

Part III: First Encounters: The Consequences at Home

“1861”

ARM'D year! Year of the struggle!
No dainty rhymes or sentimental
love verses for you, terrible
year!
Not you some pale poetling,
seated at a desk, lisping
cadenzas piano;
But as a strong man, erect,
clothed in blue clothes,
advancing, carrying a rifle on
your shoulder,
With well-gristled body and
sunburnt face and hands—with
a knife in the belt at your side,
As I heard you shouting loud—
your sonorous voice ringing
across the continent;
Your masculine voice, O year, as
rising amid the great cities,
Amid the men of Manhattan I
saw you, as one of the
workmen,
the dwellers in Manhattan;
Or with large steps crossing the
prairies out of Illinois and
Indiana,
Rapidly crossing the West with
springy gait, and descending
the Alleghenies;
Or down from the great lakes, or
in Pennsylvania, or on deck
along the Ohio river;
Or southward along the
Tennessee
or Cumberland rivers, or at
Chattanooga on the mountain
top.
Saw I your gait and saw I your
sinewy limbs, clothed in blue
bearing weapons, robust year,
Heard your determined voice,
launch' d forth again and
again;
Year that suddenly sang by the
mouths of the round-lipp'd
cannon,
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing,
sad, distracted year.

Walt Whitman

When the garrison at Fort Sumpter surrendered on April 13, 1861 it echoed throughout the country but the echo was punctuated by the silence of leaders North and South regarding; what happens next? The media propagated the alternatives facing the nation; will the North let the South seceded or will there be war? On April 16, Abraham Lincoln broke the silence and called for 75,000-men to serve, presumably to suppress a rebellion.

The crops were almost completely planted for the 1861 growing season and young men everywhere were listening to the prognostication of a short war and visualizing the accolades that accompany the valor and glory they anticipated. Their families, community, and many a fair lady would be proud.

On February 9th, Jefferson Davis was sworn in as the first president of the Confederate States of America. The structure and organization resembled that of the government they recently abandoned. Not only was immense effort underway to establish the elements necessary to govern, they were anticipating and calculating the types and number of military formations, the size of the industrial base, and quantities of materials necessary to defend their new nation.

Communities began to sew flags recognizing their boy's units and their soldier's personal clothing. Even the least technically appointed industrial sites began forging cannons, textile mills produced tents, cloth for uniforms, hats and other items. Wealthy citizens stepped up to fund regiments and procure foreign produced weapons.

In the midst of the preparation for war many set aside thoughts regarding the impact on the community when the men departed because there was no choice but to adjust. Almost everyone in the South lived in the midst of a slave society their entire lives and their new constitution validated that society. They understood that environment, but in the North workers' rights was a theme that accompanied immigrants arriving to work in the factories. Women's suffrage was debated. Even in the South refined ladies addressed the issue in letters and other forms as early as the 1830's. When the

men departed for war and women assumed responsibility previously performed by men, support for women's suffrage grew. The slave society of the South and the industrial society of the North impacted farmers too. War gave farmers a voice to promote better farming technics and also leverage to reduce their debt burden to the country's banking system. The war would fuel the popularity of these transgressions but solutions were years away.

A minstrel tune, "Dixie", punctuated the dull routine of training in the South and lifted the spirits at home. "Bonnie Blue Flag" was added to the list of Southern patriotic songs and standard American anthems like "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Hail Columbia," and "Yankee Doodle" were revered in the North. The music industry grew with the rise of middle-class families that could afford a piano and the home front needed a form of expression that would reflect triumph on the battlefield or the solemn death of a soldier, consequently a plethora of era music emerged.

Boys and men were off with their volunteer units to train and prepare to defend the South against an invader. The Western portion of Virginia quickly moved to split from the state. The tentative slave state of West Virginia became a battle ground with frequent skirmishes and the dead and wounded accumulating for each side. But it was mid-year when the true nature of the human cost of war was revealed -- First Manassas/Bull Run.

First the news of a Southern victory traveled by word of mouth and was quickly followed by newspapers around the country. Casualties were reported in the papers and posted where residents frequently assembled and the carnage was described in graphic detail leaving little doubt that the struggle was great and the reapers bill was high. As families learned of their loss the South's celebration for sovereignty and the North's zeal for unity challenged their new reality.

The South's success on the battlefield at Bull Run in Virginia and Wilson's Creek in Missouri accented the Southern spirit of defiance and hardened the resolve of the northern politicians and the public.

The Confederate postal service, with unique stamps, began to function and Confederate paper money was added to the alternatives of gold, silver, US dollars, and barter as commercial trading instruments. The identity and resolve of the Confederacy was established but the US Navy blockade began to interfere with international trade and the decision to withhold cotton from the world market to gain European recognition of the Confederacy began.

Northern military excursions in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Florida provided opportunities for slaves to escape and experience freedom working for the Federal Army. Their presence shaped Union war policies and set conditions that would impact Reconstruction.

1861 was a year of transition. The homes in both the North and South began to feel the change in social norms and over time recognize economic barriers and other unintended consequences of a "War Between the States".