned rats like they would squirrels and let them soak in salt water before cooking. And the Fort Delaware *Prison Times* reported a rise in demand for rats in spring 1865.<sup>53</sup>

Although some prisoners normalized eating taboo foods, not all were convinced of its necessity and looked down on those who practiced it. John A. Gibson, a Confederate prisoner at Fort Delaware, was unsure whether the cause was “our short rations or an experience of someone who wished to be odd.”<sup>54</sup> At Elmira, Marcus Toney was even less sympathetic. He disliked being kept awake “by the noise of rat hunters” and thought that “If men were actually starving there might be some excuse for this heathen behavior.”<sup>55</sup> While Confederates disagreed whether rat eating was really necessary, they considered it part of the animalization of taste.

Consuming cats, dogs, rats, and inedible food, prisoners believed that they were no longer eating like men but feeding like animals. Anthony Keiley thought that

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas A. Sharpe diary, October 10, 1864, MSS #20, Box 6, Folder 19, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. See also Roger Pickenpaugh, *Camp Chase and the Evolution of Union Prison Policy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 110-111.

<sup>53</sup> Fort Delaware Prison Times Collection, Library of Congress. See also J. G. Barret, ed., *Yankee Rebel: The Civil War Journal of Edmund DeWitt Patterson* (Chapel Hill, 1966), 194-95; John Ransom, *Ransom's Diary*, 30.

<sup>54</sup> John Alexander Gibson Diary, entry for December 2, 1864, Gibson Family Papers, Mss2G3598b, Virginia Historical Society. A prisoner at Elmira wrote that rats “smelt very good while frying.” King, *My Experiences*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Marcus Toney diary and letter book, September 16, 1864, TSLA.

confinement on insufficient food had the potential to turn men into hogs and devils.<sup>56</sup> Recalling captivity at Florence, South Carolina, Hugh Moore described the internal struggle he went through when another prisoner wanted a share of his rations of corn meal and red peppers, which he had received from the guards in exchange for his knapsack. The whole time he was cooking “there was a fight going on within me between the man and the animal, which lasted all the time the mush was cooking... I had divided [rations] with him before, but this was harder, for the cold and hunger was harder to bear now.”<sup>57</sup> Luther Guiteau Billings recalled it was common to see officers fighting “like dogs over a dirty bone or crust of bread” and prisoners greedily ate rations as quick as possible to prevent others from stealing them.<sup>58</sup> Hunger prevented solidarity in prisons by encouraging vigilance, mistrust, and self-interest.

The haptic experience of eating further animalized captivity. Westerners had considered eating with the hands uncivilized for centuries, and the lack of utensils and plates dredged up feelings of a more animalistic past. When Griffin Frost first arrived at Gratiot Street Prison, St. Louis, he wrote that were served by hand and had to eat with their hands. After being moved upstairs to an officers’ cell, he remarked, “We have the

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<sup>56</sup> Anthony M. Keiley, *In Vinculis; or, The Prisoner of War* (New York: Blelock, 1866), 63.

<sup>57</sup> Clifford H. Haka, ed., “Illinois Commentary: A Reminiscence of Confederate Prison Life,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 65, no. 4 (winter 1972), 458. See also Ransom, *Ransom’s Diary*, 27, 39. See also House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 36.

<sup>58</sup> Luther Guiteau Billings memoir, 59, Luther Guiteau Billings Collection, 1865-1900, Library of Congress.

privilege of using knives, forks, and spoons, which we prefer to the *finger plan* in vogue below.”<sup>59</sup> Robert Knox Sneden recalled that prisoners on his floor in the Pemberton warehouse had a few knives and forks but no tin plates or spoons other than what they made with their hands from wood and bone. They made plates by stealing tin from the roof at night under the auditory cover of strong winds. These materials they split and turned up the edges to make plates.<sup>60</sup> Allen Abbott succeeded in scrounging up broken knives and forks after several weeks in Libby Prison. “We were glad to get even these, for we had been eating with our fingers, and bits of sticks, or any thing we could find.”<sup>61</sup> Prisoners used their hands to make utensils so they would not have to eat with their fingers.

While hunger compelled prisoners to eat with their hands, it also affected how they used their hands to make meals. The hungriest in nineteenth-century America, especially among the poorest working-class families and westward settlers, made certain that no bones went to waste. Many prisoners described heavily processing bones in ways that historical archaeologists have found evidence of at the Donner Party site and Chinese mining camps.<sup>62</sup> Union and Confederate prisoners, especially in 1864, took care to

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<sup>59</sup> Griffin Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal*... (Quincey, IL: Quincey Herald Book and Job Office, 1867), 28, 29, entries for January 5 and 7, 1863. On table manners, see Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1939; reprint, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978), 105-107; Flammang, *Taste for Civilization*, 103.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Knox Sneden, *The Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey*, Charles F. Bryan, Jr., and Nelson D. Lankford eds. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 168, 171.

<sup>61</sup> Abbott, *Prison Life in the South*, 41.

<sup>62</sup> M. A. B. Ellis, Christopher W. Merritt, Shannon A. Novak, and Kelley J. Dixon, “The Signature of Starvation: A Comparison of Bone Processing at a Chinese Encampment in

extract marrow from bones issued to them in rations. Marcus Toney described the vigor with which Confederates devoured soup, bread, and bones “as eagerly by some of the men as if they had not tasted food for some time.”<sup>63</sup> Prisoners at Camp Morton, Indiana, considered bone butter a luxury and produced it by splitting bone joints, boiling the fragments, and collecting the residue.<sup>64</sup> Confederate prisoner John R. King recalled taking discarded bones into his bunk “and after gnawing the soft ends, sucked at the bone for hours at a time. I wasn’t the only one. No bones went to waste as long as there was any subsistence left on them.”<sup>65</sup> While some carefully processed bones, others greedily gnawed on them for additional sustenance.

Hungry Union prisoners used similar methods to process bones. At Salisbury, William Francis Tiemann recalled that he preferred rations of meat and bone to meat alone. “These were esteemed a great luxury,” he wrote, “as they were broken up and boiled in water to make soup, or if the recipient was so fortunate as to possess the wherewithal to purchase rice they were cooked with that, the marrow and grease combined with the rice making a most palatable and savory mess!!”<sup>66</sup> At Christmas, Tiemann and his messmates determined to make a dinner suitable for the occasion. While another prisoner procured a pan, Tiemann “broke up our share of the bones, cracking

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Montana and the Donner Party Camp in California,” *Historical Archaeology* 45, no2 (2011): 91 [97-112].

<sup>63</sup> Marcus Toney diary and letter book, August 15, 1864, TSLA.

<sup>64</sup> Winslow and Moore, *Camp Morton*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> King, *My Experiences*, 45.

<sup>66</sup> William Francis Tiemann Memoir, 18-19, William Francis Memoir, 1894, Virginia Historical Society.

them into small pieces about one half inch in size and very rich and full of marrow they were, and I fairly gloated over them as I thought what a rich and palatable mess they would produce when boiled with the rice!!!”<sup>67</sup> Recalling the anticipation while boiling beans and rice, Tiemann wrote that he and the other hungry cooks “smacked our lips.” When the hungry satisfied their appetite, it came by scavenging and extracting every morsel of sustenance.

### Markets and Mail

Although some prisoners described the degradation of the sense of taste and the animalization of eating, great variation existed at different times, places, and among different classes of prisoners. Confederate officers, political prisoners, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted men described usually ample food alongside reasonable treatment early in the war. Edward W. Drummond, captured at Fort Pulaski in early 1862, thought that he “could not have chosen a better place for captivity” than Fort Lafayette in New York Harbor. From the island, Drummond and the others not only had a grand view of New York City, Brooklyn, and Jersey City, and they had access to meat and bread three times each day and coffee in the morning and evening. Yet even in favorable locations, the quality of rations varied. In late April, Drummond recorded his distaste for temperature of the cold coffee, the texture of the stale bread, and the taste of the raw pork.<sup>68</sup> The southern sympathizing editor of the Baltimore *South*, Thomas W. Hall

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<sup>67</sup> William Francis Tiemann Memoir, 27-29, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>68</sup> Roger S. Durham, *A Confederate Yankee: The Journal of Edward William Drummond* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 44.



recorded that he received bread, pork, and rice and he promised his mother that any complaints of hunger were the “mere figure of effect.” Hall did longingly imagine a warm dinner, vegetables, or “a well-ordered meal,” but he admitted that “there is always enough to keep ‘body and soul together.’”<sup>69</sup> Good food did not erase the unpleasantness of captivity, but for prisoners like Hall in 1862 it eased the experience of captivity.

Mail and markets offered the two most important ways for prisoners to preserve their sense of taste by supplementing rations. Although Drummond sometimes complained about rations and Hall longed for outside food, both were better off than most prisoners because of cash and edibles sent through the northern mail networks. The ability to send for food through the mail enabled them to taste the comforts of home. Drummond, Hall, and other prisoners in a similar position, filled letters with requests for food from home or money to buy food in prison. Hall regularly purchased tea, extra coffee, and vegetables, and he catalogued additional wants in letters home. At Fort Lafayette in October 1861, Hall wrote, “All contributions in the shape of biscuits, crackers, sandwiches, cold meats, such as tongues, pressed corned beef, spiced beef or beef a la mode, hams, cheese, bologna, sausage, pickles, preserves, [in] short anything and everything which will stand a journey and ‘keep’ will be thankfully received.”<sup>70</sup> After receiving one of his several packages at Fort Warren in February 1862, he wrote in reply that “the beef and ham are delicious. I have tasted nothing nicer since I have been in prison, nor often out of it.” The ham, in particular, triggered taste-based memories. He

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas W. Hall to his mother, February 10, 1862 (quote) and October 16, 1861, Thomas W. Hall Correspondence, MHS.

<sup>70</sup> Hall to “Dear Mother,” October 11, 1861, MHS.

wrote that the ham, “recalls the recollection of the ham she sent me at Fort Lafayette, the first descent morsel I put in my mouth after arriving there.”<sup>71</sup> Buying food and receiving the rations from home allowed prisoners to exercise the freedom of choosing between tastes.

The more fortunate prisoners, especially those in the North, ate well in spring 1862, but money and connections already divided experience. Confederate officers and enlisted men described writing home sought to convince family members of their wellbeing. Charles A. Ray, captured at Fort Donelson and imprisoned at Camp Chase, told his parents not to worry because they received hominy, coffee, tea, sugar, bacon, pork, and beef. Ray wrote that the guards said that they “intend to treat us well and win us back and all live like brothers again.”<sup>72</sup> Alabamian Joseph T. McGehee, another Camp Chase prisoner, wrote his mother of his capture and attempted to allay her fears about his health. “We have meat, potatoes, corn, meal, flour, sugar, tea & coffee to eat and drink, and those who have money can furnish themselves in anything the market affords.”<sup>73</sup> Describing abundant food helped pacify concerns from home, but references to money and the market indicated an important class division. From the beginning, the poorer prisoners suffered. W. M. Smith wrote to a friend, “I have to do without many little necessities, which others enjoy.” The little money he once had, Smith wrote, “I

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<sup>71</sup> Hall to his mother, February 20, 1862, Maryland Historical Society. See also Jack Allen, ed. *Pen and Sword: Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1859), 604-605.

<sup>72</sup> S. B. Moore to “Dear Father and Mother,” April 20, 1862, Camp Chase papers, folder 8, VHS.

<sup>73</sup> Joseph T. McGehee to I. C. McGehee [his mother], April 19, 1862, Camp Chase papers, folder 6, VHS.

purchased milk with, which, when I can get [it], I mostly live on, I would rather have fifty dollars now, than three times the amount under other circumstances, but I am learning to do without.”<sup>74</sup> For these prisoners and their families eating became tantamount to experience. In the coming years those with money and friends consistently ate better than the rest.

Union and Confederate prisoners wrote home with lengthy instructions for sending particular consumable items. In Richmond’s Libby Prison, Union prisoner Henry Clay Taylor asked his father for clothing, soap, and a hair brush as well as a “one *ham*, can of Butter, can *Chowder*, five pounds coffee, four pounds sugar, onions, pickles, and any thing of substantial fat you can put up.”<sup>75</sup> Confederate Ben W. Coleman of Tennessee wrote home from Point Lookout prison camp in December 1863 and requested hams, butter, pickles, catsup, tobacco, and wine. In anticipation of the package, he wrote, “My mouth is watering for them now.”<sup>76</sup> Marcus Toney wrote in praise of a box of eatables that “none but those who have experienced Prison life know how refreshing it is to receive luxurious after being on prison diet.”<sup>77</sup> Family members expressed the longing to be with loved-ones through references to food. F. J. Collins, the mother of Confederate prisoner of war Robert Collins, wrote from Franklin, Tennessee, to her son at Point

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<sup>74</sup> W. M. Smith to J. S. Reynolds, “My Dear Friend,” April 20, 1861, Camp Chase papers, folder 9, VHS.

<sup>75</sup> Henry Clay Taylor to his father, October 1, 1863, Henry Clay Taylor Papers, 1856-1865, #SC 311, WHS.

<sup>76</sup> Ben W. Coleman to “My Dear Parents,” December 7, 1863, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, box 8, folder 26, TSLA.

<sup>77</sup> Marcus Toney to “Mrs Nash,” August 5, 1864, Marcus Tony diary and letter book, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, box 7, folder 9, TSLA.

Lookout, Maryland: “I wish you was at home to help us eat watermilion [sic] and so on.”<sup>78</sup> Sending food was a way of preserving ties with loved-ones.

Throughout the war, Confederates and some Union prisoners continued to benefit from packages sent from relatives, friends, and sympathetic strangers. Mary Stockton Terry, a woman arrested for smuggling and spying in 1864, also received rations from outside supporters. In the Fitchburg prison for women she received a box of eatables from friends in New York, including “2 smoked tongues, 1 ham, 3 bottles of Claret, 1 do of sherry, 2 bottles pickles, 1 English cheese, 3 bundles of crackers, 2 lbs of tea, 1 lot of peaches.” She received everything except the wine, which the matron confiscated.<sup>79</sup>

Although packages enabled some prisoners to receive food from the outside, senders and recipients feared mail was not getting through. Kimball received a box of food and supplies in the mail in March 1864, but mold damaged all the contents that the Confederates had not stolen.<sup>80</sup> Senders and recipients worried that prison guards were stealing contents of the packages. In letters from Kentucky to a friend in Ulster County, New York, Courtney Pickett expressed her uneasiness that packages would never reach their recipients. “It breaks our hearts nearly,” she wrote, “to think of the yanks getting even a biscuit intended four our gentlemen.”<sup>81</sup> Even after a recipient acknowledged

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<sup>78</sup> F. J. Collins to “Dear Robert,” August 26, 1864, Robert B. Collins letters, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, box 8, folder 29, TSLA.

<sup>79</sup> Marry M. (Stockton) Terry diary, September 23, 1864, Mss5:1T2795:1, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>80</sup> Kimball diary, March 4, 1864, HC.

<sup>81</sup> Courtney (Heron) Pickett to “Dear Mrs Battelle,” January 8, 1864, section 1, folder 2, Finney family papers, Mss1F4974a, VHS.

receipt of a package, Pickett had lingering suspicions of the “intolerable thieves” guarding prisoners. She believed that the examination of letters prohibited the recipients from stating that items were missing from the box.<sup>82</sup>

The provisions that entered prisons often came from family members, but they also arrived from strangers. Esther B. Cheesborough, an antebellum writer whose work appeared in such outlets as the *Southern Literary Gazette*, *Charleston Courier*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, and *Godey’s Lady Book*, moved from her home on Church Street in Charleston to Philadelphia two years before the Civil War. In 1862 and 1863, Cheesborough raised thousands of dollars from southern sympathizers in Philadelphia and sent provisions to Confederate prisoners at Fort Delaware and the West Philadelphia Hospital. Her careful records on the quantities of clothing and food sent to prisoners indicate that she sent Jamaica Ginger, biscuits, rice, jelly, and lemons to the hospital. To Fort Delaware she sent tobacco, grapes, wine, sausage, beef, bologna, apples, biscuits, pickles, coffee, wine, confectionary, tomatoes, cheese, catsup, black tea, green tea, sugar, butter, milk and spices including mustard, black pepper, salt, and nutmeg.<sup>83</sup> At Christmas Cheesborough hosted a reception in Philadelphia to collect donations and at each knock at the door “in would walk ‘a rebel,’ with a fine supply of mince-pies concealed under her cloak.”<sup>84</sup> Cheesborough continued to collect and send provisions to Confederate

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<sup>82</sup> Pickett to “My Dear Mrs Battle,” March 22, 1864, section 1, folder 2, Finney papers, VHS.

<sup>83</sup> Esther B. Cheesborough notebook, September – December 1862, Esther B. Cheesborough papers, 1852-1890, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>84</sup> “For the Chester Standard. A Christmas Dinner at Fort Delaware in 1862,” Cheesborough papers, SCL.

prisoners into spring 1863, when threats forced her to South Carolina for the rest of the war.

Cheesborough was one of many women who mailed food to strangers. A group of Baltimore women sent prisoners at Johnson's Island a box containing "Jelly, Cloths, Eatables of most every kind, Fruit, &c &c. We all had a good fill of cake &c and have lots left."<sup>85</sup> From Alexandria, Virginia, Catherine Hooper facilitated a similar channel of food and tobacco to prisoners through the end of the war. Confederate prisoners often reached out blindly. A. J. Brown reached out to Hooper, writing that he was "compelled to seek friends among strangers," and asked for money to buy writing materials and tobacco or direct the letter to someone who would.<sup>86</sup> Confederates frequently requested clothing, food, and tobacco. L. R. S. Spindle asked Hooper for one or two pounds of smoking tobacco and a pipe. Joseph Christie traded her five rings he carved in prison in exchange for tobacco.<sup>87</sup> The ability to receive packages greatly enhanced prison fare just as foraging increased and diversified the rations outside prisons.

Union prisoners in the South also received some assistance from outside the Confederacy. The United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) attempted to fulfill this task, but prisoners and commissioners feared the Confederate government had redirected the supplies to its own soldiers. Union officers at Libby Prison had actually received the boxes, but those packages awaited inspection for some time. General Neal Dow received

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<sup>85</sup> Durham, *Confederate Yankee*, 53.

<sup>86</sup> A. J. Brown to "Mrs. Kate Hooper," November 18, 1864, Arkansas State Archives.

<sup>87</sup> Robert L. Spindle to Catherine Hooper, October 24, 1864; Joseph Christie to Catherine Hooper, January 1, 1865, Arkansas State Archives.

food from home and the USSC in December 1863, and he admitted in January 1864 that without supplies from the North they would have starved.<sup>88</sup> Thomas Dekay Kimball, Jr., received tea, sugar, butter, and apple butter from the USSC, and he thought the rations were “a perfect godsend to us who have no money to add some thing palatable to our rations of bread & beef soup.”<sup>89</sup> The privates learned about a stockpile of rations sent by the USSC long before they received them. Knox Sneden recalled that some sailors broke into boxes of supplies from the U.S. Sanitary Commission and secreted coffee, sugar, and canned milk. Sneden wrote, “The smell of the coffee alone set the rest of us nearly crazy.”<sup>90</sup> When prisoners on Belle Island received boxes from the U.S. Sanitary Commission in late January 1864, and George Hegeman drew brown sugar and “Java coffee, the first I have tasted since I was captured.”<sup>91</sup> Yet allegations from the North that Confederates were stealing rations intended for their prisoners and counter-allegations that northerners were sending in contraband ended the USSC efforts.<sup>92</sup>

The markets, including official sutlers and the informal economy, were not unique to prisons, but they were an important way that prisoners attempted to supplement prison rations. Confederate officers had some of the best access to additional food because for

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<sup>88</sup> Frank L. Byrne, “A General Behind Bars: Neal Dow in Libby Prison,” in *Civil War Prisons*, ed. William B. Hesseltine (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1962), 62, 67.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas Dekay Kimball diary, October 31, 1863, Kimball Civil War Collection, Hillsdale Archives and Special Collections, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, Michigan.

<sup>90</sup> Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 173.

<sup>91</sup> Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” 251.

<sup>92</sup> Frank Byrne, “Libby Prison: A Study in Emotions,” *Journal of Southern History* 24, no. 4 (November 1958), 436-38.

most of the war they could receive money and food from outside the prison walls. Benjamin Farinholt, with Lee's army, found easy access to the tastes of the North outside and inside prison. In his last letter prior to being captured at Gettysburg, he wrote, "I have eaten many nice meals in Yankee land and the People take our money and feed us on the best they have, such as nice Pickles, candies, wines, Preserves, apple butter, cherries, etc." Large quantities of other foodstuffs were cheap, including beef, bacon, coffee, sugar, and whiskey.<sup>93</sup> After his capture, Farinholt admitted that at Fort Delaware he "suffered much for water, food &c," but the fare improved when he reached Johnson's Island. "We live very well so long as our money holds out," and they were able to purchase ham, cheese, butter, eggs, sugar, molasses, cabbage, beets, onions, and cucumbers, albeit at higher prices.<sup>94</sup>

Hunger stimulated prison markets in the North and South, but only those with cash or a valuable trade could participate. James Franklin noted that when Union officials halted a meat ration, the prisoners became "quite clamorous for meat – and will pay two and even three dollars for the smallest imaginable piece or of the privilege of gnawing an already polished bone."<sup>95</sup> Prisoners turned their diaries, already food journals, into business ledgers, keeping note of current food prices, credits, and debts in the margins and memoranda sections of their diaries. William M. Collin noted that flour at Belle Island sold for \$22 a barrel, potatoes \$0.22/qt., Molasses, \$1.50/qt., sugar \$1.10/lb., ham

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<sup>93</sup> Benjamin Lyons Farinholt to "Dear Lelia," July 1, 1863, Benjamin Lyons Farinholt papers, Mss2F2273b, VHS.

<sup>94</sup> Farinholt to "My ever dear Lelia," August 11, 1863, Benjamin Lyons Farinholt papers, VHS.

<sup>95</sup> Franklin, "Prison Diary," pg. 49, entry for October 29, 1863.



\$0.75/lb., bacon \$0.75/lb., and milk \$0.25/qt. Collin and his messmates invested in flour to make and sell flapjacks. Although a “mob” of prisoners rushed them the next day and stole most of their flour, they succeeded in making enough money to purchase better food.<sup>96</sup>

Prisoners also engaged with the market by making things with their hands that they could sell or trade with outsiders. By making, trading, and selling rings and jewelry, the carvers, not unlike the splitters and boilers, extracted sustenance from bones and other scraps. Writing to Anna Miller, one of the women who sent goods to Confederates in Union hands, J. F. Anderson asserted that since imprisonment at Fort Delaware he had become “quite a mechanic in the art of ringmaking,” and he promised to send “a specimen of rebel ingenuity” in his next letter.<sup>97</sup> The jewelry business inside prisons offered captives an opportunity to work with their hands and sell or trade their products for food, tobacco, or other goods. One of the early occupants of Johnson’s Island, Edward Drummond noted that nearly all the prisoners occupied their time crafting rings and other articles. “It is a curiosity,” he wrote, “to see the many articles manufactured: Pipes, Chess

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<sup>96</sup> Collin diary, memoranda pages, LC. See also Francis A. Dawes diary, December 22, 23, 24, and 25 (quote) 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated, Box 9, Army Heritage Education Center; John Baer diary, July 7, 8, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>97</sup> J. G. Anderson to Anna S. Miller, October 10, 1864, Prisoner of War Letter Collection, Museum of the Confederacy. References to ring and jewelry making abound in prison letters and diaries. The lens of material culture is well documented in the archaeological investigations by David R. Bush. See Bush, *I Fear I Shall Never Leave this Island: Life in a Civil War Prison* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011); Bush, “Interpreting the Latrines of the Johnson’s Island Civil War Military Prison,” *Historical Archaeology* 34, no 1 (2000): 62-78.

Men, Rings, Studs, Sleeve Buttons &c &c, some of a very fine style.”<sup>98</sup> Prisoners extracted all they could from bones and refuse whether in the form of marrow or cash.

Prison markets were quite diverse, but two goods—coffee and tobacco—were especially meaningful to prisoners. A staple drink for nineteenth-century America, the stimulating effect of chewing coffee grounds and drinking the beverage staved off hunger and decreased thirst. A cookbook issued to Union soldiers also stated “the fragrance or aroma” was “the chief virtue of the drink.”<sup>99</sup> In the Confederacy, there were perhaps more recipes for coffee substitutes than any other article. The *Confederate Recipe Book* suggested roasting acorns in place of coffee and civilians substituted parched rye, corn, peanuts, as well as the seeds of watermelon and okra.<sup>100</sup> Whereas Confederate prisoners in the North often had better access to coffee than they did in the South, Union prisoners searched for substitutes like soldiers and civilians in the Confederacy. Thomas Hall had easy access to coffee in New York, even if he had to drink it black. Such a sacrifice was made even less burdensome by the thought that it was the style in Turkey and China.<sup>101</sup> One of the first Union prisoners in Richmond recalled turning the gas light into stoves,

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<sup>98</sup> Durham, *Confederate Yankee*, 74.

<sup>99</sup> James M. Sanderson, *Camp Fires and Camp Cooking...* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 11. Later as a prisoner in Richmond, Sanderson tried to standardize cooking by his standards, but had little success. Sanderson, *My Record in Rebelhood* (New York: W. E. Sibell, 1865), 23-37.

<sup>100</sup> Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting*, 96-97; Bellows, *Ersatz in the Confederacy*, 72-73.

<sup>101</sup> Hall to his mother, February 10, 1862, Maryland Historical Society.

giving the apartment the fragrance of coffee and stews.<sup>102</sup> Later in the war, Frederic James wrote a poem that contextualized the lack of coffee within the unpleasant prison smells. He wrote, “Of Coffee you’ll not get one sip, in this Pinelog Institution / But foul air and water quite enough to wreck your constitution.”<sup>103</sup> David Kennedy described having a cup of “conscript” coffee at Andersonville made from the coals of burnt cornbread. Kennedy wrote that it went “verey well for a drink.”<sup>104</sup> Others made coffee from corn, bread crust, and rye.<sup>105</sup>

Alongside coffee, prisoners went to great lengths to chew and smoke tobacco. Those who could sent out for these provisions. Roger Weightman Hanson, a Kentucky lawyer and former state legislator, had an international taste for Spanish cigars. When he wrote his wife from prison at Fort Warren, he said that he “indulge[d] in no luxury except smoking,” and he wanted two boxes of cigars from a friend in Kentucky. “I like a strong cigar,” he wrote, and “I have sent to Boston for cigars but they do not send good ones.”<sup>106</sup> The weed was so central to markets that some prisoners used it as currency. One

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<sup>102</sup> William C. Harris, *Prison-Life in the Tobacco Warehouse at Richmond...* (Philadelphia: George W. Childs, 1862), 23.

<sup>103</sup> Frederic James diary, memoranda, MAHS.

<sup>104</sup> Kennedy diary, entry for June 3, 1864.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas W. Springer diary, July 31, August 21, and September 21, 1864, MS Number 7093-v, University of Virginia. Some Union prisoners were still issued real coffee, albeit rarely, in 1862. See Nathaniel G. Kenyon diary, entry for February 19, 1862, University of Alabama Special Collections. In the Minnesota experiment, some participants drank more than 15 cups of coffee. Those who did not previously drink coffee began to do so. Keys, *Human Starvation*, 835; McLaughlin, ed., “James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 227, 229.

<sup>106</sup> Roger W. Hanson to “Dear General,” April 13, 1862, Roger W. Hanson papers, LC.

Confederate prisoner admitted that he was “a slave to the ‘Indian Weed,’” and another stated in a letter he would prefer half rations to being without tobacco.<sup>107</sup> Like coffee, tobacco also had the benefit of depressing the appetite. Prisoners were often willing to trade their bread and possessions for tobacco. One Confederate at Elmira explained “the tobacco would pacify his stomach for two hours, while the bread would only aggravate it.”<sup>108</sup> George Hegeman noted in December 1863 that he was hungry, without rations, and “chewing tobacco to prevent from going mad.”<sup>109</sup> Frank Bennett, after being accused by the Confederate captors of stealing cotton and tampering with slaves, “felt no appetite” for dinner, “but we puffed vigorously at our cigars, trying to lose our cares, in the soft and pleasant tobacco smoke which lay heavily around us.”<sup>110</sup> Alongside coffee and its substitutes, tobacco helped appease appetite and diminish concerns.

Some prisoners criticized the chewing and smoking habits of fellow prisoners. Henri Jean Mugler immigrated from Alsace-Lorraine to America in the 1850s where he served in the U.S. army. He joined a Virginia regiment as a musician in 1861, and deserted to Union lines in 1864, after which he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner.

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<sup>107</sup> Gray, *Business of Captivity*, 76.

<sup>108</sup> Gray, *Business of Captivity*, 76. On trading possessions, see Franklin diary, August 27, 1863, MC; see also McLaughlin, ed., “James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 220; “The Yankee Prisoners at Andersonville – A Correspondent of the Atlanta Confederacy says:,” *The Charleston Mercury*, August 26, 1864. The Minnesota Experiment found that smoking cigarettes, chewing gum (up to 40 packages a day), watching others eat, and smelling food brought “vivid vicarious pleasure.” Some nonsmokers began smoking. Keys, *Human Starvation*, 834-35.

<sup>109</sup> Hegeman Diary, entries for December 28, 1863, in Heslin, ed., “The Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” 248.

<sup>110</sup> Frank T. Bennett papers, 1861 – 1864, pg. 13, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University.

Mugler detested both African Americans and diehard rebels, particularly prisoners who begged for food and tobacco. He wrote that such prisoners put “themselves on perfect equality with the negro soldiers begging chews of tobacco from them and trading and conversing with them.” He was even more appalled when he discovered that one of the prisoners was chewing a discarded quid of tobacco from a black soldier.<sup>111</sup> Another prisoner at Elmira, Marcus B. Toney described a similar scene. “Until I reached prison I did not know what a slave to habit man was,” he wrote, “I have seen a prisoner discharge a quid of tobacco from his mouth and another one pick it up, dry and smoke it.”<sup>112</sup> Toney himself was heavy chewer and smoker, a habit he mentioned in his private papers but not his published memoir. While in prison, he wrote to a friend, “I am at present out of Tobacco, and you know very well what it is to abstain as suddenly from a habit which we indulge so much in.” He asked his friend for five or ten pounds of smoking tobacco and five pounds of chewing tobacco.<sup>113</sup>

Markets and mail helped prisoners preserve food customs, especially at holidays that encouraged indulgence. Christmas in 1861 tasted much like home for Thomas Hall and others who could afford it. Hall received a box from home and his mess dined on turkey, pickles, and plum pudding.<sup>114</sup> Contributions from outside the prison provided Hall’s mess with a large stock of food for the beginning of 1862, including turkeys,

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<sup>111</sup> Henri Jean Mugler diary, August 4, 1864, West Virginia Collection, University of West Virginia, Morgantown.

<sup>112</sup> Marcus B. Toney, *Privations of a Private* (Nashville, TN: M. E. Church, 1905), 96.

<sup>113</sup> Toney diary and letter book, January 1, 1865, TSLA.

<sup>114</sup> Hall to his mother, December 25, 1861, Maryland Historical Society.

“pyramids of cakes,” “mountains of preserves & pickles...to say nothing of the six gallons of egg-nogg.”<sup>115</sup> The tastes of Christmas exceeded the prisoners’ expectations. Hall wrote that after “such painful and gloomy anticipations of Christmas spent in prison...we were agreeably disappointed to find that the sun did shine, that the turkey & plum pudding retained their natural flavor, and that egg-nogg and apple-brandy brought in their [brain] the usual increase of good humor & hilarity.”<sup>116</sup> Henry M. Warfield, a Maryland State legislator arrested under suspicion of plotting to pass an act of secession, agreed with Hall’s assessment. “From the Alleghenies to Old Worcester,” Warfield wrote, “came avalanches of fish, flesh, & fowl. Everything grateful to the palate.”<sup>117</sup> The good eating continued for many into the New Year. Hall did not consume the last of the Turkeys until the end of January. Baltimore Mayor George William Brown’s mess took meals with an Italian named Antonio trained in French cooking.<sup>118</sup> Brown gained fifteen pounds in the first several months of captivity. Confederate officers and political prisoner, especially early in the war, feasted at the holidays from donations.

Prisoners attempted to preserve the holiday fare throughout the war. At Fort Delaware in 1864, Francis Boyle wrote, “We made our Christmas dinner of a can of tomatoes and a bread and molasses pudding. The Yankees gave us a double ration of bread for breakfast—just about the quantity they ought to give us every day. They did the

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<sup>115</sup> Hall to his mother, December 25, 1861, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>116</sup> Hall to his mother, January 1, 1862, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>117</sup> Henry M. Warfield to Charles H. Pitts, Charles H. Pitts papers, MS 1440, Maryland Historical Society.

<sup>118</sup> George William Brown to Dr. George C. Schattuck, January 31 and February 9, 1862, George William Brown Papers, MHS.

same generous deed on Thanksgiving Day.”<sup>119</sup> Union prisoner Nathaniel Rollins and two other officers at Libby combined food they received in packages for a Christmas dinner. The three men ate “Boiled Potatoes, Roast Beef, Biscuit & Butter, Dried Apple Sauce, Cheese, Syrup, Chocolate with Sugar & Condensed milk. Apple Dumplings with sauce of sugar & butter. Preserved Pine-apples also pickles, salt & pepper.”<sup>120</sup> Jacob Heffelfinger purchased and raised three hens and a rooster as a prisoner in late 1864 and early 1865.<sup>121</sup> In December, he wrote, “My hen is laying eggs, she has commenced just in time to save her life beyond Christmas.” It wasn’t until the middle of January that Heffelfinger finally killed the first of his hens. “She was fat as butter, and made a most delicious stew.” Alongside the stew, he purchased sweet potatoes, wheat bread, and cakes to make “an excellent dinner, which almost emptied my pocketbook.”<sup>122</sup> The experiment lasted slightly more than two months, but Heffelfinger succeeded in improving the taste of prison rations, even temporarily, through husbandry and the market. Yet most Union prisoners had lean holidays. Ransom Chadwick bemoaned on July 4, 1864, that the so-called fresh beef that was full of maggots and “stunk enough to knock a man over.”<sup>123</sup> On

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<sup>119</sup> Francis A. Boyle diary, entry for December 25, 1864.

<sup>120</sup> Nathaniel Rollins diary, December 24, 25, 1863, WHS. See also Ransom, *Ransom’s Diary*, 23; Michael Dougherty, *Prison diary, of Michael Dougherty* (Bristol, PA: Chas. A. Doughert, 1908), 29-30.

<sup>121</sup> Heffelfinger dairy, November 9 10 (quote), 1864, AHEC.

<sup>122</sup> Entry for January 14, 1865, Jacob Heffelfinger Diary, Box 14, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Army Heritage Education Center.

<sup>123</sup> Ransom Chadwick diary, July 4, 1864, Minnesota Historical Society. See also David Kennedy diary, July 4, 1864, MNHS; George M. Hinkley diary, July 8, 1864, WHS; James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, ed. Jack Klasey (Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Historical Societ, 1987), 45, entry for July 4, 1864.

Thanksgiving in a Charleston, South Carolina, prison, Alfred Burdick mixed sweet potatoes and meal together and baked them in canteen halves. For Burdick, this “royal feast” made Thanksgiving “a poor one.”<sup>124</sup>

The more desperate prisoners, especially in the South, traded or sold their belongings and nearly any article of clothing for food to eat or sell. William Dolphin fell into Confederate hands at Liberty Mills, Virginia, in September 1863, and the fear of starvation hung over him within a few weeks.<sup>125</sup> Dolphin traded his overcoat for two pounds of tobacco, one pound of sugar, and three dozen biscuits. In subsequent weeks, Dolphin sold his pocketbook and his boots to buy an onion and sweet potatoes and he shared wheat bread with his friend, Hubert Smith, who had sold his shoes.<sup>126</sup> Describing the desperation from memory, Allen Abbott wrote, “Watches, knives, rings, jewelry, pocketbooks, anything that could be spared, we sold for rations.”<sup>127</sup> Many prisoners effectively consumed their belongings by selling or trading their personal effects for food.

One form of hard currency was in great demand in southern prisons—watches. Union prisoners described metaphorically eating their watches to purchase other articles.

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<sup>124</sup> Alfred D. Burdick diary (handwritten transcript), November 24, December 25, 1864, and January 1, 1865, P82-2504, Wisconsin Historical Society. See also John Whitten diary, December 25, 1863, LC; John C. Ely diary, entry for December 25, 1864, Andersonville National Historic Site.

<sup>125</sup> William Dolphin diary, November 11, 1864, MS 5:1D6984:1, Virginia Historical Society. See also Michael Dougherty diary, 26-27.

<sup>126</sup> William Dolphin diary, November 29, December 1, 10, and 29, 1863, VHS.

<sup>127</sup> Allen O. Abbott, *Prison Life in the South* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865), 46.



Having already “eaten my watch,” Hiram Eddy wrote that he could not supplement his rations with sugar, coffee, potatoes, or butter.<sup>128</sup> In South Carolina Heffelfinger wrote that his messmates’ eating had temporarily improved because “we are eating up my watch.”<sup>129</sup> Prisoners ate their watches by trading them to civilians for food they ate or sold to others. Nichols De Graff recalled losing his haversack and canteen to his captors, but he successfully hid a watch he took from his brother’s body at Shiloh in 1862. “Little did I then know,” De Graff wrote, “that it would be parted with within a few months for a pittance of corn meal.”<sup>130</sup> At Florence, South Carolina, Eugene Sly wrote that citizens traded bushels of sweet potatoes for watches and inside the prison the bushels sold for twenty-five dollars in Confederate money or six dollars in greenbacks.<sup>131</sup>

The hunger that propelled prisoners to swallow their watches also compelled gambling. Jonathan Stowe disliked gambling and its effect of adding to “the noise and confusion of the day. I have used my utmost influence to check it but it is useless as they have got a good start and I am met only with jibes and jest so [I] go below to study.”<sup>132</sup> Stowe and some others interpreted gambling as moral corruption, but desperate prisoners gambled to improve their condition, especially what they ate. George S. Albee defended

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<sup>128</sup> Hiram Eddy to “My own dear Fannie,” April 30, 1862, Hiram Eddy papers, MS 78637, Connecticut Historical Society.

<sup>129</sup> Heffelfinger diary, November 9, 1864, AHEC.

<sup>130</sup> Nichols De Graff Diary (Memoir), Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 31, AHEC. See also Merton Coulter, ed., “From Spotsylvania Courthouse to Andersonville: A Diary of Darius Starr,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 41, no. 2 (June 1957), 188, 189.

<sup>131</sup> Sly diary, September 18, 1864.

<sup>132</sup> Jonathan P. Stowe letters, November 13, 14, 1861, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 26, AHEC.

“poking” on the grounds that if he lost “I will be no worse off & I may win enough to buy a loaf or two of bread.”<sup>133</sup> Henry G. Tracy took advantage of the gambling in one of Richmond’s prisons in 1863 to raffle off his watch for twenty dollars.<sup>134</sup> William Dolphin and his messmates placed bets with food as currency and the prizes increased as time went on. Dolphin won “a good dinner” from Smith on January 15, 1864, but he came to owe Wood, Wall, and Boyce “all of the cheese & Molasses cake that we can eat.” Likewise, Wood owed Downs, Smith, and Dolphin “all of the Cod fish Balls roast Beef Bread & Coffee Butter that we can eat.”<sup>135</sup> The bets in Dolphin’s mess suggested that gambling helped prisoners imagine a future of full stomachs. For others, hunger drove them to wager their rations in hopes of benefiting from someone else’s food.

Hunger lastly compelled some prisoners not only to sell possessions and gamble but also trade allegiance. The word “swallowing” was common in references to taking the oath of allegiance to either the Union or Confederacy. Early in the conflict, the *Illinois State Sentinel* criticized Union officials for feeding “pone-craving prisoners” northern wheat bread when corn would be more palatable to southerners and cheaper to the government. Satirically trying to make sense of the policy, the writer suggested that forcing “maize-loving rebels to eat Northern wheat bread” would turn them into good law-abiding citizens. “With every mouthful of wheat bread, the hungry rebel swallows

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<sup>133</sup> George S. Albee diary, September 2, 1864, MSS 41695, Library of Virginia.

<sup>134</sup> Henry G. Tracy papers, 1863, MS 77592, CHS.

<sup>135</sup> William Dolphin diary, January – May bills payable, Mss5:1D6984:1, Virginia Historical Society. See also Henry B. Sparks diary, March 5, 1864, #SC 0020, Indian Historical Society. See also James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, ed. Jack Klasey (Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Historical Society, 1987), 51, entry for July 20, 1864.

and incorporates into his treasonable system so much loyalty and patriotism.”<sup>136</sup> In the South, many Union prisoners became convinced in fall 1864 that guards were starving them into taking the oath of allegiance to the Confederacy. Pervasive rumors indicated that as many as several hundred foreign soldiers had switched sides, unable to remain loyal to the U.S. government in the face of starvation.<sup>137</sup> The Charleston *Mercury* in late 1864 noted that foreigners in the Union army “make many protestations of their disinterestedness” in the conflict and “a goodly number of foreigners are taking the oath, which they swallow with avidity.”<sup>138</sup> Confederate civilians and soldiers, as participants in rebellion, had pressure throughout the war to swallow the oath and the metaphor had staying power in memory of defeat. In 1922 John Kempshall of Tennessee recalled having the opportunity to leave Camp Douglas if he “swallow the dog.” Yet against his father’s pleading, he refused to do so until the surrender of the Confederate armies.<sup>139</sup>

### Seeing is Disagreeing

While the nonvisual senses were essential in constructing the experience of food in captivity, vision was particularly important for those trying to understand and convey the broader meaning of hunger in Civil War prisons. Readers consumed stories about

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<sup>136</sup> “Corn Bread,” *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 10, 1862.

<sup>137</sup> Sly diary, October 2, 8, and 14, 1864. See also William Haun diary, October 4, 1864, Historical Society of Missouri; Stone diary, October 10, 12, 1864, ANHS

<sup>138</sup> “The Yankee Prisoners at Florence,” *The Charleston Mercury*, October 20, 1864.

<sup>139</sup> John Kempshall to John Trotwood Moore, March 13, 1922, John Kempshall memoirs, Civil War Collection, Confederate Collection, box 13, folder 10, TSLA. See also See Shiver and Breen, *Ohio’s Military Prisons*, 18. See also “From New Orleans – The Rule of Butler,” *Charleston Mercury*, November 15, 1862.

hunger in prisons throughout the war and the stories about southern prisons had an effect on General Orders No. 100 or “Lieber’s Code.” The orders stated that “prisoners of war shall be fed upon plain and wholesome food whenever practicable, and treated with humanity.”<sup>140</sup> It also stipulated that prisoners ought to eat rations equivalent to their captors, and the entire code carried an important provision of retaliation. Although some contemporaries thought retaliation and humanitarianism incapable, retaliation as legal recourse was already well established in U.S. history. Statesmen from John Rutledge to Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had squared the circle of humanitarianism and retaliation in regards to prisoners during the Revolutionary war.<sup>141</sup> Prison accounts about unwholesome food led to regular threats of retaliation, but the U.S. government refrained from exercising of retaliatory powers until summer 1864, when visual evidence emerged that pointed to one rational conclusion—intentional starvation.<sup>142</sup> Retaliation did not require a conspiracy among northern officials, but it did require a general consensus that Confederate prison officials had crossed an important line. In 1864, the visual evidence emerged that confirmed these fears.

The decision to seek remedy through retaliation resulted because northern civilians and the U.S. government believed they had seen irrefutable visual evidence of an intentional conspiracy to starve Union prisoners. In April 1864, a boatload of Union

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<sup>140</sup> General Orders No. 100, *Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field*, Section III, Article 76, in *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 5, 676.

<sup>141</sup> John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press 2012), 39-43.

<sup>142</sup> Witt, *Lincoln’s Code*, 39-42. Historians, for a variety of reasons, are uncomfortable defending the right of retaliation. This basic discomfort is an essential part of the “war psychosis” thesis that underscores much interpretation of prisoner of war treatment.

officers and enlisted men arrived at Annapolis, Maryland, and the sights shocked the eyes of officers and hospital attendants. Abbie J. Howe, one of the nurses, spoke to the United States Congressional Committee and the United States Sanitation Commission (USSC) on their emaciated bodies, blackened skin, and irregular behavior of the returned prisoners. The prisoners had come from Belle Island, which had the dubious distinction of being the “worst” prison before Andersonville became a household name. They expressed strange tastes “for things which they ought not have,” that included “anything that a dog can eat” and water from the James River.<sup>143</sup> Attendants believed that released prisoners had lost control of their appetites and would steal from each other or the hospital to get more food. D. L. Dix reported that “some were reduced to idiocy” begging for the privilege of looking at an apple if they were not allowed to eat solid food.<sup>144</sup> Another attendant stated that several prisoners “were in a state of semi-insanity, and all seemed, and acted, and talked like children, in their desires for food, &c.”<sup>145</sup> The staff feared that the insane might even overeat themselves to death if not monitored.

To the nineteenth-century observer, visible forms of emaciation in captives proved starvation in prisons, as vision was often considered the most object judge of truth.<sup>146</sup> From the invention of the daguerreotype in the 1839 and the popularization of

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<sup>143</sup> 38<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Report no. 67, *Returned Prisoners*, 23.

<sup>144</sup> United States Sanitary Commission, *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of United States Officers and Soldiers while Prisoners of War in the Hands of Rebel Authorities* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1864), 184.

<sup>145</sup> “Testimony of Surgeon A. Chapel, in charge of West’s Building Hospital, Baltimore, Md, taken at Baltimore, June 2, 1864,” in *Narrative of privations*, 182.

<sup>146</sup> On vision, photograph, and inner truth, see Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 43-44.

ambrotypes, tintypes, and Carte de Visites (CDVs) in the 1850s and 60s, there was a strong idea that photographic images provided a connection between the subject and the viewer. Eyes pried into photographs, reading truth but also potentially trespassing on the subject.<sup>147</sup> The confidence that seeing was believing affected how the Union officers responded to the return of emaciated prisoners. On 2 May 1864, Commissary General of Prisoners William Hoffman arrived at the hospital on the request of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to see for himself. A prisoner of war himself early in the war, Hoffman adhered to strict economy but fairness for nearly three years. He saved the government hundreds of thousands of dollars by exchanging equivalent weights of bread in place of flour to prisoners; a decision that in effect reduced rations, and was also a standard practice. From 1862 through early 1864, Hoffman displayed an economical management style but consistent policy in treating prisoners of war and paroled Union prisoners on equitable terms.<sup>148</sup> However, what Hoffman saw changed his point of view. The thirty-two officers were generally in good condition, but the three hundred and sixty three enlisted men were emaciated and near death.

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See also John Stauffer, *Black Hearts of Men: Racial Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 169-183.

<sup>147</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 12-19.

<sup>148</sup> Leslie Gene Hunter, "Warden for the Union: General William Hoffman (1807-1884)" (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 1971), 103, 132, 158-159, 162. Hunter's argument, though conservative in scope, effectively undermines Hesseltine's "war psychosis" thesis.

For Hoffman, the gruesome visual evidence and oral testimony impressed upon him, beyond reasonable doubt, the prisoners had been intentionally starved at Belle Island. Relaying this belief to Stanton, Hoffman considered the environmental factors of weather alongside clothing, but he pointed to insufficient and unwholesome food as causing starvation and intestinal diseases. Hoffman wrote that the cornmeal “was made of coarsely ground corn, including the husks, and probably at times the cobs, if it did not kill by starvation it was sure to do it by the disease it created.” Yet it was the visual evidence of emaciated prisoners that overwhelmed him. Hoffman wrote, “That our soldiers when in hands of the rebels are starved to death cannot be denied.” He brushed off the Confederate claim and their soldiers received the same rations and did not starve as impossible. “While a practice so shocking to humanity is persisted,” Hoffman wrote, “I would very respectfully urge that retaliatory measures be at once instituted by subjecting the officers we now hold as prisoners of war to similar treatment.”<sup>149</sup> In the meantime, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of War photographed eight of the worst cases to include in their report and print them as pocked-sized CDVs that could be massed produced. At least one set was sent to President Lincoln.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Hoffman to Edwin Stanton, May 3, 1864, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 7, 111.

<sup>150</sup> “Prisoners at Annapolis,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1864; Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, image insert between pages 162 and 163.

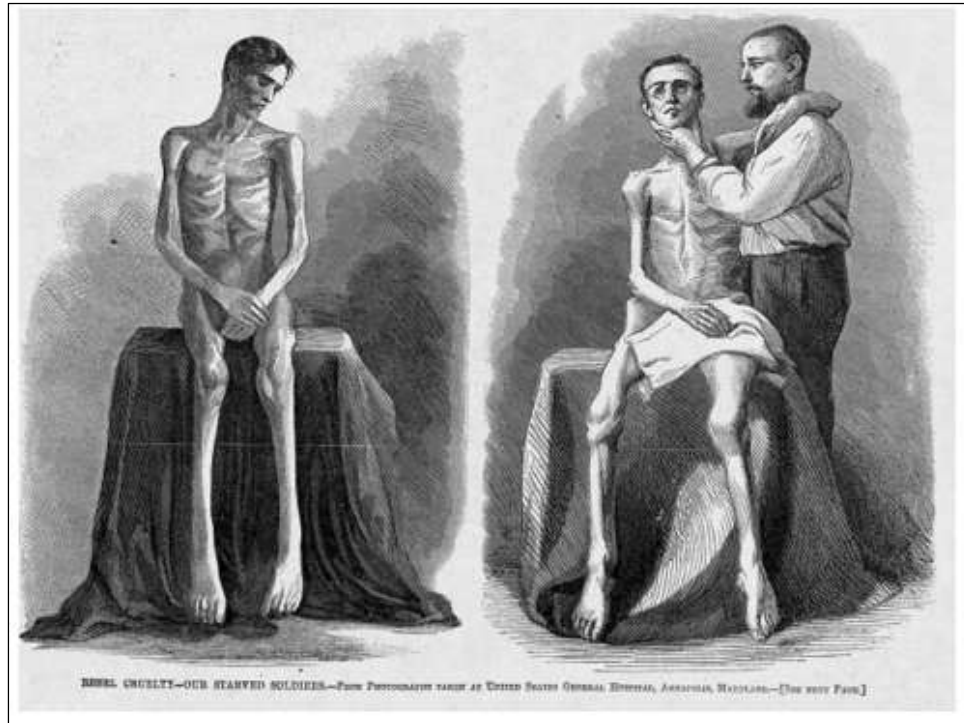


Figure 4.1. What starvation looked like. “Rebel Cruelty – Our Starved Solders – From Photographs Taken at United States General Hospital, Annapolis, Maryland.” *Harper’s Weekly* June 18, 1864.

Starvation, now visualized, spread quickly through the U.S. government and northern newspapers. Unable to exchange prisoners without jeopardizing the war gains or alienating the black soldiers who the Confederacy would not exchange, Secretary of War Stanton wrote President Lincoln, arguing Confederate officers in Union prisons should be fed on rations equivalent to those of Union prisoners in the South.<sup>151</sup> On June 18, 1864, the images taken by the congressional committee were published in *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, two of the most widely read newspapers during the Civil War. Descriptions of the size, shape, frequency, and taste of prison rations

<sup>151</sup> Edwin W. Stanton to “His Excellency the President of the United States,” May 5, 1864, *Official Records*, series II, vol. 7, 113-114.



accompanied the front-page illustrations. In both newspapers, however, the powerful images stood alone on one side with a title but no detailed explanation. Inside, descriptions of prison food and living conditions supplemented the visual evidence. One of the returned prisoners thought the meat was mule because “I never saw such looking meat, and never tasted any of the same queer taste.” Others described the soup as “coarse and dark, ill-tasted, and repulsive.” One man had who initially weighed 185 pounds came to Annapolis weighing only 108 1/2 pounds and the faces of prisoners were so shriveled it was said they resembled apes.<sup>152</sup> Vivid images and corresponding descriptions of starvation was presented as undeniable. Visualization helped underscore the authenticity of starvation and catalyze a response.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> “Further Proofs of Rebel Inhumanity,” *Harper’s Weekly*, June 18, 1864. William B. Hesseltine, *Civil War Prisons: A Study in War Psychology* (1930; reprint, New York, Frederick Ungar, 1964), 194-200. On the differences between northern newspaper representations of Union and Confederate prisons, see Benjamin Cloyd, *Haunted by Atrocity: Civil War Prisons in American Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 24-25.

<sup>153</sup> In addition to newspapers, two major publicans made this connection between seeing the images and knowing starvation. House Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Returned Prisoners*, 38<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, Report No. 67; United States Sanitary Commission, *Narrative of Privations and Sufferings of United States Officers and Soldiers while Prisoners of War in the Hands of the Rebel Authorities* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, 1864). In the *Treatment of Prisoners of War* (1869), however, the committee substituted more than 1,100 pages of argument and testimony for pictures.

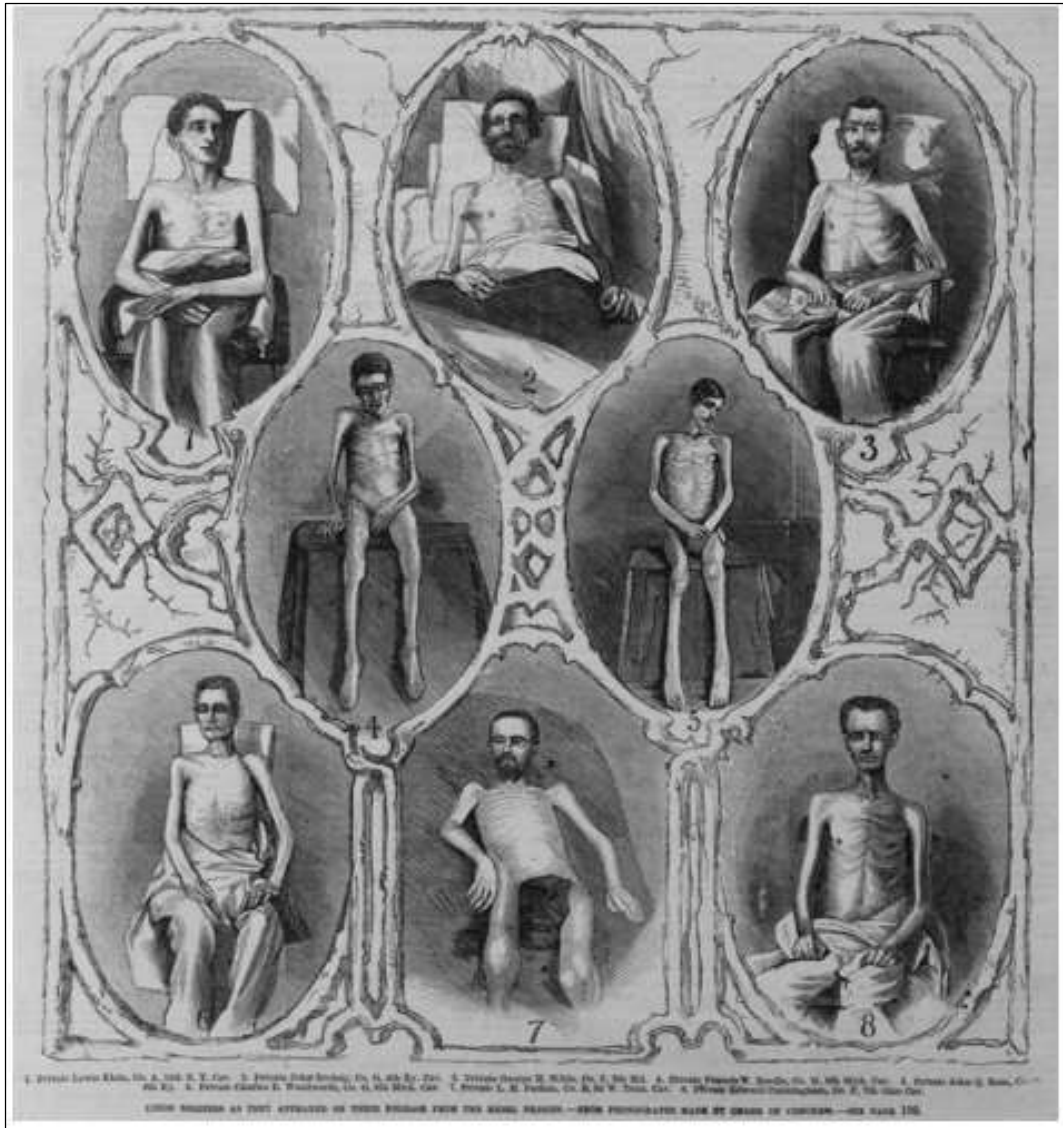


Figure 4.2. Seeing Starvation. Although northern soldiers and civilians read accounts of hunger in Confederate prisons, images of emaciated prisoners came to visualize the starvation of Union prisoners in the South. “Union Soldiers As They Appeared on Their Release from the Rebel Prisons – From Photographs Made by Order of Congress,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, June 18, 1864.

Fighting hunger with hunger was seen as a harsh, but consistent, route that in theory would pressure Confederate officials to feed its prisoners. It was not revenge, but a rational, intentional calculation in accordance with the laws of war. Northern prisoners experienced a food reduction upwards of twenty percent. Although this produced much

anger, the policy had little effect as a leveraging strategy. Even at Elmira, which did not open until after retaliation had been endorsed, hunger may still have had less to do with retaliation than with rapid population growth and abuses by both contractors and prisoners. And it had no effect on improving the conditions at the largest and fastest growing prison in the South, Andersonville.<sup>154</sup>

Despite the graphic nature of the published photographs, the visual evidence was not irrefutable. Confederate officials publicly refused to interpret the images the same way. In March 1865, a Confederate congressional committee published a detailed response to both the images and the accompanying reports that had made their way to parts of the South and Europe. Gendering the North's emotional publications and the photographs, the committee members argued that the images carried an emotional and sentimental message but not a rational or authentic one. They dismissed the emotional power of the photographs and the text as belonging "to the 'sensational' class of literature, and that 'prima facie,' it is open to the same criticism to which yellow covered novels, the 'narratives of noted highwaymen' and the 'awful beacons' of the Northern book stalls should be subjected." After reducing visualized starvation to sensational northern novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the committee announced its intention to investigate and report its findings "to the public eye of the enlightened world." It then laid out what became part of the standard defense of the South. Prisoners received the same rations as Confederate soldiers and, if they were left hungry, so was the rest of the

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<sup>154</sup> The accounts of rat eating, mentioned above, all come from after the retaliatory period began. See also Roger Pickenpaugh, *Captives in Gray*, 180-201. The most focused study of food in a single prison during this period is Michael Gray's *The Business of Captivity: Elmira and Its Civil War Prison* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001), 28-42.

South and it was the fault of “the savage policy of the enemies” who burned crops and butchered hogs and cattle. Less believable, they argued that photographed prisoners were “not in a worse state than were the Confederate prisoners returned from Northern hospitals and prisons, of which the humanity and superior management are made subjects of special boasting by the United States sanitary commission!” As witnesses of truth, so it seemed, the eyes were just as subjective as the other senses.<sup>155</sup>

The Confederate response was a clever rhetorical sleight of hand. Overlooking the strong evidence coming not only from officials but also withering prisoners in their hands, Confederate officials attacked the medium of photography and the certainty that seeing was believing. In some ways, they were right. When it came to defining starvation, vision, like taste, was inherently a subjective determination. There was also an important rhetorical loophole in Lieber’s Code that deserves consideration: It required prison keepers only to issue the same amounts of food, not ensure the same amount of eating. Therefore, it is possible that prisoners received the same amount of food as soldiers, but soldiers likely had an easier time satisfying hunger. The ration that made up most of the entire prison ration was only a portion of the food Confederate soldiers could scrape together. Prisoners, therefore, might have legally received the same rations as Confederate soldiers and still starved. After the war, Confederate apologists used the photograph debacle and prisoner retaliation to defend themselves against the charge of cruelty. Undermining visualized starvation reinforced doubts about the taste, smell, and feeling of prison rations in southern prisons. In contrast, it added weight to the claim that

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<sup>155</sup> Confederate States of America Congress, *Report on the Joint Select Committee Appointed to Investigate the Condition and Treatment of Prisoners of War* (Richmond: Congress, 1865), 1-5.

Confederate prisoners were the real victims because they had suffered retaliation justified by the U.S. government on false and misleading propaganda. Lastly, by representing the northern press, public, and prisoners as emotional and susceptible to a “war psychosis,” the gendered reading by Confederates made it easier to discount the vast body of multisensory evidence that also pointed to starvation.

Shortages were not unique to prisons in the Civil War, but getting enough to eat preoccupied prisoners. When prisoners tasted, smelled, and consumed food, they believed their existence more akin to animals than humans. They reacted to prison food strongly, describing the multisensory experience and the emotional revulsion to eating unwholesome food. Hunger affected the broader experience of eating and the daily lives of prisoners. The hungry thought about food more, detailing precisely what they ate on a daily basis and conversing about imagined meals in the past and future. They went to great lengths to preserve appetites, devising ways to imitate the taste of coffee and paying high prices to smoke and chew tobacco even when they might have spent that money on more wholesome food. Eating watches, selling clothes, and engaging in prison markets, prisoners tried to hold off the effects of long-term hunger.

The intentionality of hunger and starvation, like the experience of taste, was both widely believed and impossible to agree upon across political divides. Comparisons of hunger, like taste, are difficult to compare and generalizations oversimplify the diversity of experience. Yet the experience of eating in captivity was unequal. Union and, especially, Confederate officers consistently better than other prisoners of war. Likewise, prisoners who could effectively use the mail or had the money to participate in prison markets fared substantially better than those forced to sell their clothes and eat their

watches. For the unlucky, the experience of eating in the North and South blunted taste and animalized experience.

## CHAPTER 5:

### ALARM BELLS AND HOMESICK PEALS: LISTENING TO CAPTIVITY

I hear the music of the bells  
Float out upon the Southern air:  
Now like the sea their chorus swells,  
Now faintly as the breath of prayer –  
Yet, lingering still, as if to bless  
My heart within its loneliness

“Libby Prison,” in S. H. M. Byers, *What I Saw in Dixie; or, Sixteen Months in Rebel Prisons* (Danville, NY: Robbins & Poore, 1868), 16.

While touches, smells, and tastes pointed to the animalization of captivity, the experience of listening paralleled the range of emotions from hope to despair. As with the other senses, listening connected prisoners’ interior thoughts and feelings with the external human and nonhuman environment. Listening allowed prisoners to actively engage with the soundscape by investing meaning in certain sounds and not others. As opposed to merely hearing, therefore, the act of listening helped prisoners navigate the moment-to-moment uncertainty of captivity. As a prisoner of war at Gettysburg, German immigrant Bernhard Domschcke chafed under what he called the “aggravating ignorance” of captivity. After his capture on July 2, 1863, Domschcke and other Union prisoners were visually segregated from the front line. Prisoners gleaned information from the sounds of battle and rumors brought by arriving captives. Their anxiety grew amid the “rattle of musketry and roar of cannon,” and despair set in upon hearing the

“joyous tunes” of Confederate bands and the “hurrahs” of Rebel soldiers. Throughout the morning of July 3, Domschcke recalled “an eerie silence prevailed” before “thunder of cannon shook the earth.” Whereas music declared Confederate victory the night before, silence on the night of July 3 hinted that something had changed. When guards marched the captives southward with Lee’s retreating army, it confirmed what Domschcke had already inferred from listening.<sup>1</sup>

As Domschcke’s writing suggests, prisoners attached meaning to sounds they believed were meaningful. Some of most significant sounds came from the human world, but prisoners also listened inferred meaning from the nonhuman environment as well. In an ambiguous position between combatant and noncombatant, captives listened for clues about the war and their own fates, and they drew on a soundscape that included echoes of battle, civilian sounds and silences, oral communication, keynotes of Sundays and holidays, and the sounds of suffering and destruction.<sup>2</sup> Guards and prison officials gave explicit meaning to certain sounds, but prisoners inferred their own interpretations and resisted inhumane treatment by making tactical use of sound and silence. This tension in the auditory world reflected the conflict between captor and captive, and attention to

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<sup>1</sup> Bernhard Domschcke, *Twenty Months in Captivity: Memoirs of a Union Officer in Confederate Prisons*, trans. Frederic Trautmann (1865; reprint, Madison, 1987), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Although there are important differences between verbal and nonverbal sound, prison acoustemology requires an inclusive definition. As Jane Kamensky argues in her study of early New England, isolated environments make oral communication an important part of the aural experience, *Governing the Tongue: The Politics of Speech in Early New England* (New York, 1997), 46-55. See also Richard Cullen Rath, “Hearing American History,” *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 2008): 417-31; Shane White and Graham White, *The Sounds of Slavery: Discovering African American History through Songs, Sermons, and Speech* (Boston, 2005), xii, 122-30.



sound provides a way to access and better understand the experience and emotion of captivity.

This chapter interprets sound in Civil War prisons by focusing on what prisoners thought about listening. It substitutes an ear for an eye as a useful proxy for lived-experience, emphasizing what prisoners heard over what they saw as a way to add nuance to our understanding of captivity. Necessarily, then, most of this chapter follows a selective—but, I believe, representative—list of recurrent sounds in wartime and postwar accounts: prison cacophony, rumors, the presence or absence of bells and noise in Sunday soundscapes, music, and the sounds and silences of celebration and gloom. Taken as a whole, these patterns of listening exemplify the deep linkage between listening and experience in several ways. First, discerning ears helped prisoners interpret the progress of war in environments characterized by great demand for news but little reliable information. Second, listening influenced how prisoners experienced the passage of time from hourly calls to the monotony of days that lacked a calm, quiet Sunday. Third, prisoners heard the sounds of national holidays, music, and other celebrations as political statements. In places where noise seemed inescapable, prisoners engaged with the environment of captivity by careful listening.

The entwining of listening and experience invites a related comment about sound. Captives and keepers consistently disagreed over what certain sounds meant because listening depended on perspective. This is an obvious point, but one that is important to consider when writing about contentious lived-experiences. The “sounds of suffering” and the “sounds of destruction” highlight this discontinuity. One might assume that the cry of the sick or the burst of an artillery shell would have consistent meanings, but

captives and keepers attached different meanings to these same sounds. Many prisoners heard sounds of suffering as barbaric treatment; some guards and outside listeners heard only moral impurity and unmanliness. Similarly discordant, Union prisoners interpreted the sounds of their own guns in ways that contrasted with Confederate guards and civilians because it gave them hope.

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Listening was an active process in which participants winnowed the soundscape by interpreting certain aspects of their environment and not others. The sounds and silences of nature could impart feelings of tranquility or anxiety. John S. Jackman noted that the pine forests in Louisiana were so quiet that he did not even hear the chirp of a grasshopper.<sup>3</sup> A Confederate soldier from Georgia, William R. Stilwell described the inanimate sound of wind rustling through the pine trees near Fredericksburg “making a solemn sound and all nature seems to be hushed in gems of pleasure.”<sup>4</sup> Civilians and soldiers commonly described the sounds of birds as resonating with a range of emotions. Describing pleasant smells and sounds at Camden in December, 1861, Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, “Here everything is fresh, bright, cool, sweet-scented; and a mocking bird is singing and a woodpecker at work – or a yellow hammer, for I cannot see the small bird which is making such a noise.”<sup>5</sup> James A. Connolly described the interaction

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<sup>3</sup> John S. Jackman, *Diary of a Confederate Soldier: John S. Jackman of the Orphan Brigade*, ed. William C. Davis (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 53-54.

<sup>4</sup> William Ross Stilwell and Mollie Stilwell, *The Stilwell Letters: A Georgian in Longstreet's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia*, ed. Ronald Moseley (Macon, 2002), 126.

<sup>5</sup> Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental Reference Guide* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 127.

between brass bands and mocking birds, writing that the latter imitated the former's playing of "Dixie" and the "Star Spangled Banner."<sup>6</sup> Whereas the mocking bird's imitation a brass band seemed to please Connolly, he heard the sounds of whip-poor-wills during the battle of Resaca, Georgia, much differently. "The mournful notes of a whippoorwill," he wrote, "mingle in strange contrast with the exultant shouts of our soldiers—the answering yells of the rebels—the rattling fire of the skirmish line, and the occasional bursting of a shell."<sup>7</sup> Careful listening helped locate objects in the environment to invest with personal meaning.

While the sounds of nature were meaningful to participants, listeners also picked up on the sounds of war. The sounds of destruction and the sounds of suffering, two modes of perceiving the historical process Megan Kate Nelson terms "ruination," animated an important aspect of lived experience.<sup>8</sup> Recriminations over the destruction of cities conveyed both the sounds and silences of ruination. Emma LeConte described the Union soldiers in Columbia, South Carolina, as "shouting – hurrahing – cursing South Carolina – swearing – blaspheming – singing ribald songs and using such obscene language that we were forced to go indoors," to which some civilians responded with loud outbursts and others with cold silence. Yet loud destruction of cities and land

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<sup>6</sup> James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The Letters and Diary of Major James A. Connolly*, ed. Paul M. Angle (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1959), 217.

<sup>7</sup> Connolly, *Three Years in the Army*, 208. On this contrast, see also Alpheus Starkey Williams, *From the Cannon's Mouth: The Civil War Letters of General Alpheus S. Williams*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1959), 273.

<sup>8</sup> Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 2-3,

culminated in the stillness of an acoustic desert.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, prisoners mediated much of captivity, like the ruination of cities, through the ears. Passing the junction of railroad tracks to Andersonville, Lyle Adair noticed “every ear is anxiously listening with throbbing hearts, the signal from the engineer to back & switch off on the fatal road.” When the train picked up speed again, prisoners took a breathed a deep sigh of relief. They were moving to a different prison.<sup>10</sup>

### Listening for Hope (and Sometimes Like Antebellum Slaves)

Careful listening described by Domschcke and Adair was an accepted part of captivity experience. The idea that careful listeners inferred meaning from battlefield sounds also took hold in George Frederick Root’s popular prison song, “Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! (The Prisoner’s Hope).” First published in 1864 as a sequel to the popular song, “Just Before the Battle, Mother,” the title and the second verse imagine listening from the perspective of the captive:

In the battle front we stood,  
When their fiercest charge they made,  
And they swept us off, a hundred men or more.  
But before we reached their lines,  
They were beaten back, dismayed.  
And we heard the cry of victory o’er and o’er.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 50-52, quote on 50; Mark M. Smith, “Of Bells, Booms, Sounds, and Silences: Listening to the Civil War South,” in *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 18-24.

<sup>10</sup> Glenn Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die: The Civil War Prison Diary of Sgt. Lyle Adair, 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2011), 37, entry for November 1, 1864.

<sup>11</sup> George Frederick Root, *Tramp! Tramp! Tramp! Or, The Prisoners Hope* (Chicago, 1864).

The prisoner's hope came from listening and interpreting the tramping of footsteps, those of a liberation army or a retreating enemy, and the "cry of victory" that spread news beyond the limited viewshed of individuals in thickets and hollows. Confederates sang this tune as well, changing the last line to "and the 'Rebel yell' went upward to the sky."<sup>12</sup> Prisoner Samuel Byers of Iowa recalled hearing the "glad cries of victory" on top of Missionary Ridge near Chattanooga while moving southward with retreating Confederates.<sup>13</sup>

Ears did not hear the cries of victory and the Rebel yell in the same way. Listening to the battle of the Wilderness on May 12, 1864, Confederate prisoner Francis A. Boyle concluded that Grant's assault had been "desperate but unsuccessful."<sup>14</sup> Another captive listener, George Washington Hall, was less certain, but he also heard the sounds of battle and prayed they might be recaptured.<sup>15</sup> Five hundred miles away in Georgia, Union prisoner Robert Kellogg listened to the battle through newspaper accounts smuggled into Andersonville. Silence about the outcome in the papers and from the guards sounded promising because Kellogg reasoned that "if Grant is whipped, the

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<sup>12</sup> Irwin Silber, ed., *Songs of the Civil War* (New York, 1995), 37; McWhirter, *Battle Hymns: The Power and Popularity of Music in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 168-69.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Hawkins Marshall Byers, *What I Saw in Dixie; or, Sixteen Months in Rebel Prisons* (Danville, NY: Robbins & Poore, 1868), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Francis A. Boyle diary, May 12, 1864, in Francis A. Boyle books, 1864-1865, MS #1555-z, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina [hereafter SHC]. For listening as part of the experience of soldiers and civilians, see Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 198-237; Hess, *The Union Soldier in Battle*, 15-28, 143-57.

<sup>15</sup> George Washington Hall diary, May 13, 1864, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress [hereafter LC].

Rebs will not be long in letting us know it.”<sup>16</sup> In the uncertainty of captivity, prisoners listened for clues and drew their own preliminary conclusions.

Listening took on new importance inside the confined spaces of prisons. Sound was inescapable for the simple reason that prisoners had no earlids—no way to detach themselves from the sonic environment. One Confederate prisoner copied an antebellum song, “Silence! Silence!,” with the repeating line, “Silence, silence make no noise or stir,” into an autograph album at Johnson’s Island.<sup>17</sup> Yet prisons were usually anything but silent. Describing the arrival at Libby Prison, Luther G. Billings wrote, “we were at once surrounded by a howling, shouting, crazy mob of ragged men, who saluted us with cries of ‘fresh fish.’” Throughout his stay in Libby Prison, there was the “constant buzz or murmur of hundreds of hoarse voices, sharply broken now and then by the challenge of a sentry or a shrill cry of distress.” Such a “sea of human misery” inside a resonating brick building was never calm.<sup>18</sup> John Baer described the “sound of many voices born to

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<sup>16</sup> Robert H. Kellogg diary, May 8, 1864, in Robert Hale Kellogg papers, 1862-1931, MS #68013, Connecticut Historical Society [hereafter CHS]. See also Lewis C. Bisbee diary, May 25, 1864, in Lewis C. Bisbee papers, 1862-1923, MS #P1268, Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society [hereafter MNHS]. On the connection between reading and listening, see Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> J. D. Milligan Autograph Album, Johnson’s Island, 1864-1865, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy [hereafter MC]. Prisoners often copied popular and original songs in autograph albums, see Luther R. Ashby Autograph Album, Johnson’s Island, 1863-1864; Walker Peyton Moncure Autograph Album, Johnson’s Island, 1863-1864, 1864-1865; and John W. Myers Autograph Album, Johnson’s Island, 1863-1864, (all) MC.

<sup>18</sup> Luther Guiteau Billings memoir, 57, 58-59, in Luther Guiteau Billings collection, 1865-1900, LC. See also, George C. Parker to his family, September 23, 1861, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 21, Army Heritage Education Center [Hereafter AHEC]. On the phrase “fresh fish,” see Homer B. Sprague, *Lights and Shadows in Confederate Prisons: A Personal Experience 1864-65* (New York, 1915), 50; Cavada, *Libby Life*, 42; Domschcke, *Twenty Months in Captivity*, 55-56; “In Southern War Prisons,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1891.

our ears,” that included conversations about home and loved ones, heated disputes, and cursing.<sup>19</sup> Noise was a constant phenomenon of prison life, but this elevated the importance of careful, selective listening in the construction of individual and collective experiences.

Captives took note of sounds that stood out from this cacophony. Listening gave prisoners opportunities to interpret events beyond their viewshed. The lack of normal channels of communication increased reliance on oral networks, which culminated in an omnipresent buzz of prison rumors. What little information Robert Knox Sneden brought into Libby Prison encouraged old prisoners, and he “could hear cheering about the hubbub of voices.”<sup>20</sup> James Burton described prisoners grabbing for rumors “as a drowning man does at straws. Result about the same so far but hope on hope is the motto.”<sup>21</sup> Dubious though they were, rumors were products of ideology and environment that offered reassurance. As part of a broader soundscape, the spoken word took on greater importance in the production and consumption of knowledge.

Prisoners spent much of their time listening for news and debating its authenticity in informal groups as part of a continuous cycle of hope and despair. Those detained in

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<sup>19</sup> John A. Baer diary, August 14, 1864, Andersonville National Historic Site [hereafter ANHS].

<sup>20</sup> Charles F. Bryan, Jr. and Nelson D. Lankford, eds., *Eye of the Storm: Written and Illustrated by Private Robert Knox Sneden* (New York, 2000), 165. Jason Phillips explores the connection between rumor and the doctrine of Confederate invincibility, but rumors were also persistent in Union and Confederate prisons, “The Grape Vine Telegraph: Rumors and Confederate Persistence,” *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 4 (November 2006): 753-88.

<sup>21</sup> James Burton diary, May 19, 1864, MS #120, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University [hereafter EU].

cities had regular access to newspapers, but even captives at remote prisons such as Andersonville and Point Lookout had some access to newspapers.<sup>22</sup> Yet the scarcity of papers meant that prisoners regularly consumed news in the form of a recitation. When a paper appeared inside prison at Millen, Georgia, “a crowd would gather around that they might hear if it gave any information concerning exchange, catching at least a word which held out the possibility of hope.”<sup>23</sup> One prisoner privately admitted in his diary to intentionally starting an exchange rumor for the purpose of seeing how quickly it would become common knowledge to all the prisoners at Andersonville.<sup>24</sup> The rumors commonly recorded in diaries and memoirs indicate that the auditory world only temporarily soothed what Domschke termed the “aggravating ignorance” of captivity. Frustrated with the lack of reliable news, some prisoners created their own satirical newspapers, including the Libby *Chronicle* and the Fort Delaware *Prison Times* that the “editors” compiled and read aloud.<sup>25</sup> The spoken word was an important mode of transmission for information collected, produced, and consumed by prisoners.

When the war came to a close, Confederate prisoners could at first hardly believe their ears. Although demoralized throughout the winter of 1864-1865, the news of Lee’s

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<sup>22</sup> Forbes, *Diary of a Soldier*, 15, 35, 40, 41; [No Author], *A Voice from Rebel Prisons...* (Boston, 1865), 15; Toney, *Privations of a Private*, 87-88; George Marion Shearer diary, January 10, February 2, 4, 1865, ANHS; James Vance diary, August 4, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>23</sup> *Voice from Rebel Prisons*, 15; Sprague, *Lights and Shadows*, 103, 141.

<sup>24</sup> Baer diary, July 24, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>25</sup> Alonzo Keeler diary, October 9, 1863, Keeler family papers, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan; Cavada, *Libby Life*, 36; Louis N. Beaudry, *The Libby Chronicle: Devoted to Facts and Fun...* (Albany, 1889); Fort Delaware *Prison Times*, LC.



surrender came as a surprise in the form of rumors and cannon salutes. Francis A. Boyle wrote, “The news of the surrender of Gen. Lee’s army falls like a clap of thunder upon us – even those who feared and expected this thing are astonished, even stupefied, at the terrible news.” Boyle heard some prisoners express hope that the Confederacy still had a chance, but he thought otherwise. “Gen Lee was the last hope,” he wrote, “with him goes everything.”<sup>26</sup> The bell ringing and news of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination was also generally met with shock, disgust, or cautious silence amid uncertainty about what the death of the president meant for them. The possibility of reprisal led prisoners to fear exhibiting even a whisper that might be interpreted as exultation.<sup>27</sup>

Vocal sounds were important to prisoners, but listeners also linked bells and other instrumental sounds to their perception of the passage of time. Although the relationship between bells and temporal experience had a long genealogy, there were practical reasons that bells, drums, voices, and trumpets became the arbiters of time.<sup>28</sup> Northern soldiers complained of being robbed of watches more often than other possessions, making

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<sup>26</sup> Mary L. Thornton, “The Prison Diary of Adjutant Francis Atherton Boyle, C.S.A.,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (winter 1962), 82, entry for April 12, 1865.

<sup>27</sup> Thornton, ed., “Francis Atherton Boyle, C.S.A.,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 80n.

<sup>28</sup> On bells and time see Schafer, *Tuning of the World*, 55-56; Rath, *How Early America Sounded*, 51-57; Rath, “Sounding the Chesapeake,” 5-8, 20; Corbin, *Village Bells*, 110-18, 131-32, 219-20; Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock* (Chapel Hill, 1997), ch. 2; Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 57-58. On time in the Civil War, see Cheryl A. Wells, *Civil War Time: Temporality and Identity in America, 1861-1865* (Athens, 2005), 1-7. See also, Barbara Adam, *Timewatch: The Social Analysis of Time* (Cambridge, 1995); John Urry, “Time, Leisure, and Social Identity,” *Time and Society* 3, no. 2 (June 1994): 131-49.

personal clock time harder to preserve in Civil War prisons.<sup>29</sup> There were also environmental and cultural reasons prisoners linked sound and time. First, the military-prison environments established by Union and Confederate officials used certain sounds—shouts, bells, and musical notes—to mark hourly and daily rhythms. Confederate officials at Andersonville, for example, used seventeen calls during the day from Reveille at daybreak to Taps at 8:30 p.m.<sup>30</sup> These calls mixed natural time, sunrise and sunset, with clock time in ways that factory and plantation bells rang for decades and church bells for centuries. A stable call rang out half an hour after daybreak and the breakfast call sounded at 7:00 a.m. In the evening, prisoners heard the parade call at 5:00 p.m. and the supper call came between 5:00 p.m. and tattoo at 8:00 p.m. Some calls affected prisoners more than others, but these sounds were omnipresent and unavoidable in prison environments. Jacob Heffelfinger, a Union prisoner from Pennsylvania, routinely recorded the time of each journal entry, but he often substituted bugle calls, especially retreat, for numerical time.<sup>31</sup> John A. Gibson wrote at Fort Delaware that the firing of a cannon marked sundown and the lowering of the U.S. flag.<sup>32</sup> One Union

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<sup>29</sup> “Register of Claims for Lost Personal Property,” Record Group 249, Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners, Entry 84, Volume 1, National Archives and Records Administration. Union Prisoners also traded watches to civilians for food, Eugene Sly diary, September 18, 1864, United States Civil War Collection, Western Michigan University, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/civilwar1/USCW004.0001.001?view=toc>.

<sup>30</sup> General Orders No. 90, November 5, 1864, Isaiah H. White papers, DU. See also Charles E. Frohman, *Rebels on Lake Erie* (Columbus: The Ohio Historical Society, 1965), 15.

<sup>31</sup> Jacob Heffelfinger diary, December 13 through December 31, 1862, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 14, AHEC.

<sup>32</sup> John Alexander Gibson diary, November 29, 1864, Gibson family papers, Mss2G3598b, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond [Hereafter VHS].

prisoner with access to a watch complained about the unpredictable rhythm of the ration call: in three days, the breakfast drum or “grub call” sounded at 10:00, 11:00, and 11:30 a.m. The supper call was just as unpredictable, sounding at 3:00, 4:00, and 4:30 p.m.<sup>33</sup> The inconsistency of aural time did not make it less important; if anything, intermittent calls reinforced careful listening because it meant the difference between receiving rations and medicine or going without. Instrumental notes mingled with sentries’ hourly cries, announcing time aurally whether prisoners wanted to hear it or not.

Associated with the environmental context of military prisons were cultural and religious ideas about how certain days should sound. Sound in antebellum America marked not only working hours but also the cadence of weeks and years. Important anniversaries were celebrated with toasts, speeches, bells, fireworks, cannons, and loud celebrations. On Sundays, however, religious listeners expected to hear church bells, the sober tone of religious leaders and hymns, Sabbath quietude, and had little tolerance for anything else.<sup>34</sup> A writer traveling through Mississippi in the 1830s, Joseph H. Ingraham wrote that on Sunday, “a more hallowed silence then reigns in the air and over nature.”<sup>35</sup> Sunday quietude was not silence but sober, highly structured sound “like a ‘still small

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas W. Springer diary, September 19, 20, and 21, 1864, MS #7093-v., Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia [hereafter UVA]. See also, James H. Sawyer record book, 1862-1865, 105, MS #96780, CHS. Nearly thirty years later, one prisoner recalled that the “grub call” sounded “like sweet music,” Briscoe Goodheart, “Belle Isle Revisited,” *National Tribune* (Washington, D.C.), November 10, 1892.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 95-103.

<sup>35</sup> [Joseph Holt Ingraham], *The Southwest, By a Yankee*, 2 vols. (New York, 1835) vol. 2, 52.

voice” in which the “light notes of merry music, or the sounds of gay discourse, would seem like profanation.”<sup>36</sup> For this reason, aural disturbances in Natchez appalled Ingraham. “Sounds of rude merriment,” he wrote, “mingled with tones of loud dispute and blasphemy, rose with appalling distinctness upon the still air, breaking the Sabbath silence of the hour, in harsh discord with its sacredness.”<sup>37</sup> Sunday had a sacred but fragile soundscape, easily disturbed by the noise of drunks, gamblers, and peddlers.

Mobilization affected the sounds and silences of Sunday. Some congregations voted to donate their loud, brass bells to the Confederacy to be melted down and cast into the loudest instruments of war—cannons. The Montgomery *Daily Advertiser* highlighted the case of the Methodist Protestant Church of Autaugaville, Alabama, and wished that the bell, once used to “call in sinners to attend divine service,” might soon “be in a condition to ring out the death knell of the dastard invaders of our soil.”<sup>38</sup> Moreover, martial sounds broke the Sabbath’s calmness in spite of limited efforts to accommodate Sunday observers.<sup>39</sup> This was especially the case in prisons, where noise contributed to a sense of timelessness because Sunday rarely sounded different than other days.

Reflective listeners in prison bemoaned the absence of antebellum Sunday sounds. When Heffelfinger lay in a Confederate field hospital, he thought of his family

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<sup>36</sup> Ingraham, *The Southwest*, vol. 2, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Ingraham, *The Southwest*, 54.

<sup>38</sup> “Bells for Confederate Service,” Montgomery (Alabama) *Daily Advertiser*, April 17, 1862.

<sup>39</sup> George C. Rable, *God’s Almost Chose Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 95-97; Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 202-03, 213-14, 227, 232.

entering the “house of God, where they now have the privilege of mingling their voices in prayer and praise.”<sup>40</sup> David Kennedy emphasized the soundscape of Andersonville, but only on Sundays. On his second Sunday in prison, he wrote, “Sunday comes againe but o what a plaice to spend the Sabath. No chiming of bells. Nothing to put us in mind of its being the lords day.”<sup>41</sup> Kennedy wished to hear “the chiming bells” and imagined “how sweet they would sound to my ears once more.” Even the word “Sunday” sounded “sweet” to Kennedy because it resonated with thoughts of family, and it made him long to “heire the plaintive straine of the church bells amidst those ones that I love so well.”<sup>42</sup> But there were no Sunday bells in Andersonville, and Kennedy worried he might never “heire the word of god preached in yankey land againe.”<sup>43</sup> The absence of the “sweet chiming of the bells” broke the Sunday soundscape. “It is Sunday,” Kennedy wrote, “but we can hardly relies it.”<sup>44</sup> Confederate prisoner Randal W. McGavock also noted the absence of church bells in northern prisons. He wrote, “Another Sabbath day has come but we hear no church going bells and we see none of those loved ones that we are accustomed to go to church with.”<sup>45</sup> When prisoners listened for church bells they often remarked on their absence.

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<sup>40</sup> Heffelfinger diary, July 6, 1862, AHEC.

<sup>41</sup> David Kennedy diary, May 15, 1864, MS#P1091, MNHS. All spelling in the original.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy diary, June 26, 1864, MNHS.

<sup>43</sup> Kennedy diary, June 12, 1864, MNHS.

<sup>44</sup> Kennedy diary, July 31, 1864, MNHS.

<sup>45</sup> Randal W. McGavock diary, April 27, 1862, in *Pen and Sword: The Life and Journals of Randal W. McGavock*, ed. Herschel Gower (Nashville, 1960), 619. For other diaries emphasizing sound or its absence on Sundays, see Franklin J. Krause diary, July 17,

Although prisoners disliked the absence of Sunday church bells, those who occasionally heard bells found that the sounds lowered their spirits because it heightened their sense of place and condition away from home and family. In contrast to the summoning sound of bells in earlier contexts, bells did not call for prisoners of war. Rather than bringing people together, bells highlighted the distance between prisoners and loved ones. At Macon, Georgia, Asa Dean Matthews wrote “at the usual hour the church bells rang but they’re to us homesick peals.”<sup>46</sup> Expressing his deep desire to return home and go to Sabbath school, Henry B. Sparks at Belle Island wrote that “the church bells of Richmond sound so familiar to me. Seems as if I should be at home.”<sup>47</sup> In Charleston, South Carolina, the “sound of church bells” reminded Heffelfinger of northern soundscapes, but these thoughts made it harder to maintain a “contented spirit in a prison.”<sup>48</sup> Mary M. Terry, a southern sympathizer and suspected spy imprisoned in Baltimore, initially considered it “a blessing to live within the sound of the church going bells.” As if on second thought, however, she reconsidered: “what a sad thought, I cannot sit under the drippings of the sanctuary.” The next Sunday was gloomier because Terry “heard nothing, no preaching to, or praying for prisoners,” and it was a remarkably “long

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1864, MS #14096, UVA; Nehemiah Solon diary, May 29, 1864, MS #78606a, CHS; Heslin, “Diary of a Union Soldier,” 270.

<sup>46</sup> Asa Dean Matthews diary, August 28 (quote), September 4, 11, 1864, MSA 371:12, Vermont Historical Society. See also Henry W. Tisdale diary, May 29, 1864, ANHS. See also Glenn Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die: The Civil War Prison Diary of Sgt. Lyle Adair, 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2011), 29.

<sup>47</sup> Henry B. Sparks diary, February 21, 1864, SC 0020, Indiana Historical Society.

<sup>48</sup> Heffelfinger diary, August 7, 1864, AHEC. For a postwar description of Sunday bells in Richmond and the same conclusion, see Abbott, *Prison Life in the South*, 55.

sad day.”<sup>49</sup> Whether depressed by the absence or presence of bells, many prisoners listened for the antebellum keynotes of Sunday but heard nothing like them.

Some listeners became distressed that Sunday provided no respite from the omnipresent noise of prison life. Robert Bingham, a North Carolinian imprisoned at Fort Delaware, was sensitive to Sunday noise as disruptive of the rhythm of time. “There is little Sunday in prison – no quiet – no calm,” Bingham wrote.<sup>50</sup> He described Sunday as though it could be quantified by the ear. He wanted to spend the day quietly reading and thinking, but the political discussions and cursing prevented thoughtful reflection. It was the “least like Sunday—no quiet—no holy calm.”<sup>51</sup> Others hinted at sound by noting the monotonous pace of time or the sameness of each day.<sup>52</sup> The Sunday soundscape no longer offered a pause that set the day apart from the rest of the week. Therefore, when William T. Peabody, a prisoner who later died in Andersonville, wrote, “This is Sunday, not much like N. England Sunday, more like Hell I think and a tough one too,” he hinted at the soundscape and the pace of time described by other listeners.<sup>53</sup> Less careful listeners would have agreed with William D. Wilkins that the “clamor, shouts, oaths &

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<sup>49</sup> Mary M. Terry diary, July 3 and 10, 1864, Mss5: 1T2795:1, VHS. See also George W. Pennington diary, May 15, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Bingham diary, July 12, 1863, in Robert Bingham papers, 1863-1864, MS #03731-z, SHC.

<sup>51</sup> Bingham diary, Sunday, July 5, 1863, SHC.

<sup>52</sup> Arthur Wyman diary, August 4 and 7, 1864, Civil War Document Collection, Box 127, Folder 1, AHEC. William T. Peabody diary, August 14, 1864. See also Baer diary, August 14, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>53</sup> Peabody diary, June 5, 1864, ANHS.

raving lungs” of prisons clashed in sharp discord with “a sweet, quiet Sabbath at home.”<sup>54</sup> Most weeks, Sunday sounded like all the other days in captivity.

In spite of a general lack of familiar Sunday soundscapes, some prisoners recovered the missing element by carving out religious space within prisons. “The church bells ringing the calls for services seem like sweet music,” Lewis C. Bisbee wrote in Savannah, Georgia, and “the sacred influence of the day seemed to pervade the camp more than usual.” For once, Bisbee thought it “seemed very much like Sabbath today.”<sup>55</sup> To someone who had spent two hundred and ninety-one days in Richmond, seventy-six in Macon, and thought exchange near, this particular Sunday may have indeed sounded sweeter. Bisbee and others attempted to revive a sacred soundscape inside prisons, an accomplishment which postwar narratives stressed more than wartime diaries. John Baer at Andersonville noted that on Sundays at 11 a.m. and sunset “the voice of deep and earnest prayer” from hundreds of voices momentarily rose above “the din and confusion of camp.”<sup>56</sup> The Rev. E. B. Duncan visited Andersonville to preach and noted that the

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<sup>54</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, September 19, 1862, William D. Wilkins papers, LC. For entries that implicitly reference sound through the sameness of Sunday and other days, see George A. Clarkson diary, July 3, 10, 1864, ANHS; Sheldon R. Curtiss diary, September 11, 1864, ANHS; John Duff diary, February 19, 1865, ANHS; Burton diary, July 10, 1864, EU; Heslin, “Diary of a Union Soldier,” 243, 272.

<sup>55</sup> Bisbee diary, August 14, 1864, MNHS. For prisoner singing and preaching on Sundays, see Tisdale diary, July 17, 1864, ANHS; Joseph B. Fenton diary, July 10, 1864, ANHS; Kellogg diary, April 24, 1864, CHS; Norman Niccum, “Documents: Diary of Lieutenant Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45, no. 3 (September 1949), 277, 280 entry for May 18, June 7, 1862; Paul C. Helmreich, “Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41, 1 (January 1976), 17, entry for May 15, 1864. On “captive congregations,” see Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 365-369.

<sup>56</sup> Baer diary, July 10, 1864, ANHS. See also John B. Vaughtner, *Prison Life in Dixie...* (Chicago, 1880), 62; Abbott, *Prison Life in the South*, 55, 68. On the memory of religious



prisoners “listened with most profound attention.”<sup>57</sup> A Confederate prisoner at Johnson’s Island faced a similar situation, stating that one could “scarcely get a seat, within hearing, unless he goes very early.”<sup>58</sup> Listeners disagreed whether the holy sounds of Sunday could be heard above unholy sounds. “There is perhaps a little less gambling,” Bingham conceded, “but the same novel reading & perpetual noise.”<sup>59</sup> Whatever prisoners picked up from the auditory environment, they referenced a complex prison soundscape that linked listening and experience.

Church bells were not the only bells prisoners interpreted, and Union prisoners at Belle Island and Libby listened anxiously to the warning bells. The Richmond *Enquirer* noted that the prisoners at Belle Island “could not restrain the exhibition of their diabolical joy on hearing the alarm bell.”<sup>60</sup> At Libby in May 1864, John B. Gallison and others sat up at night trying to interpret the ringing of bells, the tramping soldiers moving through the streets, and the brass bands.<sup>61</sup> Later that year, George S. Albee, a firefighter

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faith in northern and southern armies, see Gardner H. Shattuck, *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of Civil War Armies* (Macon, 1987), 127-36.

<sup>57</sup> John William Jones, *Christ in the Camp, or Religion in the Confederate Army* (Atlanta, 1904), 624.

<sup>58</sup> John Taylor to his mother, August 24, 1864, in Frances Taylor Meissner and Charles William Meissner, Jr., eds., *I had Rather Lose a Limb and be Free* (Seaford, 2005), 42. The bylaws of the Christian Association at Fort Delaware required that music open and close each meeting, Christian Association records, 1864-1865, Boyle books, Folder 2, SHC.

<sup>59</sup> Bingham diary, September 6, 1863, SHC.

<sup>60</sup> “One Hundredth Advance on Richmond,” Richmond *Enquirer*, February 9, 1864.

<sup>61</sup> John B. Gallison diary, May 22, 1864, John B. Gallison Papers, Ms. N-1266, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. See also Frank L. Byrne, “A General Behind

from Madison, Wisconsin, woke up to alarm bells several nights in a row at Libby and during the day the bells “rung vigorously for half an hour or more but we saw nothing.” At first he struggled to separate the meaning of bells from their antebellum context. He wrote, “my first impulse is to jump & run to the fire as I used to do.” Overlapping with instinct, Albee felt distinct pleasure listening to the ruination of Richmond. He concluded that “if incendiaries are at work they do work faithfully” and joked that “as this is the ‘heart of the rebellion’ the rebellion is warm hearted at present.”<sup>62</sup> Listening to alarm bells could be more pleasant than those of churches.

Sensitive to the peal of religious and secular bells, prisoners also picked up on other elements of the aural environment. Listening to nature, prisoners situated themselves within its animate and inanimate sounds. Apprehensive Confederate officers at Johnson’s Island listened periodically to the howling wind and roaring waves of Lake Erie. To James Mayo it sounded “quite solemn” and like a warning of the end of summer and approach of fall and winter.<sup>63</sup> Gilbert Sabre recalled that a cloud of insects hung over Andersonville and the “hum of their innumerable wings could be heard resembling the

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Bars: Neal Dow in Libby Prison,” in *Civil War Prisons*, ed. William B. Hesseltine (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1962), 69, 75.

<sup>62</sup> George S. Albee diary, September 1, 2, and 3, 1864. Compare the bell ringing in Thomas W. Springer diary (entries for September 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 16, 17, 21, 1864) to that of his messmate, James W. Eberhart, who later carried Springer to the dead house on November 29, 1864. Florence C. McLaughlin, ed., “Diary of Salisbury Prison by James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56, no. 3 (July 1973), 220-221-24, entries for September 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 16, 21, and November 29, 1864. On listening to bells, see also James W. Vance diary, June 1, 1864, VFM1834, Ohio Historical Society; Keeler diary, October 15, 1863, Keeler family papers, BHL, UM.

<sup>63</sup> James Mayo diary, August 17, 1863, LC. On listening to a thunderstorm, see entry August 22, 1863. See also W. M. Davis to father, December 17, 1863, Davis family papers, Filson Historical Society.

sound of an approaching wind.”<sup>64</sup> Humming and howling, nature reminded prisoners of place and condition. Prisoners used these sounds to articulate experience.

When prisoners listened to nature, they used songbirds to describe emotional fluctuations in ways not unlike enslaved blacks. In antebellum America, enslaved people envied what they interpreted as the happy sound of birds, and songbirds helped characterize the emotional experience of captivity and longing for freedom.<sup>65</sup> Prisoners inferred similar meanings. Vermonter Charles Chapin listened to the tune of a mocking bird outside the stockade at Andersonville on the Fourth of July and wrote that “it is the nicest bird I have ever heard.” The next day, however, Chapin recorded that “the rebs cut down the tree & drove off our mocking bird” and the stillness “makes me lonesome.”<sup>66</sup> Prisoners who listened to the sounds of birds felt more content because of their pleasant sounds, melancholy in spite of sweet sounds, or sometimes both. “The sun shining brightly and birds singing merrily,” Frank T. Bennett wrote on a Sunday in spring 1862, “it seems hard that this can be a time of war.”<sup>67</sup> Prisoner Charles L. Blinn listened to birds in an oak grove near Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1862. “Sweet birds are singing in the oak grove outside,” he wrote, “but they make not happy a prisoners life.” In contrast, on the Fourth of July the same birds in the same trees that spoke “of the goodness of Him

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<sup>64</sup> Gilbert E. Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War* (New York: The American News Company, 1865) 92.

<sup>65</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 209-210.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Chapin diary, July 4, 5, 1864, Vermont Historical Society.

<sup>67</sup> Frank T. Bennett diary, June 15, 1862, Frank T. Bennett papers, DU.

who Created all things.”<sup>68</sup> Waking up in Andersonville, James Burton that it was a “beautiful day to pine for caged birds.”<sup>69</sup> The sounds of birds resonated with the feelings of prisoners who used birds to describe their ups and downs.

Enlisting the sounds of nature to express contentedness could comfort loved ones at home and even articulate lessons about the value of finding serenity amid hardship. In May 1864, Frederic Augustus James wrote at the request of his wife to his six-year-old daughter, Nellie, explaining to her why she ought not to despair over the recent death of her only sister. He wrote from Salisbury prison, having been captured near Charleston, South Carolina, during an ill-fated amphibious assault on Fort Sumter in September 1863. Confederates held James first as a political hostage and then as a prisoner of war in Columbia, Richmond, Salisbury, and, lastly, Andersonville. Privately, he wrote about the prison lice and, a month after the letter to his daughter, his failing health, but none of this appeared in the letter intended to be read aloud to his daughter. After explaining the meaning of sin, heaven, Jesus, and that he wanted her to be happy, he reinforced his message by describing the tranquil natural and auditory environment at Salisbury, North Carolina. From the windows he could see forests and wheat fields and hear the songs of colorful birds. “We have plenty of music too,” he wrote, “for there are a great many birds here & you know that they are great musicians & don’t send a money around to ask us to pay them for singing, as the organ grinders do.” In contrast to the street musicians, James wrote that nature’s musicians “sing as merily as can be, just for the fun of it, because they are so happy. The sound of the birds drew back to his larger themes about faith and

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<sup>68</sup> Charles L. Blinn diary, June 22, July 4, 1862, University of Vermont, Burlington.

<sup>69</sup> James Burton diary, May 16, 1864, MSS#120, Emory University.

happiness. God had made birds colorful and sonorous, James explained, “to be happy & make others so.”<sup>70</sup> James explained what he wanted the sounds of songbirds to mean to his daughter. After his death at Andersonville, these words became the last Nellie heard from her father.

Describing the seasons and climates of northern and southern states, prisoners wrote about the sound of nature in sectional terms. Confederate prisoners in the north described the region as an acoustic desert in the winter. Randal McGavock contrasted the “cold, dark, and disagreeable day” at Fort Warren, Massachusetts, on May 1, 1862, with how he imagined his home in Franklin, Tennessee, where “the flowers are blooming and the birds singing.”<sup>71</sup> Another Tennessean, Samuel B. Boyd, wrote home in March 1865, that he had neither seen a bird nor “heard a chicken crow or a cow low or a horse neigh & have heard a dog bark but once.”<sup>72</sup> Other Confederates marked spring earlier in the North, but emphasized the novelty of the sounds. Captured at Gettysburg and dying at Johnson’s Island, William Peel noted in spring 1864 that a dozen blackbirds were perched on the sugar trees in the prison yard and he listened to their singing, a woodpecker hammering a dead buckeye tree, and ducks returning north. These sounds and sound stood out to Peel because “the almost entire absence on this forlorn island of

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<sup>70</sup> Frederic Augustus James to “My Dear Little Nellie,” Salisbury, N.C., May 6, 1864, Massachusetts Historical Society; Frederic Augustus James diary, March 14, 1864, MAHS.

<sup>71</sup> Gower and Allen, *Pen and Sword*, pg. 621, entry for May 1, 1862.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel B. Boyd to “My dear wife,” Camp Chase Ohio, March 2, 1865, Samuel B. Boyd Papers, MS 871, Special Collections, John C. Hodges Library, University of Tennessee. See also Thomas Lafayette Beadles diary, April 5, 1864, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

animal life except the prisoners & the necessary guard, to which I may add an innumerable host of rats, & a few pet cats, renders them circumstances to be noticed.”<sup>73</sup> Confederate prisoners like James Franklin wished to be in the woods, “holding communication with nature” and listening to “the songs of birds making sweet melody.”<sup>74</sup>

In contrast, Union prisoners in North Carolina and Georgia wrote about listening to warm-weather sounds as late as December and January.<sup>75</sup> Lyle Adair noted that frogs sang at Blackshear, Georgia, on the last day of November as if it were the spring.<sup>76</sup> Captured at Chattanooga, William L. Tritt inferred northern distinctiveness from agricultural practices that threatened bird populations. Listening to the birds, possibly the Carolina Parakeet, at Danville prison, Tritt concluded that “the sweet melody of birds is much gayer in the North than in the South on account of the spraying and breeding in the South.”<sup>77</sup> The sound of birds heightened not only place and the physical distance from home but also sectional differences.

If listening to singing birds had emotional meaning, prisoners and outsiders used the birds and their sounds, as well as the sounds of other animals to describe prison

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<sup>73</sup> William Peel diary, March 26, 1864, Z1797.000, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>74</sup> James Franklin dairy, August 9, 1863, Museum of the Confederacy.

<sup>75</sup> Alfred D. Burdick diary (handwritten transcript), December 16, 1864, P82-2504, Wisconsin Historical Society. See also James Canon Diary, January 13, 1865, Wis Mss 178S, WHS.

<sup>76</sup> Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die*, 48, entry for November 30, 1864.

<sup>77</sup> William L. Tritt diary, January 21, 1864, Wisconsin Historical Society. On biographical information, see William L. Tritt diary, ANHS.

environments. Although metaphor of the “grapevine telegraph” was more common than whispering birds, John White Scott at Fort Warren wrote to his wife in spring 1862 that even though “there is neither free press, nor free speech, outside of this Prison, yet little birds will in the Springtime warble sweet music & we hear it, and the rapid progress of events cheers me with the hope that all sill soon be over.”<sup>78</sup> Passing through Wilmington, North Carolina, Union prisoners Asa Matthews racialized the sounds of enslaved black laborers, writing that “they would scream and gabble like a hundred blackbirds.”<sup>79</sup> Describing the growing population of homesick prisoners at Andersonville in June 1864, the *Macon Telegraph* noted that “These little fellows want to go home – but they are as lively as caged birds.”<sup>80</sup> Others thought of nature when describing the sounds emanating from prisons. After sectionalizing the sounds of birds, William Tritt thought that the noisy barracks made “a regular human like a swarm of bees.”<sup>81</sup> For Tritt, the birds and the “bees” both helped characterize the acoustic environment of prisons.

In concert with bells and nature, the sounds of holidays, celebration, and music held emotional significance for prisoners. Sounds of the Fourth of July were important to Union and Confederate prisoners just as they had been before the Civil War. Confederates debated whether to celebrate or mourn this national holiday.<sup>82</sup> In northern

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<sup>78</sup> John White Scott to his wife, April 6, 1862, John White papers, LC.

<sup>79</sup> Asa Dean Mathews diary, July 5, 1864, MSA 371:12, Vermont Historical Society.

<sup>80</sup> J. H. H., “Three Days among the Yankee Prisoners,” *Macon Telegraph*, June 8, 1864.

<sup>81</sup> Tritt diary, February 11, 1864, WHS.

<sup>82</sup> Fletcher Melvin Green, “Listen to the Eagle Scream: One Hundred Years of the Fourth of July in North Carolina, 1776-1876,” in *Democracy in the Old South and Other Essays*

prisons they had no choice but to hear sounds of celebration that rejected the legal existence of the Confederacy. Thomas W. Hall, a Confederate sympathizer from Baltimore imprisoned at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor, disliked the noisy celebration on July 4, 1862. The most disturbing part of the day was neither the band nor the “Star Spangled Banner” but a national salute of thirty-four guns. The salute aurally asserted that the Confederates had illegally forsaken the Union.<sup>83</sup> A similar interpretation took place two years later at Camp Chase, Ohio, when James T. Mackey of Tennessee wrote, “Thirty-five guns were fired to-day; at least eleven more than was necessary.”<sup>84</sup> For these prisoners, sounds of northern celebration also reinforced their belief that they were the inheritors of the American Revolution. In 1863, Bingham awoke to the sound of salutes. “What a mockery,” he wrote, “Salutes to celebrate the Declaration of Independence fired by the most infamous tyrants that disgrace the earth.”<sup>85</sup> Terry wrote from the Baltimore jail, “The day ushered in by the bombing of cannon to celebrate what our fathers fought for. Blindness to the future is kindly given for could my old father have looked into the future...it would have turned his heart to stone.”<sup>86</sup> Confederate prisoners wished for

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by Fletcher Melvin Green, ed. J. Isaac Copeland (Nashville, 1969), 111-56. See also Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 21, 95-96.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas Hall to his mother, July 4, 1862, Thomas W. Hall Correspondence, MS #2390, Box 1, Folder 8, MHS.

<sup>84</sup> James Taswell Mackey diary, July 4, 1864, MC.

<sup>85</sup> Bingham diary, July 3, 1863, SHC. See also Joseph W. Mauck diary, July 4, 1864, MC

<sup>86</sup> Terry diary, July 4, 1864, VHS. On the memory of the American Revolution in soldier writings, see James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford, 1997), 18-19, 104-106, 110-113; and McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861-1864* (Baton Rouge, 1994), 6-10, 27-30, 45, 50-51.



silence on the Fourth of July because it reminded them of their quasi independence and the death of the Union.

In contrast, many Union prisoners in the South heard only silence on the Fourth of July and wished for a much louder celebration. Frank Hughes noted that the flags in Macon, Georgia, were at half-mast on the Fourth of July. “Not a word is heard to day,” he wrote, “The only way of celebrating the glorious old 4<sup>th</sup> is profound & silent meditation.”<sup>87</sup> In Andersonville, Eugene R. Sly hoped never to hear another one like it. “The men make less noise than before in several days,” he wrote, “& it seems more like a day of mourning than like a fourth of July.”<sup>88</sup> Although some Union prisoners tried to stir up a celebration, many found it too quiet.<sup>89</sup>

Union prisoners used the Fourth of July as an opportunity to express their undefeated spirit. Union prisoners at Gettysburg sang patriotic songs on the Fourth of July in protest of their captivity. Confederates on this occasion did not silence them, which prisoners inferred as another positive sign about the outcome of the fighting.<sup>90</sup> Prisoners gathered around a small American flag early in the morning at Macon, Georgia,

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<sup>87</sup> Niccum, ed., “Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, pg. 283, entry for July 4, 1862.

<sup>88</sup> Sly diary, July 4, 1864. See also, Heffelfinger diary, July 4, 1862, AHEC; Alonzo Tuttle Decker diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS; Samuel L. Foust diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS; John L. Hoster diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS; Marcus Collis diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS; Josephus Hudson diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS; George M. Hinkley diary, July 4, 1864, MS #File 1864 April 11, WHS.

<sup>89</sup> Mourning on the Fourth of July had antebellum precedents among political dissenters from the Federalists to the radical abolitionists, David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 24-25, 211-14, 350-51.

<sup>90</sup> Domschcke, *Twenty Months in Captivity*, 29. See also Rollins diary, July 4, 1863 and July 4, 1864, WHS.

singing “Rally Round the Flag,” and “Star Spangled Banner,” while “loud singing, cheers, full of heart and soul, rent the air.” Later in the morning there was a prayer followed by speeches that were “heavily responded to by the crowd.” The guards listened to this celebration with alarm and sent orders “that there should be no more speaking.” Prisoners eventually complied, but not before giving cheers for “the flag, for Abraham Lincoln, Gen. Grant, & the Emancipation Proclamation.” That night the prisoners rekindled the commotion, improvising fireworks “out of boards, and pitch pine pegs.”<sup>91</sup> Although many Andersonville prisoners heard little celebration on the Fourth of July, there were small demonstrations. One small group gave “three cheers for the [Union] army before Richmond and three groans for the Confederacy.”<sup>92</sup> At far west as Camp Ford, Texas, Union prisoners gave toasts and listened to the Glee Club before guards broke up the celebration.<sup>93</sup> Making the prison resonate with Union sounds broke the silence imposed by Confederates and captivity on the national holiday.

The Fourth of July was an aural holiday *par excellence*, but Union and Confederate prisoners picked up on other periodic sounds of celebration coming from the guards. The popular song, “John Brown’s Body,” originated at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor and became popular among Union soldiers before emancipation was an official

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<sup>91</sup> Heffelfinger diary, July 4, 1864. Bisbee diary, July 4, 1864, MNHS. Prisoners at Salisbury in 1862 drafted a program for their celebration, Willis Peck Clarke Collection, 1826-1926, MS #SC 013, WHS. See also, “Capt. H. H. Todd,” *National Tribune*, February 13, 1908.

<sup>92</sup> Kinder diary, July 4, 1864, ANHS. For a similar account at Macon, Georgia, see Abbott, *Prison Life in the South*, 79; “An Incident of the Late War,” *National Tribune*, December 3, 1881.

<sup>93</sup> Howard O. Pollan, ed., “The Camp Ford Diary of Captain William Fortunatus McKinney,” *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 25 (summer 1996), 20.

goal of the Union army.<sup>94</sup> That the song had roots at a coastal fortification meant that prisoners of war may have been among the first southerners to hear it. George W. Brown, the imprisoned mayor of Baltimore, listened to the sounds of Union celebration after the victories at Fort Donelson, remarking that it was “all very proper except that they had the bad taste to sing the northern battle song of Old John Brown, marching on to glory, Hallelujah.”<sup>95</sup> Confederate prisoners preferred to listen to the sounds of brass bands when they did not play national airs. Brown found it unpleasant to “listen to hail Columbia” while a prisoner of war.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, Bingham awoke to “some very good music – no Yankee about it – no national airs – but it was sweet music – a brass band.”<sup>97</sup> Bingham and other prisoners enjoyed music that did not have explicitly nationalistic qualities.

Union prisoners commented less often than Confederates on specific tunes, but both sides were captive audiences to the sounds of the other’s celebrations, which to their ears were more demoralizing than uplifting. At Macon, Georgia, Frank Hughes paired rumors that Stonewall Jackson was nearing Baltimore with the sounds of three cannons at night. He was pleased to learn the next day, however, that the “firing of cannon last night proved to be only from extra rations of whiskey.”<sup>98</sup> Sneden recalled hearing military

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<sup>94</sup> McWhirter, *Battle Hymns*, 41-48.

<sup>95</sup> George William Brown to George C. Schattuck, February 19, 1862, George William Brown papers, 1861-1862, MHS.

<sup>96</sup> George William Brown to his brother-in-law George C. Schattuck, January 31, 1862, Brown papers, MHS.

<sup>97</sup> Bingham diary, July 12, 1863, SHC.

<sup>98</sup> Niccum, “Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 280, entry for May 15, 1862.

bands playing and supposed they were serenading some high-ranking official.<sup>99</sup> George Wiser recalled that the Confederates brought in a band in early 1865 to cheer up the sick and worn-out prisoners. The band played a few tunes outside the stockade, but music did not improve morale among prisoners.<sup>100</sup> Captured Confederates on Morris Island listened to the music, cheering, and singing of Union guards and worried that the sound of celebration indicated another Union victory. Although celebratory in nature, many of the sounds that prisoners consumed depressed rather than lifted spirits.<sup>101</sup>

Union prisoners in the South singled out slave songs as thought-provoking and more uplifting than Confederate tunes. Antebellum travelers in the South had listened carefully to the singing and music of enslaved blacks in the context of slavery debates, and Union prisoners picked up on these sounds as well.<sup>102</sup> Early Andersonville prisoners arrived before the completion of the stockade and they passed the time watching and listening to slaves slowly seal them inside the walls. John McElroy recalled listening to the “peculiar, wild, and mournful music.... They never seemed to weary of singing, and we certainly did not [weary] of listening to them.”<sup>103</sup> Later in 1864, another prisoner wrote that the enslaved were working all night, “as we could hear their singing, which

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<sup>99</sup> Byran and Lankford, *Eye of the Storm*, 179.

<sup>100</sup> George Wiser, *Nine Months in Rebel Prisons* (Philadelphia, 1890), 46.

<sup>101</sup> Joslyn, *Immortal Captives*, 165.

<sup>102</sup> Shane White and Graham White, “Listening to Southern Slavery,” in *Hearing History*, 247-248. See also Eric W. Plagg, “Strangers in a Strange Land: Northern Travelers and the Coming of the American Civil War,” (Columbia: Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2006).

<sup>103</sup> John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons...* (Toledo, 1879), 135-136. See also Newell Burch diary [memoir], 122, ANHS.

always sounds inexpressibly mournful to me, as if the wail of the oppressed was rising to heaven.”<sup>104</sup> Listening to the slave music reminded prisoners of the enslaved people’s humanity as well as the ideological goals of emancipation. Willard W. Glazier listened to singing attributed to captured soldiers in the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and remarked, “no race so delicately sensitive to the emotional can be essentially coarse and barbarous.”<sup>105</sup> African American music reinforced individual commitments to emancipation at the same time alliances strengthened between whites and blacks in the Union army.<sup>106</sup> The power of sound and the importance of listening facilitated this transition among Union prisoners.

Prisoners also made noise around the Christmas holiday. A political prisoner at Fort Warren, Massachusetts, described Christmas in veiled language to his mother: he wrote, “What jokes we cracked, what songs we sung, and the name of the obnoxious individual whose effigy we sentenced to an ignominious fate, after a solemn trial, verdict found & sentence rendered.” Had the “obnoxious individual” been anyone other than a northern political figure, there would have been no reason to write in tortured prose to avoid the prison censor. “These are secrets,” he wrote, “not to be communicated now or

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<sup>104</sup> Forbes, *Diary of a Union Soldier*, 36. See also, “Under the Union Guns,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1891.

<sup>105</sup> Williard W. Glazier, *The Capture, the Prison Pen, and the Escape...* (New York, 1870), 151.

<sup>106</sup> See Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War was Over* (New York, 2008), 13; McWhirter, *Battle Hymns*, 152-55. For soldiers’ views on slavery, see McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, Ch. 9; Jimerson, *The Private Civil War*, chs. 3 and 4.

here.”<sup>107</sup> A Union prisoner in Richmond described howling so loud around Christmas that it “made the guards tremble. They no doubt thought we were about to make a break for liberty.”<sup>108</sup> Another recalled singing “Rally around the Flag,” and emphasizing the words, ““Down with the traitor and up with the stars’ ...for the benefit of the traitor guard on the front sidewalk.” They sang until guards threatened to use force against them.<sup>109</sup> Sound resistance was important to prisoners because it expressed their unconquerable political spirit.

### Listening and Understanding

Although listening was central to captivity experience, the meanings of individual sounds were not constant. During and after the war, listeners engaged in an interpretive struggle over the meaning of captivity.<sup>110</sup> The experiences and memories of captivity were too painful for even the powerful forces of reconciliation in the late-nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Captives and keepers rarely saw things the same way after the war because they rarely heard things the same way during the war. Aural landscapes were sites of interpretive struggles between prisoners and guards. That prisoners, guards, and civilians

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<sup>107</sup> Hall to his mother, January 1, 1862, Hall papers, MHS.

<sup>108</sup> Heslin, “Diary of a Union Soldier,” 247.

<sup>109</sup> Bryan and Lankford, *Eye of the Storm*, 178. See also Cornelius, *Music of the Civil War Era*, 110-14; John J. Sherman, “The Prisoner who Sang at Belle Isle,” *National Tribune*, February 21, 1884; Sherman, “The Song that was Sung and Belle Isle,” *National Tribune*, April 17, 1884.

<sup>110</sup> Sanders, *While in the Hands of the Enemy*, 297-316. For a different interpretation, see Gillespie, *Andersonvilles of the North*, 3.

<sup>111</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 179.

disagreed about conditions is not surprising. What is important is that the centrality yet subjectivity of listening enabled clashing interpretations of the same resonances. Patterns of listening were products of context and power relations. Even supposedly distinctive sounds such as suffering or destruction had the potential to elicit highly discordant interpretations.

As prisoners listened to the sick and dying from a position of weakness, they latched on to sounds of degeneration and death. Stephen Minot Weld described the sounds of suffering each Sunday morning at the county jail in Columbia, South Carolina, when the prisoners “are regaled by the cries from negroes being whipped in the lock up for various offences.”<sup>112</sup> These sounds of suffering became powerful rhetorical devices during and after the war. Ex-prisoners in the north asserted that the sounds of suffering underscored the inhumane conditions of Confederate prisons. “Groans and shrieks, curses and prayers, the ravings of delirium, and agonizing cries,” an ex-prisoner wrote, “mingled in one confused chorus, and served to drown the murmurs of those less boisterous in their complaints.”<sup>113</sup> Gilbert E. Sabre recalled his first nights at Belle Island in terms of sound. Only able to see shapes, he found his ears assailed all night by “moans from the agonies of a dying victim.” Thinking the “incredible sensations” too awful to be real, Sabre wondered if it was only a dream.<sup>114</sup> An ex-prisoner recalled dismal breathing conditions

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<sup>112</sup> Stephen Minot Weld diary, August 13, 1864, Ms. N-2378, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

<sup>113</sup> John Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence...* (Philadelphia, 1870), 48-49; see also Wiser, *Nine Months in Rebel Prisons*, 27; Forbes, *Diary of a Union Soldier*, 15, 19, 34; Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*, 75; Julius Frederic Ramsdell to Hoburn, December 3, 1864, Ramsdell papers, Series 1, Folder 2, UNC.

<sup>114</sup> Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*, 22-23.

in a room that housed captured black soldiers. Poor ventilation irritated lungs so badly that “coughing at times drowned all other sounds.”<sup>115</sup>

These sounds increased the horror of captivity experiences. Adding to the cacophony of prison life in the South were prisoners who went insane. John Urban heard their madness, their “ravings, prayers, and curses,” which “added much to the horrors of the prison.” Deranged prisoners wandered and begged for food; others “imagined themselves animals, and moved around on their hands and knees, hunting for something to eat.”<sup>116</sup> Sounds of suffering were a constant theme in prison writings. Union prisoner Roland E. Bowen complained that the “silent hours of the night” were “always broken by the dismal tread of a hundred shivering forms as they pass to and fro.”<sup>117</sup> A Confederate prisoner at Johnson’s Island described the aural contrasts between melancholy silence, sighs of grief, and hourly calls by the guards:

Silence over Erie’s Waters  
Resting in the ambient air;  
Silence over Prison quarters  
Melancholy Silence there.  
Hark the spell at last is broken;  
Shrill the cry by sentry spoken;  
What may not those words betoken  
All is well.

“Half past ‘10’ o’clock” is calling  
“All is well”! Ah! Whence that sigh?  
‘Twas like grief in cadence falling

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<sup>115</sup> Sprague, *Lights and Shadows*, 132.

<sup>116</sup> Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell*, 520.

<sup>117</sup> George A. Coco, ed., *From Balls Bluff to Gettysburg...and Beyond: The Civil War Letters of Private Roland E. Bowen, 15<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, 1861-1864* (Gettysburg, 1994), 173-74; see also Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*, 45-46.



From some o'er charged heart close by  
Like a weary zephyr dying  
Where October's leaves are lying  
Yet the Sentry is replying,  
"All is well."<sup>118</sup>

Prisoners remarked on the disparity between their listening and that of the guards.

Listening to sounds of suffering was inescapably linked to the experience of captivity.

Prisoners reacted differently to suffering that they could do little to alleviate.

Adhering to the cultural rites of death, some tried to get last statements from the dying, often without success.<sup>119</sup> Prisoners from Andersonville petitioned President Lincoln to reopen the prisoner exchange, writing that men, "crazed by their sufferings, wander about in a state of idiocy; others deliberately cross the line, and are remorselessly shot down."<sup>120</sup> And many of the dying struggled loudly for life. One prisoner recalled, "They would speak of wife, children, parents and kindred, in the most piteous tones; and it was truly distressing to see men...cry like children, as they felt conscious that they would never look upon their dear old homes again."<sup>121</sup> Prolonged suffering inured others to the terrible sounds. An anonymous prisoner wrote, "Suffering had deadened our sensibilities,

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<sup>118</sup> Lt. Walker, "Half Past Ten O'clock," Moncure Autograph Album, 1863-64, MC.

<sup>119</sup> Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence*, 51. On the culture of death and dying, see Drew Giplin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (New York, 2008); Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, 2008).

<sup>120</sup> "The Prisoners of War," *The Charleston Mercury*, September 6, 1864; see also "The Union Prisoners in Georgia," *New York Herald*, August 23, 1864; United States Congress, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War by Rebel Authorities during the War of the Rebellion* (Washington, 1869), 948.

<sup>121</sup> Harrold, *Libby, Andersonville, Florence*, 58-59. See also Vance diary, July 2, 1864, ANHS.

so that we did not heed them; and we went on regardless of the sights and sounds around us.”<sup>122</sup> That these stories are more common in postwar narratives does not necessarily indicate exaggeration or dishonesty. If sensibilities could harden they might also soften. What is clear is that physical and mental suffering did not occur silently. The cries of suffering haunted survivors.

Other listeners, especially in the south, heard ample evidence to indict the guards for inhumane treatment. An ex-prisoner recalled that the guards publicly whipped a black sailor for refusing to work, and the man “came in crying.”<sup>123</sup> An Andersonville diarist recorded on July 4 that a “gun cracked and the man *squealed* out as it took effect on or near the dead line.”<sup>124</sup> In Mississippi, a prisoner temporarily held in a slave pen interpreted the “piteous cries” of black prisoners as the sounds of torture.<sup>125</sup> Two ex-prisoners described the whipping of slaves to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, saying “they could hear,—even if they shut their eyes to the horrid exhibition.”<sup>126</sup> Although these sounds were probably magnified in postwar narratives, historians cannot expect dispassionate accounts. Prisoners simply did not experience captivity or the war with

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<sup>122</sup> *Voice from Rebel Prisons*, 11.

<sup>123</sup> Forbes, *Diary of a Soldier*, 31.

<sup>124</sup> William Tritt diary, July 4, 1864, emphasis in the original, WHS.

<sup>125</sup> Sabre, *Nineteen Months a Prisoner of War*, 12. See also James E. Wenrick diary, April 26, 1864, Am. 66954, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg.

<sup>126</sup> U.S. Sanitary Commission, *Narrative of Privation and Sufferings...* (Boston, 1864), 45.

dispassionate impartiality. Rather than making these informants untrustworthy, however, it confirms their humanity.<sup>127</sup>

A radically different interpretation of suffering highlighted the incongruity of experience, the subjectivity of listening, and the importance of treating sound seriously. Listeners from a position of power sometimes interpreted the sounds of suffering as affirmation of the moral fallibility of their enemy. According to a contributor in the *Richmond Examiner*:

Hospital No. 21, Cary Street, is the receptacle of the Yankee wounded that fall into our hands, and, at all hours, cries and groans of distress can be heard issuing from its somber wards. Enter it, and the whine and groan and fearful contortion of countenance to be met with on every hand is fearful to behold. Frequently the patients have importuned the surgeons to shoot them, to put them out of their misery of mind and body.<sup>128</sup>

The writer then compared the noise of these suffering prisoners to the quietude of Confederate wounded. He wrote, “In a hospital of Confederate wounded, the sights and sounds are vastly different, and if not pleasant, are far from being revolting. Pleasant faces are to be met with, groans and sighs are repressed, and the wounded joke and laugh about their wounds as something to be proud of.”<sup>129</sup> The noise of Union prisoners and the quietude of a Confederate hospital reflected what the writer called a difference between a “just and holy cause” and a “wicked and unjust crusade.”<sup>130</sup> This was not unique to the South. A Union physician, George T. Stevens, interpreted silent suffering as a mark of

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<sup>127</sup> Gillespie, *Andersonvilles of the North* 5.

<sup>128</sup> “The Wounded of Two Armies,” *Richmond Examiner*, May 18, 1864.

<sup>129</sup> “The Wounded of Two Armies,” *Richmond Examiner*, May 18, 1864.

<sup>130</sup> “The Wounded of Two Armies,” *Richmond Examiner*, May 18, 1864.

northern masculinity. A desperately wounded Union soldier, Stevens wrote, “would shut his teeth close together and say nothing.” In contrast, a Rebel prisoner, “if he could only boast of a flesh wound, would whine and cry like a sick child.”<sup>131</sup> It depended on the position of the listener whether the sounds of suffering marked inhumane treatment, divine retribution inflicted on an unholy enemy, or lack of masculinity.

Just as the sounds of suffering elicited conflicting interpretations, the sounds of destruction also had fluid meanings. White southerners in Charleston, South Carolina, had no choice but to listen to the noise of their waning independence as the Union bombarded the city in 1863 and 1864.<sup>132</sup> Union prisoners heard it differently. One captive explained that the effect of shells was far greater on morale than anything else and the bombardment of Charleston was enough to “ruin the steadiest nerves of the city.”<sup>133</sup> Others mused at the effect on civilians. In dark humor, Burton wrote, “It must disturb the dreams somewhat to have one of those large shells come down through the top of the house and explode.”<sup>134</sup> Listening to the bombardment gave him satisfaction that someone else was paying for the rebellion.

Other captive listeners in Charleston heard the bombardment in patterns similar to Burton. Edmund E. Ryan wrote that he took pleasure in “hearing our shells drop into the heart of this rebellious city.”<sup>135</sup> John C. Welch explained why the bombardment sounded

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<sup>131</sup> George T. Stevens quoted in Nelson, *Ruin Nation*, 185.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, “Of Bells, Booms, Sounds, and Silences,” 16-18.

<sup>133</sup> “Under the Union Guns.” See also Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell*, 607-608.

<sup>134</sup> Burton diary, September 27. 1864, EU.

friendly. He wrote, “Our danger from them did not seem imminent, and they were a sort of reminder that we had friends doing what they could for us.”<sup>136</sup> Another remembered that the sound of shells “made music for me, and I loved to listen to them in their flight, and to catch the downward rush and deafening crash of their explosion, for they seemed, not like missiles of destruction, but messages from near-by friends.”<sup>137</sup> For Heffelfinger, the sounds of the bombardment were “just enough to remind us that Uncle Sam is still full of life and vigor.”<sup>138</sup> After being marched out of Charleston, he noted that the bombardment had a silencing effect. “The city,” he wrote, “is more quiet to-day than a northern village on the Sabbath.”<sup>139</sup> Tellingly, Confederate prisoners equally exposed to fire near Charleston did not remember the bombardment as invigorating because the sounds did not offer the same hope.<sup>140</sup> The sounds of destruction, like the sounds of suffering, were malleable and open to multiple, conflicting interpretations.

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<sup>135</sup> William M. Armstrong, “Cahaba to Charleston: The Prison Odyssey of Lt. Edmund E. Ryan,” in Hesseltine ed., *Civil War Prisons*, 120.

<sup>136</sup> John Collins Welch, “An Escape from Prison During the Civil War, 1864,” 3, Manuscripts Division, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina [hereafter SCL].

<sup>137</sup> “Under the Union Guns.” See also Nathaniel Rollins to Senator Tim O. Howe, January 26, 1865 and Rollins diary, entries July 29 through October 5, 1864, Nathaniel Rollins papers, 1822-1901, Wis Mss UW, WHS.

<sup>138</sup> Heffelfinger diary, September 14, 1864, AHEC. See also Billings memoir, 108, LC; Kellogg diary, September 18, 1864, CHS.

<sup>139</sup> Heffelfinger diary, October 5, 1864, AHEC.

<sup>140</sup> Walter G. McRae, “Confederate Prisoners at Morris Island,” *Confederate Veteran* 29, no. 5 (May 1921): 178; Henry H. Cook, “The Story of the Six-Hundred,” *Confederate Veteran* 5, no. 3 (March 1897): 118.

Focused attention to hearing and listening, like the other senses, further humanizes the social history of the Civil War by examining how prisoners navigated the confusing, emotional experience of captivity. Prisoners aptly compared listening for rumors to grasping for straws, but reliability mattered little for desperate people in situations they did not understand. Analyzing listening also provides a way to access human experiences missed by attention to vision alone. The presence of Sunday noise and the absence of church bells amplified feelings of loneliness, restlessness, and ultimately timelessness in prison. Listening to holidays, celebration, and slave music made prisoners think about their place in national politics and the crisis of disunion. Analysis of listening provides a way to explore how people in the past engaged with and gave meaning to their physical and ephemeral environment.

Patterns of listening also reflected the incongruities of experience. Prisoners and guards disagreed on the meaning of sounds because listening depended on context, including power relations. The sounds of suffering and of destruction had particularly unstable meanings. Prisoners heard the sounds of suffering as keynotes of inhumane captivity. Yet one of the reasons outsiders never fully sympathized with prisoner conceptions of treatment was that they heard the same sounds as well-deserved retribution or unmanliness. Likewise, guards and civilians listened to the sounds of destruction in Charleston as a prolonged, relentless siege. Northern prisoners found the bombardment comforting because it let them know that Union forces were coming. Like an inversion of the song, “The Star Spangled Banner,” the bursting of shells let prisoners know the besieging army had not given up.

## CHAPTER 6:

### NOCTURNAL SENSATIONS

When darkness fell prison rules changed and the nonvisual senses were even more acute than during the day. Accounting for nearly half of “daily” life, night influenced the real and imagined power relationship between prisoners and guards. Darkness made guards more nervous and quick to fire because night seemed to empower prisoners, who tested the nerves of the night watch through noisy resistance and silent escape. Fears that prisoners might revolt were not unwarranted. In 1863 John B. Kay recorded a plan for how he and other Union prisoners might revolt from the Pemberton prison and seize Richmond from the inside. Select able-bodied men would sneak up on and gag a night watchman. From there they would fall upon the room where the relief guard slept with “the greatest possible silence” and without “shouting or noise of any kind.” After swapping clothes with the guard, the plotters would free the officers at Libby Prison and then the other enlisted men on Belle Island. The plan, more an imaginative dream than a serious plot, ended with the capture of Richmond and the arrest of Jefferson Davis. The key was leveraging darkness and silence. Butchering the guards, however agreeable, would make too much noise. They had to be incapacitated with neither noise nor stir.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Kay diary, November 23, 1863, 851695Aa1, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

Although the Pemberton prisoners never revolted in this way, the plan said much about how prisoners thought about the opportunity and challenges of nightly resistance.

The same darkness that brought prisoners opportunities also compounded their hardships. Multisensory experience was sharpest at night, highlighting the engagement of the senses in prisoners' creation of meaning. Homeopathic medicine in the Antebellum U.S. described the ideal nights' rest: "When we lie down to sleep, we voluntarily exclude the operation of the senses; in other words, we see nothing, hear nothing, smell nothing, and taste nothing; and endeavor to *think* nothing."<sup>2</sup> For prisoners, the impossibility of tuning out the senses was more apparent in a dark environment. John William Flinn, a Mississippian by birth who studied theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina and the University of Edinburgh, recalled in 1893 the sound and feeling of winter nights at Point Lookout. Even the title of his unpublished account, "A Southern Soldier Boy's Story of Some Thing He Saw and Heard & Felt in a Northern Prison," gestured to this synesthesias. Prisoners rubbed their hands, climbed, jumped, and stamped their feet on sleepless cold nights to keep warm. Two sounds predominated. Flinn wrote that the first "were rhythmic, as if one throb of 10000 hearts, like a muffled drum-beat, had instantly passed from man to man, causing their feet to beat in unison the measure of a common voiceless woe!" The second resonance "was a weird wailing sound, like the far away voice of the sea moaning in a storm. It was the irrepressible groan of 1000 men whose teeth were chattering, & whose forms were vibrating with the sound." Searching for metaphors to describe the strange feeling and sensation, Flinn first compared it to the

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<sup>2</sup> John C. Gunn, *Gunn's Domestic Medicine; or, Poor Man's Friend...* (Madisonville, TN: Johnston & Edwards, 1830), 120.



sound of an organ and then like “a huge animal in pain yet trying to hush the voice of its pangs!”<sup>3</sup> The senses were each important during the day, but they reached their full expression individually and in concert at night.

In many ways this chapter begins where the last chapter left off, but adds a new element of natural time. Darkness brought together the multisensory experience of Flinn’s suffering but also offered the opportunity of Day’s plot. While listening was an interpretive process in which prisoners gave meaning to select sounds, they also engaged in shaping that space by choosing to raise or lower their voices. Prisoners spoke and sang out against their captors. Their ability and willingness to make noise invariably led to conflict between guards who claimed the authority to maintain sonic order and prisoners who claimed the right to express discontent. Strict control and deployment of sound reflected officials’ desire to manage calm, orderly prisons. Aural control was never complete, in part because prisoners enlisted sound for their own purpose. Prisoner music, singing, and noise tested the boundaries of captivity and selective silence helped facilitate escape plots.

This chapter proceeds thematically. After discussing the jolting effect of night on power relations and perception, it covers the range of nighttime experiences. The penetrating sounds of suffering at night made the feeling of privation deeper and more animalistic than during the day. Prison odors smelled more pungent and lethal. The human and nonhuman populations that preyed on prisoners had greater mobility at night, seizing possessions and skin with greater impunity. All of these factors made nature’s

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<sup>3</sup> John William Flinn, ““A Southern Solder Boy’s Story of Some Things He Saw and Heard & Felt in a Northern Prison,” 1893, J. William Flinn papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

restorer more elusive in prison. When prisoners did sleep, however, they recorded rich dreams of friends, family, and going home with more frequency than nightmares. If anything, the nightmare was being jerked back from dreamland into reality by the sound of a gunshot, the call of the guards, or the shake of a sick and delirious messmate.

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The cycle of natural time affected the perception, if not always the reality, of power relationships. Although cultural worries about literal or metaphorical darkness are not universal, night has often been a time of extralegal violence and fear. As a weapon, night offered the weak cover to shed some constraints but also abetted the powerful in terrorizing their perceived social inferiors. Yet in places and societies where a small number held disproportionate power, night had at least the potential to erode the disciplining eye and ear's power. At various times and places, night has seemed to empower or embolden the devil, wild animals, witches, Indians, thieves, slaves, and mobs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820-1930* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 6-7; A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 15-17, 19-22, 28-30, 31-74, 257-258; Bryan D. Palmer, *Cultures of Darkness: Night Travels in the Histories of Transgression* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 6. On "natural" and other overlapping "times" in the Civil War, see Cheryl A. Wells, *Civil War Time: Temporality and Identity in America, 1861-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005). On the fear of mobs, especially at night, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: A New Translation by George Lawrence*, ed. J. P. Mayer (1835; reprint, New York, Anchor Books, 1969), 252, 252n. Discussions of sound, class, and mobs often implicitly discuss night. See Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93-94, 97-100; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 59-62.

In the long histories of modernization and capitalism, the powerful treated nighttime as a frontier or a problem to solve. Street lights, a symbol of modernity in the nineteenth-century, combined elements of luxury and control to colonize night. Street light extended social control and carved out leisure space in the parts of cities where the powerful intersected with the masses.<sup>5</sup> As a corollary to street lights, noise ordinances reflected a shift in elite's sensitivity to sound during the day and night. Sound endurable in the daytime, such as horses and draymen, became noise at night, but only for those whose work was not relegated to the dark hours.<sup>6</sup> Emerging in the eighteenth century, noise ordinances became widespread by the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time skyscrapers began competing with steeples for the skyline of cities, the sound of church bells, once resonant with power, came under scrutiny because they awoke more than just the members of their denomination.<sup>7</sup>

The street lamps that chased shadows and the ordinances that suppressed noise were part of a larger effort to rationalize time and discipline people. Night required policing because darkness cloaked subversion. The visual and aural power of southern

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<sup>5</sup> Mark J. Bouman, "Luxury and Control: The Urbanity of Street Lighting in Nineteenth-Century Cities," *Journal of Urban History* 14, no. 1 (November 1987), 17; Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 83-84; Murray Melbin, *Night as Frontier: Colonizing the World After Dark* (London: The Free Press, 1987). Classen argues that in the Middle Ages, "Nighttime was the realm of touch, when sight failed and the tactile senses attained their full potential." *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827-1867* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 80.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond W. Smilor, "Personal Boundaries in the Urban Environment: The Legal Attack on Noise, 1865-1900," *Environmental Review* 3 (1979), 29.

slaveholders became diluted after dark.<sup>8</sup> Masters often forbid their slaves from leaving their quarters or the plantation after dark because enslaved people used night to suit their individual and collective interests. Night provided the cover to hunt raccoons, opossums, and other wild game.<sup>9</sup> To preserve order, James Henry Hammond advised overseers to irregularly but frequently visit the slave quarters “after horn blow at night to see that all are in.”<sup>10</sup> Such measures were necessary because slaves took advantage of darkness to conceal private activities.

While masters may or may not have considered daily resistance a serious threat to order, nightly resistance gave them pause. Slave revolts, both real and imagined by whites, had important temporal dimensions. Sundays, holidays, and, especially, nights or early mornings were popular times to strike. Describing the supposed plot in South Carolina on the night of July 4, 1816, Rachel Blanding wrote that the slaves planned to take advantage of the drunken holiday, setting fire to the town as a diversion and then seizing the arsenal. Afterwards the slaves would murder the men and hold as prisoners

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 232-233; Melbin, *Night as Frontier*, 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Stuart A. Marks, *Southern Hunting in Black and White: Nature, History, and Ritual in a Carolina Community* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 22, 27. See also Guion G. Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937); William Elliott, *Carolina Sports by Land and Water...* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 244-259.

<sup>10</sup> Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 145-146. On night and slave resistance, see also Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 24-25.

the women “for their own purposes.”<sup>11</sup> As Blanding’s fears suggest, insurrection scares frequently involved enslaved people’s use of darkness. Describing the latent power of slaves in 1861, Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, “If they want to kill us, they can do it when they please, they are as noiseless as panthers.” For Chesnut the timing of slave resistance was as important as the soundlessness. The recent murder that worried her, a smothering, had taken place at night inside a plantation house while the rest of the household slept undisturbed.<sup>12</sup>

During the Civil War, darkness sharpened the senses of those navigating human and nonhuman environments. Garrisoned at Brentwood, Tennessee, five days before his capture in March 1863, Union soldier Charles Holbrook Prentiss noted the discordant martial and natural sounds of night. From his nighttime picket station he heard tattoo and the beat of drums eight miles south at Franklin. He listened to the sounds of spring which he described as a cacophony of singing toads, braying mules, and clacking frogs, peacocks and guinea hens.<sup>13</sup> Prentiss’s interest in the human and nonhuman sounds was not unusual. Even more than the daytime, nocturnal creatures howled and bit. Illinoisan John M. Follet described nature as piercing both the ears and the skin. The fauna preventing his “peace or quiet” included not only flies, crickets, frogs, alligators, mosquitoes, and owls but also lice, fleas, spiders, slugs, and beetles. Follet saved

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Blanding to Hannah Lewis, 4 July 1816, William Blanding papers, folder 1, South Caroliniana Library

<sup>12</sup> C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 211.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Holbrook Prentiss diary, March 20, 1863, Letters and Diaries, Civil War Miscellaneous Collection, Army Heritage Education Center, Carlisle, PA.

particular ire for the mosquitoes that “present their bills for liquidation” and the fleas that “play backgammon on my anatomy.”<sup>14</sup> Some noted that the conflict entered a new dimension after dark. In Virginia in 1864, George S. Albee considered it a strange sensation to walk along the picket line in the dim moonlight with “the Rebs within hearing distance.”<sup>15</sup> Captives brought this sensitivity with them into prison.

### Keeping Order

Prison guards attempted to control the soundscape of prisons at night because calm, quietude suggested order and stability. Like sound and time, the link between order and sound had its immediate roots in antebellum plantations, factories, and prisons. Planters and industrialists regulated their workforces with horns and bells and penitentiaries attempted to reform minds with quiet, sober penance.<sup>16</sup> Civil War prison officials put greater emphasis on controlling the body than reforming the mind, but they inherited an interest in managing sound, especially at night. At Camp Chase, rules forbade guards from speaking to prisoners or conversing with each other.<sup>17</sup> Aural alarms

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<sup>14</sup> John M. Follet to his parents, June 19, 1864, quoted in Kelby Ouchley, *Flora and Fauna of the Civil War: An Environmental Reference Guide* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 151.

<sup>15</sup> George S. Albee dairy, June 20, 1864, Library of Virginia.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 35-37, 138-40. The parallel between practical quietude in Civil War prisons and the reformatory silence in penitentiaries can be taken too far. On sound in the penitentiary, see Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 114-17. See also, Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary System in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

provided the most efficient way to alert the entire guard of an emergency. Regulations of Confederate prisons defined the meaning of gunshots: “The firing of one gun at night, or two during the day, will be the signal for the immediate assembling of the guard.” These rules also called for “lights-out” at 9:00 p.m., and the guards insured that the prison remained both dark and quiet.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, a prison hospital in Richmond required patients to retire at 9:00 p.m. “with as little noise as possible,” and regulations forbade “heavy walking and loud talking,” at all times.<sup>19</sup> Others categorized cursing, loud talking, and “other noise” with noxious behavior such as spitting on the floor or smoking.<sup>20</sup> Variations of prison types and regulations existed, but officials took sound control seriously.

Policing the sounds of prison mattered because guards interpreted noise as only the opening salvo of revolt. Frank Wilkeson, a guard at Elmira, feared that the “ugly-tempered and rebellious” Confederate prisoners were testing the poorly trained guards at night by raising the “charging-yell,” and he inferred that a breakout would follow. In

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<sup>17</sup> R. Lamb, Instructions to prison guards, April 1, 1864, in *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (70 vols. in 128; Washington, 1880-1901) Ser. II, Vol. VII, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas P. Turner, Rules and Regulations of the C.S. Military Prisons, undated, reproduced online at Michael D. Gorman, “Civil War Richmond,” [www.mdgorman.com](http://www.mdgorman.com). Similar regulations existed for Point Lookout. C. H. Lawrence, General Orders No. 10, April 18, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. II, Vol. VII, 66-68.

<sup>19</sup> Rules and Regulations for General Hospital #21, no date, Series III, Confederate States of America Medical Records, 1861-1865 Collection, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, reproduced online at “Civil War Richmond.”

<sup>20</sup> Rules and regulations for General Hospital #24, no date, reproduced at “Civil War Richmond.” See also A. W. Persons, General Orders, March 15, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. II, Vol. VI, 1054. See also Charles W. Hill to William Hoffman, August 29, 1864, *Official Records*, Ser. II, Vol. VI, 700-01.

response, guards fired at a prisoner barracks, making the darkness as “silent as death.”<sup>21</sup> No one was seriously injured, but Wilkeson wrote that the Confederates never again made “night hideous by their yells and howls.”<sup>22</sup>

In addition to trying to enforce interior quietude, guards made nights resonate with sounds that projected control. Union and Confederate guards used sound to mark time at night when prisoners were most likely to escape or, worse, revolt. Guards cried out the hours of the night, yelling out their post number and announcing their alertness to captives and other guards. The rules were also more unforgiving than during the day. At Camp Morton in 1862, the prison commandant stipulated that “prisoners will carefully avoid interrupting sentinels in the discharge of their duty, and especially will not curse them, use abuse language or climb onto fences or trees.” In the daytime, the guards were instructed to fire after three warnings in the daytime and one at night.<sup>23</sup> At the Ohio Penitentiary, guards walked around the building to see that prisoners were still in their cells and hear that they were quiet.<sup>24</sup> But as the commanding officer at Johnson’s Island admitted, “It does not do to rely on hearing at all, as the noise of the waves [on Lake

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<sup>21</sup> Frank Wilkeson, *Turned Inside Out: Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1887), 222, 230; Toney, *Privations of a Private*, 105.

<sup>22</sup> Wilkeson, *Turned Inside Out*, 230.

<sup>23</sup> Hattie Lou Winslow and Joseph R. H. Moore, *Camp Morton, 1861-1865, Indianapolis Prison Camp* (1940; reprint, Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society, 1995), 28. See also, Toney, *Privations of a Private*, 94; Vaughtner, *Prison Life in Dixie*, 69-70; Cavada, *Libby Life*, 46-47; Sprague, *Lights and Shadows*, 44; Frank Wilkeson, *Turned Inside Out: Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1887), 221.

<sup>24</sup> Jesse E. Watson, affidavit, December 8, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. II, Vol. VI, 674. For other prisons, see James T. Wells Papers, “Diary of a Confederate Soldier and Recollections of a Federal Prison during the War,” 28-29, SCL; Toney, *Privations of a Private*, 87.



Erie] overcomes every other.”<sup>25</sup> He ordered the installation of more lamps so that the sentinels could see in any weather conditions. Such fears and solutions indicated that the combination of darkness and noise could destabilize prison security.

Natural darkness and noise and prisoner silence aided escapes by blinding and deafening the guards. Only one day after capturing Fort Donelson in February 1862, Ulysses S. Grant reported that during the night that many animals and prisoners had run off.<sup>26</sup> At Johnson’s Island that same spring, William Hoffman noted that with the ill-trained recruits who guarded Confederate officers, “there will be little difficulty in a prisoner escaping on a dark, stormy night.”<sup>27</sup> Confederates used the visual cover of darkness and the auditory cover of a thunderstorm to break out of jail in Springfield, Missouri. Henry Martyn Dysart stood on guard at the Court House when eighteen Confederate prisoners escaped in May 1862. They cut a hole under the stove, descended into the cellar, and left through an unlocked cellar door. In addition to the guards’ laxity, Dysart wrote that the prisoners “took advantage of the noise and darkness of the heavy rain.”<sup>28</sup> Union prisoner Frank Hughes, imprisoned at Macon in summer 1862, noted that

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<sup>25</sup> William S. Pierson to Hoffman, October 17, 1863, *Official Records*, Ser. II, Vol. VI, 391.

<sup>26</sup> U. S. Grant to J. A. McClernand, February 17, 1862, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, ser. II, vol. 3, pg. 272.

<sup>27</sup> William Hoffman to M. C. Meigs, March 10, 1862, *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 3, pg. 367.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Dysart, May 19, 1862, Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas Civil War diary, 1862-1863, Iowa Digital Library, University of Iowa Libraries.

“Yankees begin to leak out at dusk,” and for that reason, the guards tripled their number.<sup>29</sup>

The combination of natural darkness and intentional silence helped prisoners “leak out” of even the more secure prisons. Jesse E. Watson, a guard present when John Hunt Morgan escaped from the Ohio State Penitentiary, testified during an inquiry that there was no indication of an escape because he “heard no noise or disturbance of any sort.”<sup>30</sup> The escape baffled guards who were experts in interpreting the sounds of prisoner activity. “Entire stillness almost always prevails,” Watson said, “and the least noise or jar is immediately and distinctly heard anywhere in the hall, and it would be impossible, I think, for any prisoner to cut, saw, dig, pound, scrape, or attempt anything of that kind without being immediately heard and discovered by the night watch.”<sup>31</sup> This nighttime silence at the Ohio Penitentiary was probably the exception rather than the rule. Nonetheless, guards trusted their ears to detect escaping prisoners, but incidents such as these indicated the ability of prisoners to fool the guards’ sense of hearing. When prisoners controlled sound it had the potential to translate into freedom.

As Watson’s testimony suggests, even the tightest prisons were not completely secure after dark. At least 1,200 Confederate prisoners successfully escaped from Union prisons and many more tried.<sup>32</sup> While many eventually went south, others went to

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<sup>29</sup> Norman Niccum, “Documents: Diary of Lieutenant Frank Hughes,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 45, no. 3 (September 1949), 282, entry for July 1, 1862.

<sup>30</sup> Watson, affidavit, 674.

<sup>31</sup> Watson affidavit, 674.

<sup>32</sup> “Abstract from monthly returns of the principal U.S. military prisons,” *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. VIII, pgs. 986-1004.

Canada. One of John Hunt Morgan's men, Henry L. Stone escaped from Union guards in Kentucky and boarded a train near dawn at Cincinnati. He arrived in Toledo at dusk and waited for the 3 a.m. train to Detroit and then took the ferry across to Windsor in the dark. Writing home from foreign soil, he stated, "I touched the Promised Land of Canada. A strange kind of feeling crept over me when I realized to myself that I was on British soil; but then I felt free from arrest and disagreeable suspicions." Walking up to a tavern, he came across twenty five of Morgan's cavalry who had escaped from Camp Douglas and other prisons. Stone described Canada as a melting pot of nationalities. He wrote, "People here are mixed up greatly, Irish, Dutch, Scotch, French, English, and last of all...Negroes." Stone used the cover of darkness to escape to a land of freedom.<sup>33</sup>

While guards sought to shape the sounds of discipline, they were not alone in perceiving the sounds of other prisoners as disruptive noise. While the sounds and silences of Sunday reminded prisoners of place and condition, prison noise jarred with how listeners thought night should sound. At Johnson's Island, Confederate officer James Mayo wrote that "the crickets' shrill cries coupled with the monotonous snoring of the sleepers around me," and the mournful, howling winds mixed with the hourly "all's well" call coming from the prison guards.<sup>34</sup> Griffin Frost described the cacophony of a college turned into a prison at Springfield, Missouri. He wrote, "It is midnight, the hour when everything should be quiet, no sound heard except the tread of the sentinel." Yet instead

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<sup>33</sup> Henry L. Stone to "Dear Cousin Melia," December 5, 1863 Hirons House, Windsor, C.W., Henry L. Stone papers, Bath County Historical Society, Mt. Sterling, KY. Many thanks to Tony Curtis at the Kentucky Historical Society for bringing these letters to my attention.

<sup>34</sup> James Mayo diary, August 23, 1863, LC.

of quietude, the sounds of agony, prayers, songs, swearing, and playing cards filled the rooms. Frost asked rhetorically, “How can a man think, or write, or hope to sleep?”<sup>35</sup> Transferred by Union guards to Gratiot Street prison in St. Louis, Frost listened to the “hideous” roar beneath his feet coming from other prisoners. He heard “coughing, swearing, singing, and praying” in addition to the “almost unearthly noises issuing from uproarious gangs, laughing, shouting, stamping and howling.” Like the ears of the religious on Sunday in the last chapter, the “unnatural clang” made night sound like “hell on earth.”<sup>36</sup> At Libby Prison, George S. Albee listened to the footfalls of prisoners without blankets upstairs “walking the floor this whole night long to keep warm.”<sup>37</sup> Prisons were never quiet, but the noise became more offensive to sensitive ears at night.

While some prisoners interpreted nightly noise as unnatural and disruptive, others found the sounds uplifting. Such listeners inferred high spirits from the sounds of celebration. At Camp Douglas, Thomas Lafayette Beadles wrote in early 1864, “Hilarity prevails with some of the prisoners whilst others look rather gloomy. Some nights they will get an old violin & fiddle & dance until lights out. Seemingly with all the happiness of a crowd at a country grocery store.”<sup>38</sup> In spring the following year, the Camp Douglas

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<sup>35</sup> Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal*, 24, entry for December 7, 1862.

<sup>36</sup> Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal*, pg. 24, entry for January 20, 1863. A civilian prisoner described a similar experience at the Old Capital Prison in Washington, D.C. William F. Broaddus diary, August 4, 1862, Library of Virginia.

<sup>37</sup> George S. Albee diary, September 19, 1864, Library of Virginia.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Lafayette Beadles diary, January 20, 1864, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson.

prison string band held a concert in his barracks which pleasantly reminded him of old times at home.<sup>39</sup>

At night prisoners expressed their sentiments by singing, yelling, and howling at night. After several weeks at Libby Prison, William D. Wilkins recorded night singing as the room's new amusement. Each evening a choir of fifteen to twenty prisoners gathered near a window to make "the indignant Streets of Richmond ring with the 'Star Spangled Banner', 'Red, White, & Blue' & 'We'll hang Jeff Davis on a Sour Apple tree.'" The singing provoked the guards, who were "hugely annoyed at this, but [they] cannot stop it without gagging every man; & the crosser they look, the louder swells the chorus."<sup>40</sup> Chanting and singing became a nightly occupation for prisoners in Richmond for the rest of the war. At Libby Prison in October 1863, John B. Kay and other prisoners sang "John Brown's Body" and "Hang Jeff Davis" in the evening hours and Alonzo Keeler described the aural scene at Libby as "whistling, singing, dancing, crowing, barking, braying & everything as usual."<sup>41</sup> The guards loathed "John Brown's Body" more than most songs, which made it especially agreeable to sing loudly. In silent pauses, prisoners listened for

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<sup>39</sup> Beadles diary, March 21, 1864, MDAH. At Johnson's Island, the "Rebel Thespians" offered entertainment and implicit political commentary on the war. See "Island Minstrels," Joseph Mason Kern Papers, Folder 2, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Kern scrapbook, folder 2, Kern papers, SHC. Prisoners held similar events at Point Lookout. William Whatley Pierson, *Diary of Bartlett Yancey Malone* (Chapel Hill, 1919), pg. 55, entry for 3 December 1864.

<sup>40</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, September 3, 1862, Library of Congress.

<sup>41</sup> Kay diary, October 16, 1863, Keeler diary, October 7, 1863, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

the effect, hoping to catch the swearing that sounded like “music to our ears” and encouraged the prisoners to keep up the noise.<sup>42</sup>

While music, cheering, and singing were important modes of resistance during the day and during holidays, prisoners learned from the reaction of the prison guard that noise was a better weapon after dark. In January 1864, Lewis C. Bisbee wrote that a hundred officers in Libby prison began “promenading in the dining room singing John Brown and other songs when the officials pounced upon them and made them stand in line until 9:30.”<sup>43</sup> Frustrated about another crackdown, Jacob Heffelfinger admitted that he and the prisoners at Libby had been “very noisy, singing the Star Spangled Banner, John Brown &c.,” and in response, “the Provost Marshall has just now forbidden us to sing.”<sup>44</sup> After their first week at Andersonville, many of the Connecticut prisoners captured at Plymouth, North Carolina, gathered in the evening to sing. Charles G. Lee recorded they did so until 9 p.m., a little after sunset.<sup>45</sup> Robert H. Kellogg described it as a way to express their resilience. He wrote, “we vented our enthusiasm by singing “America,” “Star Spangled Banner,” and “Red, White, and Blue” at the top of our voices, much to the edification of the Confederate guards, probably.”<sup>46</sup> Kellogg’s qualification

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<sup>42</sup> Junius Henri Browne, *Four Years in Secessia...* (Hartford: O. D. Case, 1865), 265.

<sup>43</sup> Bisbee diary, January 23, 1864, Bisbee papers, MNHS; see also, Heffelfinger diary, September 13 and 15, 1864, AHEC.

<sup>44</sup> Heffelfinger diary, May 10, 1864, AHEC.

<sup>45</sup> Paul C. Helmreich, “Diary of Charles G. Lee in the Andersonville and Florence Prison Camps, 1864,” *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 41, 1 (January 1976), 17, entry for May 10, 1864.

<sup>46</sup> Robert H. Kellogg diary, May 9, 1864, in Robert Hale Kellogg papers, 1862-1931, MS #68013, Connecticut Historical Society

indicated they could not control how their captors interpreted their singing. They sang, however, not only to raise the spirits of themselves but in hopes of affecting the guards as well.

As night sometimes seemed like inverted power relations, small acts of resistance came at a high cost. Guards made nervous by the night and noise were more likely to make full use of their power and act with lethal force. In 1862, Clarence Wicks, a seventeen-year-old guard at Camp Randall, Wisconsin, shot a prisoner in the early morning for threatening and insulting him. Wicks had attempted to dissuade another prisoner from creating an olfactory “nuisance” by relieving his bowels on the ground near the guards post instead of at the sinks. When the offender refused to move, Wicks threw a stone which hit the man in the face. In response, six or seven prisoners emerged from the barracks and confronted Wicks. One called Wicks a “damned son of a bitch!” and charged at him with an improvised weapon. Explaining his decision to shoot the man, Wicks told investigators, “I had orders to shoot rebels insulting me and did shoot him.” Guards at nearby posts also reported the insulting language, and one reported that the insult had come after a night of prisoners hurling words as well as sticks, bones, and rocks at the guards from the cover of darkness. Other prisoners had made a game of relieving themselves in the yard and taunting the guards, calling them foul names and inviting them to “kiss their arses.” Officials did not indict or discipline Wicks for shooting, but they documented the narrative of contributing causes. These included the nighttime commotion, the olfactory nuisance, and the hurling of words and projectiles.

Two years later, Wicks fell wounded into the hands of Confederates at Cold Harbor, and died himself a prisoner.<sup>47</sup>

The death of G.W. Spears at Camp Randall, a relatively obscure northern prison, paralleled controversial but common shootings in northern and southern prisons.

Darkness, aural resistance, and fear were almost always contributing factors. At 2 a.m. on the Fourth of July at Andersonville, the guards called out the hour and reported that all was well. From the darkness a prisoner yelled, presumably to the guard, “you son of a bitch!” The guard fired in the direction of the sound, striking another man in the knee.<sup>48</sup>

Ten days later Confederates fired blanks in the cannons near sunset, which Henry Stone connected to earlier warnings by the prison commander that they would sweep the prison with grapeshot if they tried to escape. The nighttime shot followed the daytime warning and “made all our number jump.”<sup>49</sup> Darkness offered a cover for prisoners to talk back to the guards, but the leveling effect of darkness also made the tension between guards and prisoners more lethal.

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<sup>47</sup> *Official Records*, ser. II, vol. 3, pg 578-586.

<sup>48</sup> James Hoster diary, July 4, 1864, MSS #646, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University. At Camp Ford, Texas, guards also threatened to shoot prisoners who cursed at them and stopped rations for prisoners who yelled the exclamation, “Keno” at the guards. Howard O. Pollan, ed., “The Camp Ford Diary of Captain William Fortunatus McKinney,” *Chronicles of Smith County, Texas* 25 (summer 1996), 18.

<sup>49</sup> Henry F. Stone diary, July 14, 1864, ANHS. See also Franklin J. Krause diary, July 14, 1864, MS # 14096, UVA.



## Heightened Senses

While night provided unequaled opportunity for prisoners to undermine the authority of prison guards, the sensory experiences of night were intense expressions of animalization and the emotion of captivity. Prisoners who gave meaning to prison smells during the daytime were even more appalled at night because damp air increased the pungency of odor. The diurnal/nocturnal division of smell had much earlier roots. In September 1776, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin quarreled over night air while traveling together through New Jersey. While Adams wanted the windows closed for fear of the night air, Franklin feared the opposite—they would simply suffocate without proper ventilation. For more than a century thereafter, it was common, especially in sickly seasons, to retire at night inside a sealed house regardless of the weather. The dilemma was whether damp, foul air from outside was more deadly than exhalations of self and family. It made intuitive sense in an era when odor was equated to the material manifestation of disease.<sup>50</sup> Yet there was not consensus. By the 1850s sanitarians increasingly favored ventilation, even night air, over stale air. Florence Nightingale rhetorically asked, “What air can we breathe at night but night air? The choice is between pure night air from without and foul night air from within.”<sup>51</sup> Night air was ambiguous and potentially lethal whether it came from the inside or outside.

Some prisoners considered night air more potent and dangerous than day air. William D. Wilkins described the night air of a Richmond warehouse as suffocating. He

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<sup>50</sup> Peter C. Baldwin, “How Night Air Became Good Air, 1776-1930,” *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (July 2003), 412-417.

<sup>51</sup> Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing*, 19.

wrote, “Last night I was literally almost suffocated with the noisome vapors that filled the room, and had to wrap my head in my blanket in order to breathe. Typhus fever must soon appear.”<sup>52</sup> On one of his first nights in Andersonville, Samuel E. Grosvenor wrote that “the stench was horrible & a black cloud of smoke & steam hung over us like a pall, shutting out the very stars from our sight.”<sup>53</sup> Another prisoner explained that “During the day the sun drank up the most noxious of these vapors, but in the night the terrible miasma and stench pervaded the atmosphere almost to suffocation.”<sup>54</sup> Confederate prisoners, especially those in close confinement, drew similar conclusions about night air. Griffin Frost described his room in a college-turned-prison in Springfield, Missouri, as “eighteen feet square” and occupied by twenty-eight prisoners. Frost luckily acquired a bunk, but most of the prisoners slept on a filthy floor that Frost compared unfavorably to a hog pen. He wrote, “The *night buckets* are kept in one corner of the rooms, and persons are up and down all through the night answering the calls of nature which renders our quarters very unpleasant indeed.”<sup>55</sup> The smell of night was similar to the day but more transgressive. Night air smothered and suffocated those who breathed it.

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<sup>52</sup> Wilkins diary, entry for August 16, 1862.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel E. Grosvenor diary, May 6, 1864, MS 8158, Connecticut Historical Society.

<sup>54</sup> House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 57. See also John B. Vaughter, *Prison Life in Dixie: Giving a short history of the inhuman and barbarous treatment of our soldiers by Rebel authorities* (Chicago: Central Book Concern, 1880), 56-57; Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell*, 537; U. S. Congress, *Prisoners of War*, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Griffin Frost, *Camp and Prison Journal...* (Quincey, IL: Quincy Herald Book and Job Office, 1867), 25, entry for December 19, 1862.

Darkness also marked a time when human skin, like the nose, became more vulnerable. Prisoners whose clothing had been stolen upon capture were defenseless against the effects of weather. Government worker James Bell described the abrupt change in emotions when day turned into night. “As long as day lasted we were cheerful,” he wrote, “but when the cold night air pieced our thin apparel, then we realized to the fullest extent the misery in store for us.” Lying awake with no covering on wet grass, Bell continued, “In silent but bitter mental anguish we watched thru the tedious hours of darkness until at last nature rebelled against inactivity and we got up and paced about the ground.” Being unable to shield themselves from the effects of weather felt animalizing to Bell. When a thunderstorm burst overhead, they stood “like dumb beasts with our backs to the gale until it was over.”<sup>56</sup> The cool night air and the effects of hunger sent George Bell to sleep early on Governor’s Island. Others paced at night, reminding him “of Some wild animals in a cage walking to and fro.”<sup>57</sup>

Sleeping arrangements for prisoners varied from bunks, barracks, and tents in the North to warehouses, barracks, rotten tents, and earthen burrows in the South. Prisoners slept close together but often complained about the haptic feeling of sleeping spaces. A poem written by Aza Hartz, a pseudonym for George McKnight, juxtaposed the feeling of his wife’s bed and his at Johnson’s Island. His wife had a rosewood frame bed with

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<sup>56</sup> Bell to “My dear Brother,” DHS. On this emotional change at dusk, see also “Narrative of Lieut. Col F. J. Bennett,” pg. 13, Frank T. Bennett papers, Rubenstein Special Collections Library, Duke University.

<sup>57</sup> Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., ed., “Notes and Documents: Diary of George Bell, A Record of Captivity in a Federal Military Prison, 1862,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 22, no. 2 (1938), 177, entries for June 10, 11, 1862. See also George S. Albee diary, September 19, 1864.

downy mattress and she sinks to sleep quickly, but on his bunk and straw mattress he lay sleepless.<sup>58</sup> At Camp Lawton, Georgia, George M. Shearer and three others spent four dollars to purchase materials for a more-or-less typical hut of timber and pine bows.<sup>59</sup> Prisoners without tents burrowed into the ground or built mud huts. When it rained on Christmas at Andersonville, the storm drove many prisoners from their caves, but at least two near George Clarkson smothered to death when the hole they crawled into caved in.<sup>60</sup>

Crawling into tents, huts, and holes, prisoners like the two who suffocated, slept together in pairs and larger groups. Michael Dougherty compared the sleeping arrangements at Libby prison, “wormed and dove-tailed together like so many fish in a basket.”<sup>61</sup> Captured at Gettysburg, Jonathan Boynton spent the winter at Belle Island in Richmond. Paroled to cut wood for the prison camp, Boynton befriended an African American cook named William Dickey who invited him to share his bed. Seeking relief from the crowded prison and perhaps companionship, Boynton asked permission from

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<sup>58</sup> John Thomas Parker commonplace book, 1859-1865, Mss5:5 P2264:1, VHS.

<sup>59</sup> George Marion Shearer diary, Cash Account, see also January 3, 1865, ANHS.

<sup>60</sup> George A. Clarkson diary, December 26, 1864, ANHS. See also Amos W. Ames, “A Diary of Life in Southern Prisons,” *Annals of Iowa* 40, no. 1 (summer 1969), 12, entry for December 25, 1864; Glenn Robins, *They Have Left Us Here to Die: The Civil War Prison Diary of Sgt. Lyle Adair, 11<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2011), 66. On burrowing, see also William Burson, *A Race for Liberty; or, My Capture, Imprisonment, and Escape* (Wellsville, OH: W. G. Foster, 1867), 34-35; Francis A. Dawes diary, December 26, 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 9, AHEC, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Dougherty, *Prison Diary of Michael Dougherty* (Bristol, PA: C. A. Dougherty, 1908), 4.

the guards to sleep with Dickey. The guard expressed surprise Boynton wanted to sleep “in same tent with a nigger,” but eventually consented.<sup>62</sup>

Communal sleeping made individual sickness a collective problem. As Samuel L. Foust slowly died at Andersonville, he recorded his inability to sleep amid the sweating, rolling, tossing, and coughing brought on by illness.<sup>63</sup> Another sick man named Kenny woke up his sleeping companion, George Clarkson, in January 1865 and Clarkson watched him die before sunrise. “I shall feel more lonesome now,” Clarkson wrote, “for we have slept together for most seven months.”<sup>64</sup> Others commonly reported deaths of friends with whom they had shared sleeping quarters. Suffering from severe diarrhea at Andersonville, Robert Shellito sought help from doctors in late August 1864 but was turned away. When he died that night, Confederate officials reported that the sickness caused his death. An annotation in the memoranda section of a messmate told a different story. Dispirited from four months of captivity and the effects of illness, Shellito had stayed awake after the others in his hut went to sleep. Fastening one end of his suspenders to a beam in the hut and making a slipknot with the other end, Shellito hanged himself in the dark within reach of his messmates.<sup>65</sup> William Seeley and the others in the

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<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Boynton memoir, pg. 31, Box 13, Folder 11, Civil War Document Collection, Army Heritage Education Center.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel L. Foust dairy, July 9, 22, August 2, September 18, 1864, ANHS.

<sup>64</sup> Clarkson diary, January 11, 1864, ANHS

<sup>65</sup> William Seeley diary, memoranda section, Andersonville National Historic Site. Many thanks to staff of Andersonville who brought this remarkable connection to light. Shortly after his exchange in December 1864, Seeley died from the effects of prison life.

hut awoke to the lifeless body of someone who chose a quicker death at his own hands to slow death by disease.

Not all sleeping companions were human. When prisoners crawled into bunks, tents or earthen holes, bedbugs and lice crawled out of the seams of blankets and clothing, searching for skin and sustenance. At the Richland County jail in Columbia in 1862, Frank Bennett bought blankets from another prisoner, but night was far from comfortable. The next day he described the haptic experience of laying on the floor as being left “to the tender mercies of hosts of vermin, which appeared to hold a Saturnalia last night, mice, bugs, roaches, horrid crawling things. Ugh! My flesh creeps at the remembrance.”<sup>66</sup> Stephen Minot Welt, a prisoner at the same Columbia jail in 1864, could not sleep at all. He wrote, “The bedbugs & other vermin crawled over me in thousands. I looked like a man with small pox from the number of my bites.” He attempted to sleep on top of a table, but he could find no space free of the vermin.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, George Gill, captured at Murfreesboro and taken to Richmond, described having “plenty of company in the shape of Grey Backs” which “bite like Hell at night and

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<sup>66</sup> “Narrative of Lieut. Col F. J. Bennett,” pg. 14, Bennett Papers, DU. One or two centuries earlier, this would have been less shocking. See A. Roger Ekirch, “Sleep We Have Lost: Pre-Industrial Slumber in the British Isles,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (April 2001), 353-355; John Southall, *A Treatise on Buggs...* (London: J. Roberts, 1730), 9. Lice, bedbugs, and fleas were often interchangeable. On bedbugs and other vermin, see L. O. J. Boynton, “The Bed-Bug and the ‘Age of Elegance,’” *Furniture History* 1 (1965), 15-31; Lisa T. Sarasoh, “‘That Nauseous Venomous Insect:’ Bedbugs in Early Modern England,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 46, no. 4 (Summer 2013), 513-530.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Minot Weld diary, August 6, 1864, Ms. N-2378, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

therefore Disturb our repose.”<sup>68</sup> When the morning sun rose at Andersonville, Sneden wrote that the ground would be covered with white maggots on both sides of the stream “like a snow storm.” On clear days the sun killed millions of the maggots, but on foggy mornings, millions of white-winged moths infested the camp.<sup>69</sup> When Joseph Jones visited Andersonville for his medical report, he remarked on the mosquitoes’ “everlasting buzzing” and their “troublesome bites” which “peppered” his skin. Mosquitoes made his sleep nearly impossible he speculated “that the immense amount of filth generated by the prisoners may have had much to do with the development and multiplication of these insects.”<sup>70</sup>

The vermin and varmints that crawled on the floors, walls, clothes, and skin were permanent features of nighttime haptic experience. William D. Wilkins wrote that he lost sleep at Libby prison “partly by the noisome smells; and more, by the loathsome vermin who swarm in our blankets, whence they emerge at night to creep over & bite us, & then return to the blankets at earliest dawn.”<sup>71</sup> The “singular concomitants” of diarrhea and lice kept Alonzo Keeler up at night fighting with vermin and visiting the sink.<sup>72</sup> Jacob

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<sup>68</sup> George F. Gill diary, January 22, 1863, Filson Historical Society. See also Robins, *They Have Left Us Here*, 86-87.

<sup>69</sup> Senden, *Eye of the Storm*, 230.

<sup>70</sup> Joseph Jones, “Investigations upon the Diseases of the Federal Prisoners Confined to Camp Sumpter, Andersonville, Ga.,” in United States Sanitary Commission, *Sanitary Memoirs of the War of the Rebellion* (2 vols., New York, 1867-1869), I, 498; Dorothy H. Crawford, *Deadly Companions: How Microbes Shaped Our History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 153; See also Kay diary, August 25, 1864, Bentley Library, UM.

<sup>71</sup> William D. Wilkins diary, September 13, 1862, LC.

<sup>72</sup> Alonzo Keeler diary, October 14, 1864, Bentley Library, UM.

Heffelfinger thought the Charleston jail provided his best shelter in months, even though he shared a close cell with five prisoners and innumerable insects and rodents. “Mice, rats, cock-roaches, lice, flees, and ‘kindred Cattle’ infested our beds,” he wrote, “while the stench was anything but pleasant, still it was better than out in the drenching rain thus I passed my first night in jail.”<sup>73</sup> The next day, he admitted that his “slumbers were disturbed during the night by a pair of mice trying to build a nest in my hair.”<sup>74</sup> Robert Sneden described the effect of high water on the James River for the rat and human population in Pemberton warehouse. High water drove in rats seeking higher ground and they scurried over prisoners in the warehouse at night.<sup>75</sup>

The prisoner’s inability to stave off the haptic affronts by insects and rodents had the same humbling effect at night as it did during the day. At Johnson’s Island. E. John Ellis described the “Chintzes” or bedbugs in ways others referred to lice. Ellis wrote that one night the bedbugs first attempted to capture his nose, and after fighting them off for an hour he retreated from the bunk to the ground. Three of his five friends also traded the bunks for the floor, and Ellis satirized that the “ugly and hideous” snoring of one of the men remaining on the bunk kept the insects off him. Yet like the lice of the day, Ellis inferred a moral from the relationship between insects and humans in prison. Rather than being “stinking and insignificant little things,” Ellis mused that while humans think the

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<sup>73</sup> Jacob Heffelfinger diary, September 19, 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 14, Army Heritage Education Center.

<sup>74</sup> Heffelfinger diary, September 20, 1864, Civil War Times Illustrated Collection, Box 14, AHEC.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Knox Sneden, *The Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey*, Charles F. Bryan, Jr., and Nelson D. Lankford eds. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 171. On vermin at night, see also Henry F. Stone diary, December 1, 1864, ANHS.



world is made for them, “the chintz might say, ‘man sleeps to feed me, night to hide me comes.’”<sup>76</sup> Just as the feeling of lice during the day led prisoners to think of themselves as one part of a complex prison ecology, nighttime reinforced the lesson that humans were not masters over the nonhuman world.

Dangers to the skin also came from within the human population. Alongside the vermin, prisoners who preyed on others were more active at night, robbing and clubbing their victims. Describing nighttime thieves as “roughs,” Robert Sneden wrote that thieves would “prowl about at night like a pack of hyenas, three or four in a gang,” attacking those weakened by illness and if a victim resisted “they club him into a state of insensibility.”<sup>77</sup> James W. Eberhart woke up to the “big noise” outside his tent at Belle Island that came from a nearby fight in which “one man got hurt considerable.”<sup>78</sup> At Salisbury, he awoke to cries of “Murder” and later learned that someone had been killed for a small sum of money.<sup>79</sup>

### Nature’s Restorer

Although prisoners protested that the nocturnal sensations of prison life prevented sleep, they also recorded vivid dreams of friends, loved-ones, and home. Dreams

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<sup>76</sup> Martina Buck, “A Louisiana Prisoner-of-War on Johnson’s Island, 1863-65,” *Louisiana History*, 4, no. 3 (summer 1963), 238.

<sup>77</sup> Sneden, *Eye of the Storm*, 214.

<sup>78</sup> Florence C. McLaughlin, ed., “Diary of Salisbury Prison by James W. Eberhart,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56, no. 3 (July 1973), 220.

<sup>79</sup> McLaughlin, ed., “Diary of Salisbury Prison,” *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, pg. 241, entry for December 8, 1864.

underscored for Junius H. Browne that his body could be imprisoned, “but the Rebels could not fetter the spirit.”<sup>80</sup> Like prison rumors, dreams worked on an emotional cycle of hope and despair. Recalling a recent dream of his wife and home in early 1863, Milton Woodford wrote “O, how overjoyed I felt to think I was once more free, to enjoy the society of loved ones.” The dreams gave Woodford a future to feel and visualize “which is now imagination.”<sup>81</sup> When he reached Camp Parole, Maryland, Woodford wrote his sister that he had difficulty believing he was actually free. “In jail, I used to dream of being at home, and, it would seem so natural. I would think, this must be real. But I would wake up and find it all a dream, and it seems now, almost as though I should find this all a dream, but I guess this is a ‘sure thing,’ if I had been asleep before.”<sup>82</sup>

In dreams prisoners plainly expressed a longing for the haptic comforts of home. An Irish immigrant to Brooklyn, Hoboken, and later Savannah, George Bell returned to New York harbor as a prisoner after the capture of Fort Pulaski in 1862. Bell dreamed he

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<sup>80</sup> Browne, *Four Years in Secessia*, 267.

<sup>81</sup> Milton Woodford diary, entry for January 4, 1863, Milton Woodford journal, Folder 5, Connecticut Historical Society. See also James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, transcribed by Jack Klasey (Kankakee County Historical Society, 1987), entry for July 7, 1864 [pg. 46]; George Washington Hall diary, entry for September 24, 1864, Library of Congress; George M. Shearer diary, December 9, 1864, Iowa Digital Library; James H. Dennison, *Dennison’s Andersonville Diary*, ed. Jack Klasey (Kankakee, IL: Kankakee County Historical Society, 1987), entries for July 7, August 9, September 22, October 8, 1864 and January 12, 1865; A few had dreams about combat. See Levi Whitaker diary, May 20, 1864, ANHS. Others recorded troubling dreams that disturbed their sleep. John B. Kay diary, January 10, 1864, 851695Aa1, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>82</sup> Milton Woodford to sister, October 28, 1862 [1863?], Camp Parole, Maryland, Milton Woodford Journal, Folder 5, Connecticut Historical Society.

was back in Ireland visiting his mother, uncle, and boyhood home.<sup>83</sup> Eugene Sly at Florence wrote that reading novels and works of Lord Byron helped pass time, but dreaming provided the only true pleasure for prisoners “amid the Dying Groans of the destitute & Starving.” Sly dreamed of home, including the “old haunts of his Childhood” and wandering through a grove of trees with “a fair young Damsel at his side.” Pleasant dreams produced such a rush of excitement that prisoners awoke only to rediscover their place and condition. Elisha Rice Reed in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, summarized a dream in the form of a short poem. He dreamt of walking through the door of his northern home, but at the moment he embraced his mother he heard the cry of a sentry. He wrote:

One fond embrace with tears of joy  
Alas the spell is riven  
He widely gazed about the room  
Oh! God! He’s Back in Prison.”<sup>84</sup>

Although temporary, dreaming provided relief from imprisonment.

The dream pattern expressed by prisoners like Reed paralleled imagined dreams as well, including the well-known dream of Peyton Farquhar, the imaginary character in Ambrose Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” In this short story, Bierce imagines the last delusions of Farquhar, sentenced to hang for plotting to burn a railroad bridge. In the dream the rope breaks and Farquhar falls into the river below. By seemingly good fortune Farquhar evades the soldiers and makes his way downstream and through the countryside to his wife standing on the porch. Reality intrudes as he

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<sup>83</sup> Bell, Jr., ed., “Diary of George Bell,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, pg. 184, entries for May 15, 19, 1862.

<sup>84</sup> Elisha Rice Reed diary, January 26, 29, 1862, Elisha Rice Reed papers, Wis Mss 115S, WHS.

approaches the house and before he can embrace her. A blow to the neck, “a sound like the shock of a cannon,” and a blinding white light are the last sensations before “all is darkness and silence!”<sup>85</sup> The dream had a more or less familiar rhythm and sequence that of prisoners of war. The delusions of prisoners vanished from their eyes and ears as they awoke. For Bierce’s Farquhar, the sound of his own neck breaking jerks him back into reality before eternal darkness and silence. Yet for both the spell was riven.

Under night’s dark mantle prisoners engaged in small and large acts of resistance. Yet if night softened the one-sided power of prison environments, it made resistance an even more lethal game. As a time for resistance, night was also a time of intense suffering, when sounds, smells, and insects assaulted the ears, nose, and skin. When prisoners recorded dreams, however, they typically recorded happy sounds and visions far away at home. The challenge was rediscovering themselves in prison.

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<sup>85</sup> Ambrose Bierce, *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*, ed. Donald T. Blume (Kent, OH: Kent University State Press, 2004), 16.

CHAPTER 7:  
UNSEEN, UNHEARD, UNSMELLED:  
ESCAPE IN THE CONFEDERATE SOUTH

No one knows how a white Union prisoner ended up in the ladies' outhouse on a plantation near Goldsboro, North Carolina. The building sat behind the plantation house and beyond the garden, bordered by perfuming lilac bushes. Sarah Ann Green, an elderly woman born into slavery, recalled that the plantation mistress found an injured fugitive near death and, out of sympathy for his predicament, bandaged his injuries. Sending him back into the outhouse, she saw a Confederate patrol or heard the trampling of horses' hoofs on the dirt road. When the cavalrymen neared the bushes, the white woman stepped inside, closed the door behind her, and by feigning the call of nature (we are left to speculate on the sound effects) denied access to the search party. This memory left important questions unanswered. Why had a Union prisoner chosen to hide on a plantation? Who initially hid him there and why? What events and choices led to the discovery? It is unlikely an injured prisoner crept unnoticed onto a large plantation. More probable, some fraction of the largest demographic—the enslaved people—knew all along about the white fugitive.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Ann Green, interviewed by Travis Jordan, in George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1972), Vol. 14, Pt. 1, 340-343. In 1860, Sarah Ann Green was enslaved on William Headen's plantation, who owned thirty six slaves, Manuscript Census Returns, Eight Census of the United States, 1860, Chatham County, North Carolina, Schedule 2, Slave Population, National Archives Microfilm Series M-653, reel 921, page 21.

Escape for prisoners was a topic of conversation, a collective obsession, and sometimes an imaginative delusion in wartime diaries and postwar memoirs. As with any statistics of the Civil War Era, numbers are spongy, but approximately 394 officers, 2,273 enlisted men, and 29 Union civilians secretly returned from Confederate prisons. Diarists recorded the arrival of recaptured prisoners as a common occurrence, suggesting that the successful escapes were only a fraction of the number who spent time outside prison walls.<sup>2</sup> A trickle of runaway Union prisoners throughout the war became a torrent by fall 1864 because Confederates removed captives from relatively secure prisons such as Andersonville to less-secure ones at Charleston, Florence, and Columbia. Prisoners slipped off trains, tunneled, broke parole, donned disguises of blackface or Confederate uniforms, and struck out for the Appalachian Mountains or the Atlantic Coast. Referring to the escape of prisoners from Columbia, South Carolina, the *Edgefield Advertiser* claimed in November 1864 that fugitives “actually cover the land like the locusts of Egypt.”<sup>3</sup> Union officials at Knoxville regularly encountered former prisoners who walked

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<sup>2</sup> House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), 742-757. For a lower estimate of 752, see “Register of Federal Prisoners who Escaped from Confederate Authorities,” Record Group [RG] 249, Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners, Entry 31, Volume 1, National Archives and Records Administration [NARA]. For a higher estimate of 3,165, see “List of Federal Prisoners of War Who Escaped from Confederate Prisons,” RG 249, Entry 109, Volume 1, NARA. None of these lists include those who were recaptured, which was considerably more likely than making it several hundred miles through Confederate territory.

<sup>3</sup> “Errant Yankees,” *Edgefield (South Carolina) Advertiser*, November 30, 1864; “Arrival of Prisoners at Newbern,” *Nashville (Tennessee) Daily Union*, March 12, 1865.

from captivity to that city. Escaping prisoners were part of the world of movement and confusion in the final months of the Confederacy.<sup>4</sup>

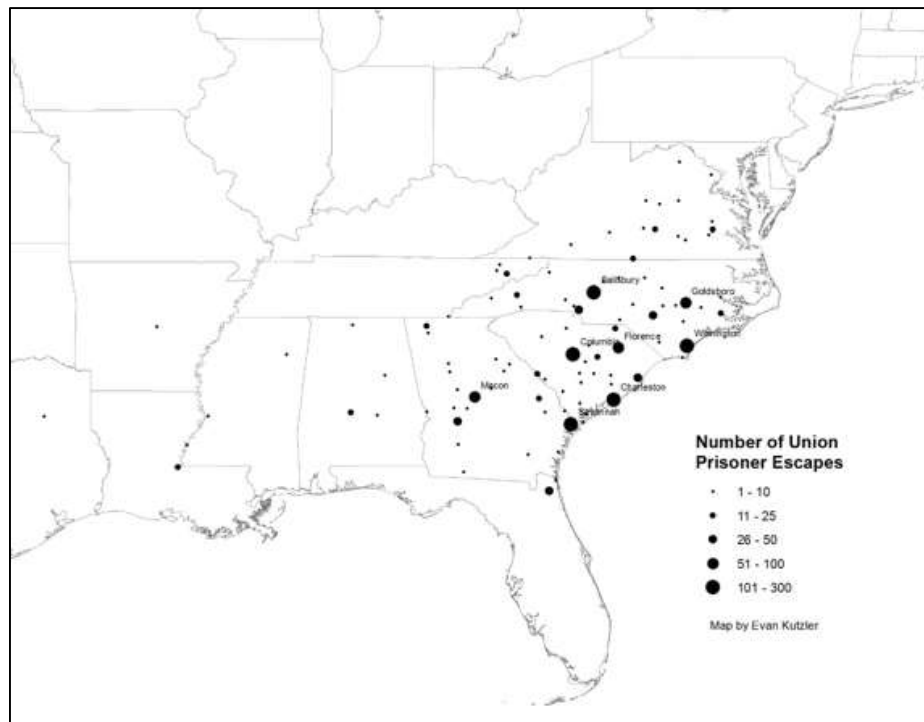


Figure 7.1. Locations of successful prisoner escapes. Larger dots represent escapes from prisons and city jails. Smaller dots likely represent escapes from trains to or between prisons.

Runaway prisoners received assistance from a diverse group of sympathizers, including Unionist men and women in Appalachia, and, further south, African Americans, who feigned ignorance to white southerners while they gleaned information on Confederate picket lines and Union army locations, facilitated river crossings,

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Brigadier General S. P. Carter to Commissary General of Prisoners, Colonel William Hoffman, November 11, 1864, Records Relating to Individual Prisoners of War, Escape Rolls, 1861-1865, Record Group 249, Records of the Commissary General of Prisoners, Entry 32, Box 1. For similar lists, see letters dated between June 1864 and March 1865. Escaping prisoners of war is one of the few important blindspots in Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012).

obtained newspapers, mended shoes, and provided guidance for prisoners traveling across the South.<sup>5</sup> Read with this in mind, Sarah Green's narrative may have been one variation of a common story in which escaped white prisoners of war received aid from and, in fact, depended on the choices of African American slaves to conceal, provision, and pilot them out of the Confederate South.

These moments of interracial cooperation highlighted the culmination of daily resistance in the Confederate South, a slave society where geography and space had long intersected with power struggles. In the antebellum period, licit and illicit interactions

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<sup>5</sup> Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, 2004), 135-37; William B. Hesseltine, "The Underground Railroad from Confederate Prisons to East Tennessee," *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 2, (1930), 60; James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York, 1967), 150-153; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1980), 50. See also W. J. Megginson, *African American Life in South Carolina's Upper Piedmont* (Columbia, 2006), 183, 190-191; and John C. Inscoe, "'Moving through Deserter Country': Fugitive Accounts of the Inner Civil War in Southern Appalachia," in *The Civil War in Appalachia*, ed. Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson (Knoxville, 1997), 158-186. Elizabeth R. Varon depicts an underground network of black and white Unionists in Richmond in *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, A Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy* (Oxford, 2003). In contrast, African Americans fall out of the narrative in the most recent work on the 1864 Libby Prison breakout. Joseph Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout: The Daring Escape from the Notorious Prison* (New York: Basic, 2010). Naval historian Barbara Brook Tomlin briefly discusses slave's "contributions to victory" in *Bluejackets and Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy* (Lexington, 2009), 153-57. The most sustained chapter-length analysis of these accounts on the subject of race is Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley, 2000). Several white claimants to the Southern Claims Commission files attested to their Union loyalty through helping escaped prisoners. See, for example, Claim of William H. Green, Charleston County, SC, Case Files, Southern Claims Commission, Records of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Auditor, Allowed Case Files, Records of the U.S. General Accounting Office, Record Group 217, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C; Claim of Philip L. Smith, Marlboro County, SC, SCC, NARA; Claim of Eleanor Quick, Marlboro County, SC, SCC, NARA; Claim of Abel Quick, Marlboro County, SC, SCC, NARA. It is possible Irish immigrants were more likely to assist as well. See Claim of Michael McNamara, Charleston, SC, SCC, NARA.



between slaves, free blacks, poor whites, and merchants were common, but historians disagree on the meaning of such exchanges. On one hand, the underground economy and small acts of resistance may have offered the enslaved small victories in rejecting slaveholder authority.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, small actions have also been written off as pre-political because the enslaved remained slaves and the enslavers remained masters. Moreover, they contend that if anything, the overarching class and racial hegemony absorbed small acts as negligible costs in the process of doing good business.<sup>7</sup> In contrast

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<sup>6</sup> See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Philip D. Morgan, "The Ownership of Property by Slaves in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Lowcountry," *Journal of Southern History* 49 (1983): 399-420; Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700-1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982): 563-599; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture, from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Alex Lichtenstein, "'That disposition to theft, with which they have been branded': Moral Economy, Slave Management, and the Law," *Journal of Social History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 413-440. These ideas were strengthened by theoretical works on "infrapolitics," and the distinction between "private transcripts" and "public transcripts." See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Robin D. G. Kelly, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> The most recent interaction of this argument is Kathleen M. Hilliard, *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange: Power's Purchase in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6-10. As Hilliard argues, this view is based off a close reading of Eugene Genovese's complicated term, paternalism. Hilliard, *Masters, Slaves, and Exchange*, 5; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974); Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968). Other key critics, without the same emphasis on paternalism, include Peter Kolchin, "Reevaluating the Antebellum Slave Community: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of American History* 70, no. 3 (December 1983): 579-601; Lawrence T. McDonnell, "Money Knows No Master: Market Relations and the American Slave Community," in Winfred B. Moore

to the obvious methods of military assistance that African Americans offered to Union armies and the less obvious acts of symbolic resistance, interracial cooperation in the context of prison escapes offered a moment of hybridity, in which daily resistance amounted to effective insurgency and so-called infrapolitics came as close as it ever did to open revolt.<sup>8</sup>

As to sensory perception, escape was the mode of transportation in which sensory acumen became the difference between freedom and imprisonment, life and death. Physical elusion required fooling not only the eyes and ears of Confederate soldiers and civilians but also the noses of canine allies adopted from slave patrols to smell out white fugitives. Cooperation across the color lines on the edges of farms and in cities provided the invisibility required to flee, usually at night when darkness impaired the guards' observatory power. Hiding by day and traveling by night, prisoners inferred from footsteps, voices, and howls the changing challenges and opportunities of the

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Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler, eds., *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 31-44; Peter A. Coclanis, "Slavery, African American Agency, and the World we have Lost," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 4 (winter 1995): 873-884.

<sup>8</sup> Debates over resistance have even more importance in the context of the Civil War, where emancipation versus self-emancipation seems is often a question of emphasis and the type of story one wishes to tell. In general, see James M. McPherson, *Drawn with the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 192-207. In contrast, see Ira Berlin, et. al., eds. *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Berlin et. al., eds, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 1985, 1993). Peter Kolchin takes a more moderate stance. "Slavery and Freedom in the Civil War South," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, eds., James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper, Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 250. See also Wayne K. Durrill, *War of another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 68-90.

countryside. While escapees attempted to live off the land, hunger and cold compelled them to take risks. Enslaved people not only provided clothing and food but also valuable information about how to move around Confederate patrols and outwit the bloodhounds assisting Confederate patrols.

### Black Allies and Invisible Movement

When prisoners interacted with civilians they made careful calculations about the loyalties of black and white populations in different parts of the South. In 1864, northern and southern newspapers presented strikingly different accounts of the interactions between Union prisoners and enslaved blacks. On February 11, 1864, in one of the most embarrassing moments for Confederate prison keepers, one hundred and nine Union officers tunneled out of Richmond's Libby Prison and vanished into the city. Although officials feared a conspiracy, they pointed to a nondescript "disloyal element" in the neighborhood and white guards. They did not publicly consider that the slaves who brought newspapers into the prison had something to do with it.<sup>9</sup> The Richmond *Enquirer* implicitly ignored the possibility of interracial collusion by printing an amusing story about an enslaved man recapturing one of the fugitives.<sup>10</sup> Four days after the escape, the

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<sup>9</sup> "Escape of One Hundred and Nine Commissioned Yankee Officers from the Libby Prison," Richmond *Examiner*, February 11, 1864; Bernhard Domschcke, *Twenty Months in Captivity: Memoirs of a Union Officer in Confederate Prisons*, trans. Frederic Trautmann (1865; reprint, Madison, 1987), 41. See also Joseph Wheelan, *Libby Prison Breakout: The Daring Escape from the Notorious Civil War Prison* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> "The Recent Escape from the Libby Prison—Recapture of Twenty Two Officers," Richmond *Enquirer*, February 12, 1864.

Richmond *Examiner* told of a prisoner seen swapping clothes with a slave, but did not publicly consider the possibility that slaves helped fugitives.<sup>11</sup>

Admitting a central role of slaves in trafficking prisoners clashed with a proslavery argument that blacks were content and apolitical unless duped by outsiders.<sup>12</sup> “Our Slaves,” Georgia Governor Joseph Brown stated in his 1860 message to the legislature, “have not been accustomed to claim or exercise political rights, and few of them have any ambition beyond their present comfort and enjoyment.” Had they chosen to exercise political rights, however, he thought the barriers insurmountable. The first was transportation. Brown wrote, “They are not permitted to travel on our Railroads, or other public conveyances, without the consent of those having the control of them.” The second barrier was communication because slaves “have no mail facilities, except as their owners allow them to have, and no means of communication with each other at a distance.” Even if danger presented itself, loyal slaves “would immediately communicate it to their masters.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “The Re-Captured Yankee Officers,” Richmond *Examiner*, February 15, 1864. See also, “Extraordinary Escape from the Libby Prison,” Richmond *Enquirer*, February 11, 1864; “Escape of Yankee Officers from the Libby Prison,” Richmond (Va.) *Whig*, February 11, 1864; “Stampede of Prisoners,” Richmond (Va.) *Sentinel*, February 11, 1864; “The Recent Escape from the Libby Prison,” Richmond *Enquirer*, February 12, 1864; “Re-Capture of Twenty-Two of the Escaped Yankee Officers,” Richmond *Examiner*, February 12, 1864; “The Escaped Prisoners,” Richmond *Whig*, February 13, 1864;; “The Escaped Yankee Officers,” Richmond *Whig*, February 15, 1864; “The Libby Runaways,” Richmond *Sentinel*, February 15, 1864; and “Two More Yankees Recaptured,” Richmond *Enquirer*, February 16, 1864.

<sup>12</sup> Manning, *What this Cruel War was Over*, 25; see also Sally E. Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Governor Joseph E. Brown, “Special Message,” Executive Department, Milledgeville, Georgia, 7 November 1860, in *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, ed. Allen D. Candler (Atlanta, 1909), 53.

Confederate newspapers rarely reported civilian assistance to prisoners. Instead, they ran short articles on white women and black slaves arresting Union prisoners. In June 1864, The *Charleston Daily Courier* reported that slaves had captured an officer near Pendleton, South Carolina, who jumped off a train bound for Georgia.<sup>14</sup> Similar stories became more common that summer and fall. An enslaved man named Joe presented a gun “with both locks at full cock, and the fingers dangerously near to the triggers as the Yankee no doubt thought.”<sup>15</sup> Another slave boarded a train “armed with a gun and protecting his prisoners, the two Yankees, with jealous vigilance, and eyes and fingers ready for action.”<sup>16</sup> In the case of the former, local residents “posed a testimonial for *Joe*, and soon raised a good purse.” Passengers on the train also gave the unnamed slave money for his good deeds and the slave “turned over his gun to a gentleman for keeping, as he did not wish to walk the streets with a gun and had no use for it.”<sup>17</sup>

If the newspapers accounts resembled the antebellum plantation novels written in response to abolitionist critiques of slavery, they served the same ideology and in 1864 helped bail water for a listing Confederacy. White southerners had good reason not to acknowledge what was happening. As wartime analysis of rumors in the South has shown, Confederates had a hard time believing the fall of Atlanta, the capture of

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<sup>14</sup> Charleston (S.C.) *Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), June 22, 1864; *Charleston Daily Courier* September 1, 1864.

<sup>15</sup> *Charleston Daily Courier*, (Charleston, SC) September 15 1864.

<sup>16</sup> *Charleston Daily Courier*, September 17, 1864

<sup>17</sup> *Charleston Daily Courier*, September 17, 1864

Petersburg, or even the surrender of General Lee marked irreversible defeats.<sup>18</sup> In similar way, there was room in southern ideology for a few bad apples, but not a widespread insurgency. Newspaper accounts responded to real concerns about social unrest that increasingly weighed on the minds of demoralized men and women. Intentionally or not, these stories also passed disinformation into prison camps, making prisoners think twice about colluding with slaves. Isaiah Conley read these same newspaper accounts while a captive in Charleston. “We had been misled while in Charleston by their daily papers,” he wrote, “which were almost daily boasting of the faithfulness of their servants.” The accounts gave Conley “strong misgivings about trusting the slaves,” but as a fugitive he came to conclude that slaves were the prisoners’ last good hope to eat and remain unseen. He later concluded that the articles had been intentionally planted as misinformation.<sup>19</sup> Corresponding rumors about the universal brutality of Union soldiers circulated in circles of enslaved people. Sylvanus Crossly, an escaped prisoner near Columbia, recorded that an enslaved woman said to him that her owner warned the slaves that the northern soldiers mistreated blacks. And luckily for Crossly, the woman chose not to believe her master.<sup>20</sup>

While most southern newspapers were silent on prisoner-slave exchanges, a few were more concerned. “Be on your guard,” the *Memphis Daily Appeal* warned in June 1864, “Escaped Yankee prisoners are tampering with negroes on our plantations.”

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<sup>18</sup> Jason Phillips, “The Grape Vine Telegraph: Rumors and Confederate Persistence,” *Journal of Southern History* 72, 4, (fall 2006), 753-788. See also Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Conley, “Conley’s Escape from Prison,” 5.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvanus Crossly Diary, February 18, 1865, LC.

Jumping off trains and escaping from stockades, these fugitives were “wandering about the country talking and trading with our slaves.” Two prisoners had been found hiding on a plantation near Millen, Georgia. The paper advised everyone to remain alert, “especially keep watch around your negro quarters at night.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, the *Southern Recorder* warned of an extensive slave plot on Christmas Eve in 1864. Confessions gathered by white interrogators indicated escaped prisoners for Florence, South Carolina, had helped inspire the plot.<sup>22</sup>

At least some Confederate officials and slaveholders privately feared collusion between slaves and prisoners. As newspapers confidently discussed slave loyalty following the Libby Prison breakout, Assistant Provost Marshall L. W. Richardson arrested Alex Brady, a free black, because he was “known to have been aiding prisoners to escape.”<sup>23</sup> Major General William H. C. Whiting warned General Samuel Cooper in June 1864 that “Yankee mechanics” sent from Richmond on parole were being too friendly with slaves and he regarded them as spies or incendiaries.<sup>24</sup> At least some

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<sup>21</sup> Memphis (Tenn.) *Daily Appeal*, June 10, 1864.

<sup>22</sup> “Insurrectionary Plot Discovered,” Milledgeville (Ga.) *Southern Recorder*, December 27, 1864; See also *The Wadesboro* (N.C.) *Argus*, December 16, 1864.

<sup>23</sup> Register of Arrests, 1863-1864, Provost Marshall’s Office at Richmond, Record Group 109, Chapter 14, Volume 100, NARA. At Camp Oglethorpe in Macon, Georgia, Luther G. Billings recalled that a slave selling blackberries aided a prisoner escape in a cart. Suspected by the Confederate guard, the man was arrested, tortured, and hanged, “Only Yesterday,” 70-80, Billings Collection, LC.

<sup>24</sup> Major General W. H. C. Whiting to General S. Cooper, 16 June 1864, Ch. II, vol. 336, p. 338, Letters Sent, Gen. W. H. C. Whiting’s Command, Dept. of NC & Southern VA, Records of Military Commands, RG 106, in Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom, ser. I, vol. I*, 738. Prisoners also inferred this mistrust. Warren A. Jennings, ed. “Prisoner of the

slaveholders discovered collusion between their slaves and prisoners. David Harris, a farmer in the South Carolina upcountry, learned that “three Yankee prisoners have been hiding for several days in our gin house and been fed by our negroes.” Rather than arresting the prisoners or slaves immediately, Harris decided to see who among the slaves was disloyal. Harris enlisted the neighbors to keep watch with their guns, but he admitted that news must have reached the fugitives and their allies. Although the ambush failed, Harris found “unmistakable evidence” that someone had been hiding in the gin. He wrote, “We tried to get the negroes to tell something about it, but in vain. We could hear of their telling each other about it but they would tell us nothing.”<sup>25</sup> Eavesdropping on the conversations of slaves, Harris could only catch fragments from the grapevine telegraph.

Whereas white southerners exhibited public confidence and private concern about collusion between white prisoners and black slaves, northern newspapers had greater incentive to push the idea that enslaved blacks were loyal not to their masters but to Emancipation and the Union. Like published and private accounts written by escaped prisoners, these articles assumed universal black political loyalty to white men, the Union, and president Lincoln. The *Fremont Journal*, reprinting a story from the *New York Tribune*, wrote that escaped prisoners “kept out of sight of whites, but trusted implicitly the blacks, *and never had their trust betrayed*.”<sup>26</sup> For prisoners scattered along the Chickahominy River, slaves “organized into relief squads and searched the woods for

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Confederacy: A Diary of a Union Artilleryman,” *West Virginia History* 36, no. 4 (July 1976): 312.

<sup>25</sup> Philip N. Racine, *Piedmont Farmer: The Journals of David Golightly Harris, 1855-1870* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pg. 353, entry for December 16, 1864.

<sup>26</sup> “Slaves Helping Union Prisoners,” *Fremont Journal*, February 26, 1864,



the fugitives, carrying them food from their scanty rations, and helping them in every way possible.”<sup>27</sup> The highest-ranking Union officer to escape from Libby Prison, Colonel Abel D. Straight, managed to make it to Union lines from Richmond with four other officers. The paper reported, “They were aided by slaves, some of whom seemed to comprehend instinctively who they were.” Straight and his escape party initially refused to give details of their escape, “fearing that a publication may injure some of their friends.”<sup>28</sup> This had double meaning: many prisoners were still missing and a detailed publication risked revealing the names of the enslaved people.<sup>29</sup>

While northern and southern newspapers used slaves to tell stories their readers wanted to hear, prisoners navigated the ambiguity on the ground. John Collins Welch recalled the two directions escaped prisoners might flee from Columbia, South Carolina. If one traveled southeast to the coast, the escapee would encounter thicker populations, Confederate boats and guards, and “the country would be full of packs of blood-hounds that had been previously trained to hunt slaves and were exceedingly convenient to hunt escaping prisoners.” To the northwest, Welch knew there were mountains to cross, but he believed the German immigrants living there were Union sympathizers. “The word passed among us,” Welch wrote, was “Get to Walhalla [South Carolina] and you are all

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<sup>27</sup> “Slaves Helping Union Prisoners,” *Fremont Journal*, February 26, 1864, emphasis in the original. See also, “Who Are Our Friends?” Chardon (Oh.) *Jefferson Democrat*, March 11, 1864; and “The Escaped Union Prisoner,” *Fremont Journal*, 18 March, 1864.

<sup>28</sup> “Narrative of Col. Straight’s Escape,” *Nashville Daily Union*, March 4, 1864.

<sup>29</sup> A later account stated, “At length they got a negro, and the negro got a boat, and in this way they got across the [Pamunky] river... The negro turned them over to another negro, who piloted them fifteen miles down the opposite bank of the river.” “Narrative of the Escape of Colonel Straight,” *Fremont Journal*, March 11, 1864.

right.”<sup>30</sup> Supplied with a coat better than most prisoners, refurbished boots, a map on greased paper, and a compass, Welch and an accomplice walked out of Camp Sorghum near Columbia with a party paroled to bring in wood, hid until dark, and began making their way towards the Appalachian Mountains with three other escaped prisoners they found hiding in the woods.<sup>31</sup>

For escaping prisoners like Welch, darkness provided a mantle and wilderness a refuge and a hiding place. Welch tried to avoid public roads, lights, and noise and traveled first only by darkness. “The night was dark and cloudy, but we knew our direction and the compass guided us alright, avoiding all public roads and flanking fires which we had reason to believe were the fires of pickets that had been thrown out on some of the roads to arrest escaping prisoners.” In the darkness they listened carefully for the sounds of humans and dogs. On one instance, the escapees crossed paths on a country road with two men and uttered the obligatory “Good evening.” Afterwards, fearing the strangers might be wandering guards from the prison, the party of five made haste and for the remainder of the night listened for the baying of hounds.<sup>32</sup>

Food availability in southern swamps, woods, and along the edges of civilization ranged from garden to desert. Suffering from prolonged diarrhea, John Kay slipped off a train headed from Andersonville towards Augusta by cutting a hole in the car. Sick, tired, and alone in the woods, he dug for water with a case knife, but it was tasted too poor and

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<sup>30</sup> John Collins Welch, “An Escape from Prison during the Civil War, 1864,” 7, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

<sup>31</sup> Welch, “An Escape from Prison,” 7-9.

<sup>32</sup> Welch, “An Escape from Prison,” 9. See also Jennings, ed., “Prisoner of the Confederacy,” *West Virginia History*, 322.

brackish to quench his thirst. After failing to find enough food scavenging for corn and beans in an old field, Kay found a slave cabin and feasted on donations. After four days on the run, a planter spotted him on the road shortly after nightfall. Taking some degree of pity on him, the white man gave Kay a supper of ham, biscuits, pancakes, and tea before delivering him to Confederate authorities at the railroad.<sup>33</sup>

Buying, begging, trading, and stealing what they could, Welch's party collected geese, chickens, parched corn, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. The potatoes "had not then been dug and by persistent efforts around a house we could always find where they grew." Along the road, the escapees also took advantage of persimmons which stood "like perpetual good Samaritans, ready to give up their delicious fruit."<sup>34</sup> Scavenging for survival along the way, prisoners sought out allies on farms and plantations. In February 1865, Sylvanus Crossly and four others escaped through a hole cut in the floor of the rail car near Ridgeway, South Carolina, while Confederates evacuated prisoners from Columbia to Charlotte. Crossly's party described the area around Winnsboro, South Carolina, as a desert forcing them to rely on "our only friends, the negroes," for food. In the darkness they traveled to a plantation and made for the slave quarters where they obtained bacon, sorghum molasses, cornbread, and salt.<sup>35</sup>

Travel was more difficult in the late fall and winter for the poorly provisioned strangers. "Everywhere we went," Junius H. Browne wrote, "we found ourselves too near

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<sup>33</sup> John B. Kay diary, September 9-12, 1864, 851695Aa1, Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>34</sup> Welch, "An Escape from Prison," 11.

<sup>35</sup> Crossly diary, February 16, 1864, LC.

some road, and the out-houses too unsafe.”<sup>36</sup> While the winter seemed to conspire against prisoners, slaves made the difficult task of traversing the South possible. Browne recalled, “They were our firm, brave, unflinching friends.... They never hesitated to do us any service at the risk of even life.”<sup>37</sup> At one stop, Browne and his companions procured dinner and provisions (figure 1). The slaves’ “hospitality,” according to Browne included “a hearty supper” and a turban to protect his head from the weather.<sup>38</sup> When escapees ate with slaves, they asked for information about the local geography and people. Edward E. Dickerson wrote that field hands knew the woods, swamps, and roads of about ten square miles, and draymen knew considerably more about the regional network of roads. These draymen knew the loyalties of people along the road and warned prisoners about which ones to avoid.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Junius Henri Browne, *Four Years in Secessia* (Hartford, 1865), 378

<sup>37</sup> Browne, *Four Years in Secessia*, 368.

<sup>38</sup> Browne, *Four Years in Secessia*, 370, 390. Harlan Smith Howard, making his way from Danville, Virginia, to Fayetteville, West Virginia, reported similar treatment at various houses along the way. Jennings, ed., “Prisoner of the Confederacy,” *West Virginia History*, 320-322, entries from November 14 through December 12, 1863; William McKell diary, 21-24, Hayes Presidential Library.

<sup>39</sup> Edward E. Dickerson diary, October 30, November 1, 4, 1864, M95-099, Wisconsin Historical Society. See also Kay diary, September 11, 1864, Bentley Library, UM; William James McKell diary, pg. 24,, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library, Fremont Ohio.



Figure 7.2. Junius H. Browne receives food and clothing from slaves.  
*Four Years in Secessia*, 370.

Not all help came voluntarily. Dickerson recorded his party's strategy for getting drafting slaves to help them. He wrote that enslaved black men "always start out as soon after dark as they can, when everything is quiet about the plantation, either to go where their wives live, to see their girls or to forage and hunt coon." Lying by a plantation, Dickerson's party followed and fell upon the traveler as soon as they were out of hearing range of the plantation. This approach relied on Dickerson's belief that enslaved feared southern whites. "They never fight," Dickerson wrote, because they "do not know whether we are Masters or Rebs, both of which they fear." The kidnappers then did their best to convince the wanderer of their story and enlist their help.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Dickerson diary, November 1, 1864, WHS. See also Crossly diary, February 15, 1865.

Enslaved people hid prisoners in their homes, barns, and nearby woods. Nancy Johnson, an enslaved woman living on Canoochie Creek in Liberty County, Georgia, told the Southern Claims Commission she and her husband Boson were Union supporters during the Civil War from behind the lines. She had detested the dehumanizing treatment during and after slavery, especially Mrs. David Baggs who called her “a stinking bitch” when she refused “to work for her like a ‘nigger.’” In the final year of the war, Johnson said a white prisoner came to their door in the middle of the night and the couple hid him in their house the following day. She stated, “He sat in my room. White people didn’t visit our house then. My husband slipped him over to a man named Joel Hodges & he conveyed him off so that he got home.... I was sorry for [him] though a heap. The white people came hunting this man that we kept over night.” She and her husband understood that this small action was tantamount to treason or insurrection. “[M]y old master,” she said, “sent me one of his own grandsons & he said if he found it [the prisoner] that they must put my husband to death, & I had to tell a story to save [his] life.... I told him I had seen nothing of him.”<sup>41</sup> The white master and the Confederate search party’s easy entry into the party belied Johnson’s initial belief that their home was a safe space. Nevertheless, by feigning ignorance Nancy and Boson Johnson pulled the wool over the eyes of the search party.

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<sup>41</sup> Testimony of Nancy Johnson, [22 Mar. 1873] in claim of Boson Johnson, Liberty County, GA, SCC, NARA. See also Ira Berlin, et al., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, series I, volume I, The Destruction of Slavery*, 150-151, 154. Fearing their homes might be searched, enslaved people often hid prisoners in places they could plead ignorance, such as abandoned cotton gins. See Welch, “An Escape from Prison,” 14.

Mack Duff Williams, an enslaved man and a preacher, hid half a dozen escaped Union prisoners one day and one night in his cabin on Louis Steel's farm about five miles outside Charleston. Prior to this act he had held prayer meetings during which they "made a great deal of noise" praying for the Union cause even after being forbidden to do so. Williams recalled the prisoners arriving at his house and identifying themselves as escaped prisoners. He stated, "They said they belonged to the Union army and had been taken prisoners—but escaped—I told them I was glad to have them do so."<sup>42</sup> Williams gave them vegetables from his garden and gave three of them pantaloons to replace their uniform blue ones.

While the Johnsons and Williams hid prisoners for only one night, laying out as a prisoner was not necessarily a short-term affair. In Charleston, three Union officers disguised in Confederate Uniforms slipped out of line while being marched from Charleston's Roper Hospital to the railroad depot and hid in the city for two months with the help of African Americans. Their first instinct was to seek refuge among African Americans. Alured Larke and R. H. Day testified, "Knowing no one in the city we relied on the negroes & the same day, we related to one Tho<sup>s</sup> Brown (Col'd Barber) who we were, & asked assistance." The African American man who helped them was knowledgeable enough to proudly identify himself to them as "a Black Republican" and he "placed us in [the] charge of his son who the same night procured for us a hiding place among some friends of his (colored) where we remained at least one month." Five slaves helped the prisoners plan an escape in which they would float by night into the harbor from Hazel Street. The plan failed when a Confederate patrol fired on the group, but the

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<sup>42</sup> Claim of Mack Duff Williams, 24 Aug. 1872, Charleston Country, SC, SCC.

white officers escaped by crawling away and hiding in an empty building while the soldiers interrogated the black men. The group finally escaped by riding the railroad in disguise and then, once out of the city, striking through the swamps to the coast. In all, they spent two months in hiding in Charleston, and reported “relying all that time on the negroes for safety—who we found remarkably intelligent, thoroughly comprehending their own *Status* in the Rebellion.”<sup>43</sup>

These men and women, like others, opened their homes and assisted prisoners, but others piloted prisoners towards freedom. Alonzo Jackson, born in Virginia in 1823 but living in Georgetown at the time of the Civil War, smuggled three groups of runaway prisoners from Florence Stockade through the lines. At the time he was in freighting, transporting cords of wood on a flat boat thirty or forty miles up the Black Mingo River from Georgetown. The first time Jackson encountered fugitives, he recognized they were Union prisoners by their clothing. “As soon as the 3 white men saw we were colored men,” he said, “they came to the boat and said ‘we are Yankee soldiers, and have escaped from the rebel ‘stockade’ at Florence, we are your friends can’t you do something for us we are nearly perished.” Jackson described them as pitiful, with no shoes and no weapons, and ill-prepared to travel all the way to the coast. Jackson said, “They did not know where the gun boats were—I did—and I told them I would take them where they could get to the gun boats unmolested.” After three days of traveling, Jackson safely

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<sup>43</sup> Capt. Alured Larke and Capt. R. H. Day to Provost Marshal, 7 Dec. 1864, vol. 238 DS, pp. 103-6, Statements of Escaped Union Prisoners, Refugees, & Confederate Deserters, ser. 4294, Provost Marshal General, Dept. of the South, RG 393 Pt. I [C-1551], in Berlin, et al., *Freedom*, Ser. I, vol. I, 809-810. Another group of prisoners passed eight weeks in the swamps by day and slave quarters by night without being detected. “How the Negroes Treat Our Men,” New York *Herald*, March 20, 1865.



maneuvered through Confederate pickets at Georgetown and delivered the runaways to North Island in Winyah Bay. Two months later, Jackson came across more runaways, who initially dashed away from him. They came back only after Jackson promised there was “no danger,” and luring them back with the promise that “I was as good a friend as ever they had in their lives!” Jackson repeated the journey through the lines to North Island and in February 1865 came across a third party of runaways which he safely escorted down river. Jackson kept prisoners hidden at all times because “I would have been killed if the rebels had found I had Yankees on my boat.”<sup>44</sup> The patterns of testimony from escapees and freedpeople were similar. In a combination of sympathy across the color line and political allegiance to the Union and its perceived war aims, enslaved people repurposed local knowledge and small acts of resistance into intentional, political action.

The aid that African Americans provided may have weakened the Confederacy from within, but the meanings of this support had bigger implications than military success and failure. Assistance by enslaved people, whether experienced directly or consumed indirectly through the northern press, embodied fluid ideas about race and slavery in a unique way. The relational network between the white southerners with guns, slaves, bloodhounds, and prisoners pushed at the limits of an already racialized experience of captivity. The Emancipation Proclamation, as well as General Orders No. 100, and the Confederate government’s severe response to both led to the cessation of the

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<sup>44</sup> Claim of Alonzo Jackson, Georgetown County, SC, SCC. See also Claim of James Brutus, Marlboro County, SC, SCC, NARA; Claim of Nancy Bass, Marlboro County, SC, SCC, NARA. “News from the Gulf,” New York *Herald*, November 24, 1864. See also, “Sherman. The Siege of Savannah,” New York *Herald*, December 23, 1864.

exchange cartel that traded prisoners between the North and the South. It offended many Union prisoners that they had to remain in prison because the Confederacy would not exchange African Americans and the United States would swap no one until the South treated prisoners equally.<sup>45</sup> Racialization went further than implicit politics and to escape from the Confederate South, escaped prisoners had to learn to sense the South like runaway slaves.

### Under the Nose

Avoiding the eyes and ears of white patrols was necessary to escape, but it was not sufficient. Prisoners had to elude detection of noses of dogs trained to smell, chase, and bite or tree runaway slaves. Sylvanus Crossly wrote that in crossing plantations, they were “much troubled with the canine fraternity.”<sup>46</sup> The idea of dogs or bloodhounds pursuing a fugitive had racial connotations that affected escaped Union prisoners and the consumers of these stories in the North. The term “bloodhound” became common in the English language during the 1790s, and the animals did not abound in the U.S. South until they were imported from Cuba for use against the Seminoles of Florida during the “Bloodhound War” (1835-1842). Northern abolitionists transferred their criticism of using bloodhounds against Seminoles to using bloodhounds against slaves in the 1840s.

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<sup>45</sup> Glenn Robins, “Race, Repatriation, and Galvanized Rebels: Union Prisoners and the Exchange Question in Deep South Prison Camps,” *Civil War History* 53, no. 2 (June 2007), 117-140. On race and prisoners in general, see Gregory J. W. Irwin, ed., *Black Flag over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); George S. Burkhardt, *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Crossly diary, February 17, 1865, LC.

By the 1850s, abolitionists from Frederick Douglas to Harriet Jacobs and George Carleton to Charles Sumner used bloodhounds as a symbol of the brutality of a “slave power” that used animals to dehumanize enslaved people.<sup>47</sup> In the context of captivity and escape, bloodhounds also affected how prisoners perceived escape because no white men came closer to understanding the South from the perspective of a runaway slave.

As an extension of their mastery, slaveholders had long relied on the canine sense of smell to police the enslaved. The popularity of the name “negro dogs” highlighted the common knowledge that as technology and strategy, dogs were used predominantly against enslaved blacks.<sup>48</sup> Used to hunt fugitive slaves before the Civil War, these dogs simultaneously symbolized the olfactory, auditory, haptic, and visual challenges of opposing the ruling class and race. Deputized by the authority of planters and patrollers, dogs received training in tracking black fugitives. Frederick Law Olmstead observed in *A Journey in the Seaboard States* (1856) that southern whites trained dog by first introducing them to black men and women as objects of pursuit. “They are shut up when

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<sup>47</sup> John Campbell, “The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War,’ and Abolitionism, 1796-1865,” *Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 2 (May 2006), 259-302.

<sup>48</sup> On the term, “negro dogs,” see William Gambel, “Negro Dogs,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 20, 1846, pg. 3; “Contented and Happy,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 20, 1846, pg. 3; James Smith, “Bloodhounds! Bloodhounds!” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, October 13, 1855; J. W. Horton, “Negro Dogs,” *The Opelousas Courier* (Opelousas, LA), July 21, 1860, pg. 1, September 29, 1860, pg. 1; “The Entertainment to which the Settlers of Nebraska are Invited. ‘Negro Dogs.’” *Fremont Journal* (Fremont, OH), March 17, 1854, pg. 2; “Slavery as it is” *Green-Mountain Freeman* (Montpelier, VT), January 29, 1846, pg. 2; “Desperate Encounter with Runaway Negroes,” *The Southerner* (Tarboro, NC), October 15, 1859, pg. 2; “Death Preferred to Slavery,” *The Jeffersonian* (Stroudsburg, PA) June 2, 1853, pg. 3; Javier Hebert, “Runaways! Runaways!” *Sugar Planter* (West Baton Rouge, LA) November 19, 1859 pg. 3; “Hunting a Murderer,” *The Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, VA) August 20, 1855, pg. 1. See also Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution, Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956), 129, 189.

puppies,” Olmstead wrote, “and never allowed to see a negro except while training to catch him. A negro is made to run from them, and they are encouraged to follow him until he gets into a tree, when meat is given them.” After introducing dogs to this peculiar game of catch, a trained dog could “follow any particular negro by scent, and then a shoe or a piece of clothing is taken off a negro, and they learn to find by scent who it belongs to, and to tree him, etc.”<sup>49</sup> Born into slavery, Anna Prichett remembered how planters projected their racialized sense of smell upon their dogs. She recalled, “when the overseers lashed a slave to death, they would turn the bloodhounds out to smell the blood, so they would know ‘nigger blood,’ that would help trace runaway slaves.”<sup>50</sup> The olfactory prowess of dogs and specially bred bloodhounds were an effective mode of discipline. Slaveholders deputized dogs and appropriated their keen sense of smell for their own purposes.

Olmstead’s notes and Prichett’s memory reflected beliefs in the racialization of smell. Training dogs with live black bodies or blood drew on nineteenth-century conceptions of smell and racial difference. Many whites in the nineteenth century who justified slavery and inequality on the basis of race believed that the bodies of blacks exuded a body odor fouler than whites. While white elites controlled the discourse on the distinction between foul and fragrant smells, the idea of smelling race crossed the color line, too. In 1854, the *Frederick Douglass Paper* responded to an attack in the New Orleans *Crescent* on the smell of blacks in general and Douglass in particular by

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<sup>49</sup> Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard States* (London: Sampson Low, and Son, 1856), 161. Olmstead later wrote that dogs “were always taught to hate a Negro, never permitted to see one unless to be put in chase of him.” Olmstead, *The Cotton Kingdom* (1861; reprint, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 387.

<sup>50</sup> Interview of Anna Prichett, *Born in Slavery*, Indiana narratives, vol. 5, 143

emphasizing the social construction of the sense of smell. “We have always remarked that it is only under certain *social* conditions that this odor is perceptible,” the paper asserted. “When the negro appears as an *equal*, at the table, on the railroad car, or in the omnibus, it is sure to be noticed; but when he waits upon the table, having intimate relations with victuals, or when he blacks the boots, or shaves the face, then it does not offend the nostrils of the most sensitive.” Reversing the stereotype, the writer countered that in northern cities “the very loudest smells” come from the poor urban whites.<sup>51</sup>

Union prisoners who escaped learned how to think about human and nonhuman olfaction from the perspective of runaway slaves. Theories for evading the dogs’ nose abounded in antebellum literature on slavery and these stories informed the strategies of prisoners whether they worked in practice or not. Following the Ocmulgee River toward the Atlantic coast, John Geer wrote that an enslaved man taught him methods for getting rid of tracking dogs. The man told Geer to stick to the swamps, but if the dogs came too close they should swim into the alligator inhabited Ocmulgee River. The alligators were less likely to attack humans than dogs, and if nothing else would divert the attention of the dogs. Another strategy Geer recorded involved blunting the dog’s nose with pepper. It could be accomplished, it was said, by using a cane poll to decrease the number of footsteps and leave pepper in the tracks.<sup>52</sup> Later escapees reported learning of strategies for dog evasion inside prison and while on the run. When Welch escaped in 1864, he had

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<sup>51</sup> “Smelling,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* (Rochester, NY), September 8, 1854.

<sup>52</sup> Geer, *Beyond the Lines*, 128. On theories for blunting dogs’ sense of smell as well as their practical limitations on trained track animals, see John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 162; Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 152-153f.

already learned strategies of olfactory evasion, including the disguise of human scent with pine needles, which he attributed to the arts of enslaved people who “carry the necessary articles with them and can elude any pack of hounds.”<sup>53</sup>

When dogs smelled the object of pursuit, their howl alerted patroller and runaway of close pursuit. Fugitives who feared the olfactory prowess of canines listened carefully for the barking, yelping, and baying of bloodhounds. The sounds of bloodhounds punctuated slave and prisoner accounts. Gill Ruffin, an ex-slave from Texas, remembered, “The woods was full of runaways and I heered them houn’s a runnin’ e’em like deer many a time.”<sup>54</sup> Prisoners described being chased in similar terms. “Nearer, clearer, deadlier,” John J. Geer wrote, “came the dreadful sounds, and we crouched in our retreat, expecting every moment to see the ferocious animals bounding upon us.”<sup>55</sup> Listeners had to interpret the sounds of dogs. What was the breed of dog? What was the proximity and was it getting closer? Did the animal sound confidently in pursuit or lost? Isaiah Conley recalled listening and interpreting these resonances. Conley wrote, “from the sound [we] felt sure that they were bloodhounds” and they were on the same road. Other prisoners bypassed campfires and “kept our ears open all night fearing we might

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<sup>53</sup> Welch, “An Escape from Prison,” 12-13.

<sup>54</sup> Gill Ruffin, in George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave*, Vol. 16, Pt. 3, 263. See also Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 160-61; Jacob Stoyer, *My Life in the South* (Salem, 1879), 98-99; Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 40-41; Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> John J. Geer, *Beyond the Lines Or a Yankee Prisoner Loose in Dixie* (Philadelphia, 1863), 139. Even those who did not escape listened to the sound of dogs outside the prison walls, James J. Heslin ed., “Diary of a Union Soldier in Confederate Prisons,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (July 1957), 261 [May 7, 1864], 263 [June 4, 1864].

hear the baying of hounds upon our tracks.”<sup>56</sup> These howls terrified runaways, white and black, because they signaled that they were the objects of pursuit by powerful forces: bloodhounds and armed white southerners. Prisoners feared being recaptured or, more immediately, the pain of being torn apart. Describing his recapture, one prisoner wrote, “I heard the dogs on my track, bellowing and yelling like wolves.”<sup>57</sup> Howls echoed in the imaginations of former prisoners and slaves for years.

The prevalence of these accounts indicates the significance dogs and the sounds of dogs had on how prisoners thought about captivity.<sup>58</sup> Artistic representations and newspaper editors juxtaposed the running down of slaves and prisoners by bloodhounds (figure 2). As the *Fremont Journal* complained, “The use of bloodhounds is a striking illustration of the peculiar ideas inculcated by slavery.” The practice of using bloodhounds to track white prisoners was no worse than using bloodhounds to track slaves, “but the difference is that whites are not used to it.”<sup>59</sup> This also raised the implicit question of who was a combatant in such a war. Southerners long condemned as an atrocity the Union’s policy of arming African Americans. Northern prisoners responded by pointing to the Confederate practice of “running white men down with

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<sup>56</sup> Welch, “Escape from Prison,” 9.

<sup>57</sup> House Special Committee on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Union Citizens, *Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War kept by the Rebel Authorities, during the War of the Rebellion...*, 40<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., House Report 45 (Washington: GPO, 1869), pg. 68. See also Luther Guiteau Billings, “Only Yesterday,” 93-103, Luther Guiteau Billings Collection, 1865-1900, Library of Congress [LC].

<sup>58</sup> Urban, *My Experiences Mid Shot and Shell*, 507. See also Robert H. Kellogg, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* (Hartford, 1865), 62-64.

<sup>59</sup> “Bloodhounds,” *Fremont (Oh.) Journal*, March 4, 1864.

bloodhounds.”<sup>60</sup> During the final months of the war, ex-prisoners and freedmen took revenge on canine Confederates. The *Belmont Chronicle* reported that in Sherman’s army “everything in the shape of a dog has been killed. The soldiers and officers are determined that no more flying fugitives, white men or Negroes, shall be followed by track-hounds.”<sup>61</sup> By the end of the war, it became apparent that both blacks and whites were united in a political struggle against Confederates and their bloodhounds.

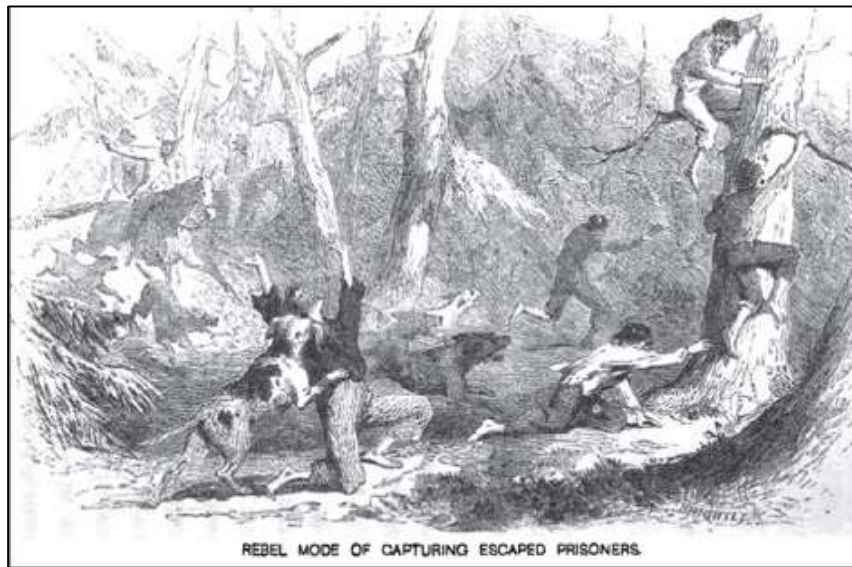


Figure 7.3. Run down like slaves. Images drew on ideas of slavery to represent the treatment of Union prisoners of war. Robert H. Kellogg, *Life and Death in Rebel Prisons* (Hartford, CT: L. Stebbins, 1865), 62.

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<sup>60</sup> John McElroy, *Andersonville: A Story of Rebel Military Prisons* (Toledo, 1879), 185. See also Vaughter, *Prison Life in Dixie*, 116; and Kellogg *Capture and Escape*, 70.

<sup>61</sup> “Killing Bloodhounds,” St. Clairsville (Oh.) *Belmont Chronicle*, January 5, 1865. In a similar story, “[S]ome of our men, escorted by niggers and escaped prisoners, paid a visit to a noted ruffian... who kept a pack of bloodhounds for the purpose of hunting down niggers and escaped Union prisoners. The boys disposed of his dogs as they have done with all the bloodhounds they have come across,” New York *Herald*, March 20, 1865. See also, “Horrible! Most Horrible,” Fremont *Journal*, January 20, 1865.



The essential assistance of African Americans, combined with the racialization of captivity and being chased by bloodhounds in the South, made diaries and escape accounts one way northerners narrated the ideological conversion to antislavery and abolitionism. John Geer, a native of Virginia who fought for the Union, had been a Democrat before the war. The experience of secession, confinement in “negro chains,” (reenacted pictures of which helped him sell books), and his condition as a friendless fugitive helped him overcome his “Virginia prejudices against the negroes” as he first sought help among the enslaved after living in swamps for days.<sup>62</sup> Geer admitted, “Beneath that dark brow was the mind of a man, and within that slave’s bosom beat a brother’s heart. I could have embraced him as my father.”<sup>63</sup> After escaping from Columbia, Charles G. Davis and another fugitive traveled by night and hid in cane breaks by day listening anxiously to the baying of bloodhounds. The fugitives fell into the company of enslaved people, who fed and piloted them as far as they could in the night to places of refuge closer to the mountains. After nearly a week on the run and describing the impressive knowledge of enslaved people about the war, Davis admitted, “I am fast becoming abolitionized.” Geer wrote publicly and Davis privately as if the assistance from the slaves came at a cost of recognizing not only their humanity but also their political interest on the outcome of the Civil War.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Geer, *Beyond the Lines*, 4, 16, 122.

<sup>63</sup> Geer, *Beyond the Lines*, 125-127, quote on 125-126. See also [William James Gilmore], introduction to *Adrift in Dixie; or, A Yankee Officer Among the Rebels*, by James R. Gilmore (New York, 1866), 10, 15; “Slaves Helping Union Prisoners,” *Fremont Journal*, February 26, 1864.

<sup>64</sup> “Army Life and Prison Experiences of Major Charles G. Davis,” November 12, 1864, MS 290, University of Tennessee.

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Stories laden with secret movement and slaves helping prisoners were also useful rhetorical pieces at the very time ideas about race were fluctuating in the North. In August 1864, Judge Joseph T. Mills of Wisconsin spoke with President Abraham Lincoln about the presidential campaign. Lincoln feared that if the Democrats came to power the Union armies would be unable to wear down the rebellion because George B. McClellan would disband the 200,000 African Americans in uniform and roll back the Emancipation Proclamation. The latter would turn enslaved people in the South into political enemies of the North. Lincoln warned, “The black men who now assist Union prisoners to escape are to be converted into our enemies, in the vain hope of gaining the good-will of their masters. We shall fight two nations instead of one.”<sup>65</sup> Frederick Douglass also invoked these stories as a form of political debt. Representing what he called “the black race and white race, and the black and the white race combined” in an 1866 speech, Douglass argued for colorblind male suffrage. Douglass emphasized the prisoners’ debts to African Americans in the South, stating, “[T]he negro helped you put [the rebellion] down. They were your friends, too. They helped your escaping prisoners from Southern dungeons—Andersonville, Belle Isle, and Castle Thunder.”<sup>66</sup> In 1879, two years after Republicans

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<sup>65</sup> “Election in Wilmington, Del; An Interview with the President,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1864. In his diary entry, Mills does not mention escaped prisoners and rarely quotes Lincoln. The reason for the omission in one source and inclusion is not clear. See “Interview August 19, 1864,” Joseph Trotter Mills papers, Memorandum Books, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>66</sup> Frederick Douglass, “We are Here and Want the Ballot-Box: An Address Delivered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on 4 September 1866,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Vol. 4: 1864-80*, edited by John W.

lost political power in the “redeemed” South, Douglass again invoked escaping prisoners during the New York gubernatorial campaign. “The colored people have some claims upon you,” Douglass said. “You know we were your friends in the south when you had no other friends there.” Escaping prisoners of war, Douglass argued, “didn’t like to see white men at that time, but Uncle Tom, and Uncle Jim, and Caesar, because they would feed them when hungry, show them the way when lost, and shelter them when they were shelterless.”<sup>67</sup> Douglass’s warning was clear: do not forget the role of the enslaved in the American Civil War.

To a large extent, however, it was a forgotten story by the time Sarah Anne Green spoke to the Federal Writer’s Project.<sup>68</sup> Yet accounts of interracial cooperation between enslaved blacks and white fugitives were important for two reasons. In the years preceding the Civil War, enslaved people fashioned local space and geographic knowledge in ways that suited their personal self-interests. Prisoners became the unexpected benefactors of daily resistance when enslaved men and women provided shelter, food, and practical knowledge of the countryside. Moreover, these stories represented an immediate “usable past” in that they were one way some northerners helped narrate and defend ideological changes about race, slavery, and expanding the political community during the Civil War Era.

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Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven, Conn., 1977), 123-133, 127, 132-33 (quotes).

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Alonzo B. Cornell and the Republican Party: An Address Delivered in Utica, New York, on 30 October 1879,” in *Frederick Douglass Papers*, Vol. 4, 533-542, 541 (quotes).

<sup>68</sup> The exceptions are Du Bois and Aptheker, who gesture to prisoner-slave interactions, Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 104; and Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943), 367.

## EPILOGUE:

### A SENSE OF PLACE AND TIME

“Never again; never, never, never.” That was J. Keller Anderson’s reply in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* to an unnamed woman who kindly and “in low tones” asked to hear the so-called Rebel Yell at a reunion. The question provoked two reactions from Anderson, reactions that have to do with the power and limitations of sensory perception. At first the request seemed to transport him back to northern Georgia in September 1863, where he remembered advancing blindly over rocks, gullies, and fallen trees in a storm of artillery shells and Minie balls which would “spat, whirl, and hiss” in their short flight. Amid the smoke, the sound of Minie balls changed from whirl and hiss to a distinct “thud” when clothing, flesh, and bone absorbed the momentum and sound of the soft lead. “Thud! Thud! Thud!” It was a moment of synesthesia when hearing became feeling and smelling the overwhelming “sulphurous smoke” became a pungent taste. He then remembered the Rebel yell, a “maniacal maelstrom of sound” and a “penetrating, rasping, shrieking, blood-curdling noise” that rose above the sounds, sights, tastes, smells, and touches of the thicket.

Anderson’s second realization was that listening to the rebel yell belonged to the past. The sounds that Anderson and others heard at the reunions did not evoke the same sense of authenticity. Neither Anderson nor anyone else could hear the Rebel yell because the context had vanished like slavery, the Confederacy, and the 750,000 lives lost between 1861 and 1865. “Dear Southern mother,” he wrote, “that was the Rebel yell,

and only such scenes ever did or ever will produce it.... We can never again, even at your bidding, dear, dear mother, produce the Rebel yell.”<sup>1</sup> The sound belonged to the Civil War and there it remained. Anderson’s words, republished in 1893 as part of the first issue of the *Confederate Veteran* magazine, a commemorative magazine and political organ for the United Confederate Veterans and the Daughters of the Confederacy, offered a warning about sensory perception. Anderson never experienced a Civil War prison, but his point about the production and consumption of the Rebel Yell is equally applicable to the sensory environments of the forgoing chapters. In this epilogue I return to my rambles in and meditations on these old prisons as they are today, discussing the place of the senses within historic preservation and historic site interpretation.

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If there is an important distinction between public and academic historians, it is that public historians face higher expectations from a less sympathetic audience. Whether in the foreground or background, public historians have the difficult task of applying the changes in the study of the past for the good of the public. The work of public historians is inherently collaborative because it engages with interested groups of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of commitment to learning about history. Public historians are trained not only in historical research but also the challenges of developing panels (not just the kind with notepads and water), text labels, signage, tours, or many other specialized skills that fall outside the purview of academic history training. Moreover, public historians know that history is contentious and that they are not interpretive despots. They do not have tenure and their jobs ultimately depend on reception and

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<sup>1</sup> [J. Keller Anderson], “The Rebel Yell,” *Confederate Veteran* 1, no. 1 (January 1893): 14-15.

revenue. Although part of the umbrella of history, public historians face different standards and criteria because their jurors and executioners are not their peers. Is there value then in integrating public history and the history of the senses? It depends.

Historians have disagreed on the merits and theoretical possibilities of sensory consumption at historic sites, but there is a way to make sensory history public without upending its underlying theory and methodology. It does not need to involve recreating sensory experience.<sup>2</sup> If sensory perception depends on all the elements that make up context, reviving a dead sensory world is not just impossible, it is nonsensical.<sup>3</sup> The introduction to this dissertation emphasized the value of holding onto that impossible barrier between the world today and the world we have lost. Yet sensory historians should also not be so quick to dismiss public history as a valuable outlet. Public history in general and historic preservation in particular already operates on several sensory assumptions. Historic preservation would benefit from a reexamination of words like integrity, preservation, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and restoration with the senses in mind. While sensory history would enrich the criteria and methods of public history, historic preservation contains an answer to the theoretical problem of discontinuous perception. Depicted as an important layer of the past, sensory history and historic preservation do not have to be so different from one another.

The senses are already embedded in the practice of historic preservation. Vision and, to some extent, touch are particularly relevant in historic preservation as a means for

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<sup>2</sup> As advanced by Peter Charles Hoffer, *Sensory Worlds in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 2-21.

<sup>3</sup> Mark M. Smith, "Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History," *Journal of Social History* 40, no. 4 (2007): 841-858.

measuring the eligibility of properties for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places and the management of historic properties. Although the federal government has little power in whether private property, however historic, is altered or destroyed by owners, the National Register is useful as an example in the way preservationists think about sensory authenticity. States and tribes manage their own nomination process through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), and these agencies judge the merits of individual nominations at a review board meeting. Successful nominations at the state level move on to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service for further review and a final decision. The National Register lists properties that have one or more resources that are associated with specific events or broad patterns in history, significant persons, distinct architecture or craftsmanship, or the potential for archaeological data. In addition to having historic significance, properties must also retain historic integrity, which includes the location, the design and materials, as well as the workmanship and aesthetic feeling.<sup>4</sup> Thomas King, an expert on cultural resource management law, writes, “if you think it’s important because of the feelings of inspiration, enlarged vision, or historical perspective it can engender, then integrity of feeling—generally requiring a visually intact property and environment—is necessary.” Yet visual integrity, King points out, is a slippery slope because drawing the line is a subjective determination, depending on to whom it is significant and why.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> United States Department of the Interior, *National Register Bulletin: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource Laws and Practice* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), 93-95.

Integrity is important to the four broad property management strategies—reconstruction, rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation—and each have implicit sensory assumptions. The term reconstruction refers to the process of building anew from scratch, recreating the visual appearance of an old building through new construction of a landscape, a building, or a feature. Preservationists tend to like reconstruction the least for the same reason sensory historians are suspicious of sensory reproduction—it creates an unnecessary illusion of continuity. Rehabilitation, which adapts an historic building for modern private or commercial use, and restoration, which creates the illusion of backdating a building or landscape to a particular date, each balance historic integrity with the needs of the present. Rehabilitation removes the illusion of integrity in favor of modern usability within certain, usually visual and material, limits. Restoration typically removes every visual layer except one in an effort to backdate a property to one particular moment or era, creating a similar illusion as reconstruction but without new materials. Preservation, which takes the most hands-off approach, values keeping and interpreting layers as they change. Each strategy involves different degrees of maintaining the illusion of visual and material continuity. Yet what is actually preserved in a rehabilitated building or reconstructed landscape? If the significance of sensory perception is what the mind of the sensate does with stimuli, there is nothing out there to preserve in the first place. Taken to this extreme, reconstruction, reconstruction, restoration, and even preservation actually preserves nothing—not even the visual past.

Yet there is no need to take such an extreme stand. With sensitivity to our inability to recover and mediate “authentic” sensory consumption, it is possible and desirable to use place to tell multisensory history. Here, preservation’s emphasis on



layers is the key. By taking a hands off approach, preservation is minimalist in reproduction and elaborate in interpretation. The public history of the senses, then, becomes part of a site's invisible stratigraphy through its interpretive plan. Public historians can harness the power of the senses by focusing on the layers of the past as they already do with visual land use. Rather than making historic sites a playground for sensory illusions, such an approach historicizes experience and might lead to greater public understanding of history and how historians study the past.

The forty-five acre island on the James River known as Belle Isle or Island offers an example of an unpreserved place where sensory history and historic preservation might work hand in hand. Like most historic sites, the island contains multiple, overlapping historical layers. The top layer, the James River Park System of the Department of Recreation and Parks, dates from 1972-1973 and exists today as something between a city park and an ungovernable territory. During the summer months, open containers, joints, and pipes abound in the afternoon, and there is a strange mix of homeless people, young families, and reckless college students enjoying the island and the river. What makes the space special is not only the visual mix of patrons but also the music and smells which make Bell Island such a unique city park.

Beneath the modern layer is an abandoned industrial one that spanned nearly one hundred and fifty years. Ruins of the dam, a millrace, and several buildings built by early industrialists between 1814 and 1836 remain as visual reminders. The Bell Isle Manufacturing Company and its successor, the Old Dominion Nail Works operated on

the island nearly constantly from 1836 to 1972. Enmeshed within this historical layer, the site was a prison for thousands of Union soldiers for about three years.<sup>6</sup>

Public historians might best capture the power of place at Belle Island through contrasting historical and multisensory layers. It was a site of work from the early nineteenth century through 1972 and has since become a place of leisure. Equally discordant are the liberties enjoyed by those who flock to this lawless urban playground when compared to its years as a notorious prisoner of war camp. The sensory engagement with the environment that makes the island so unique today made it so distressful in 1863 and 1864. A careful listener today finds that sound of the rapids or traffic compete with the loudest animate human sounds. During the Civil War, the island's proximity to the city meant that prisoners could see the Confederate capital and hear the sounds of church and fire bells. Careful listeners heard the sounds of Tredegar Iron Works on the north side of the river or the sounds of the battles south and west of Richmond. These sounds had emotional meaning to prisoners as part of their story of imprisonment. The sounds, as well as the smells, tastes, and touches, of the island enhanced the sense of place and condition. Interpretive contrasts of Belle Island's layers through descriptive signage, an iPad application, or a smartphone could juxtapose sensory layers to deepen modern visitors' sense of place.

The senses are an opportunity for enriching the interpretation of history at historic sites, but they also have a weakness—they cannot be recreated with the intended historical effect. Yet the possibility of sensory preservation offers a way out by

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<sup>6</sup> "Belle Isle," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior (Submitted February 1995) [http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Cities/Richmond/127-0455\\_Belle\\_Isle\\_1995\\_Final\\_Nomination.pdf](http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/registers/Cities/Richmond/127-0455_Belle_Isle_1995_Final_Nomination.pdf).

appreciating that the past has layers of time as well as strata and dimensions of sensory experience. Using the senses to layer historic site interpretation has the benefit of implying historical method as well as telling an important story in more dynamic and engaging ways. As a result, a public history of the senses is not pseudohistorical delusion but fertile ground for a new generation of historic preservation and site interpretation.

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## APPENDIX A: PERMISSION TO REPRINT

Sections of chapter 5, “Alarm Bells and Homesick Peals: Listening to Civil War Prisons,” and chapter 6, “Nocturnal Sensations” originally appeared as a single article elsewhere and are reprinted here with permission from Oxford University Press.

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