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Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant, and Alternative Accounts of Lee's Surrender at Appomattox

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GEORGE R. GOETHALS

On the afternoon of April 9, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln waited anxiously for word from the battlefront. It was Palm Sunday, and there was no news of General Ulysses S. Grant's continuing skirmishes with Robert E. Lee's forces near Appomattox, Virginia. If Grant could finally capture Lee's army, the four-year Civil War would be very nearly over. But Lee had escaped destruction before, and the outcome was by no means certain. Just as the day was coming to an end, fretful officials at the war department received the following telegram:

Headquarters Appomattox C. H., Va.,
April 9th, 1865, 4:30 P.M.

Honorable E. M. Stanton
Secretary of War,
Washington

General Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia this afternoon on terms proposed by myself. The accompanying additional correspondence will show the terms fully.

U. S. Grant,
Lieut.-General

Needless to say, Lincoln was greatly relieved. Celebrations in the nation's capital began immediately.

Historians and biographers writing about Grant and the end of the Civil War have discussed two features of this telegram. One is its understatement: "the day's outcome produced a curious flatness in Grant. He sent the most expressionless of victory messages"; "there was a curious restraint in Grant's tepid victory message passed on to Washington"; "No brag, no bluster, no stirring words . . . just a simple statement succinctly summarizing the day's events." [1] The second is that Grant needed to be reminded to send it at all: "Porter asked Grant if he did not think the news of the surrender was worth divulging to the War Department. Grant confessed, without embarrassment, that he had forgotten all about it"; "He had not gone far before someone asked if he did not consider the news of Lee's surrender worth passing on to the War Department."; "It was left to someone else to remark that perhaps it would be a good idea to notify the authorities at Washington what had happened." [2] Grant himself, in Volume II of *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*, simply wrote, "After Lee's departure I telegraphed to Washington as follows: . . ." [3]

Not only have different authors characterized the writing of the telegram and the message itself in different ways, they have also varied greatly in what they have inferred about Grant's frame of mind on this occasion, exactly how he behaved when reminded to wire, and what his thoughts and actions reveal about his personal qualities. And, of course, other writers have not characterized or even quoted the telegram, or mentioned that Grant needed to be reminded to send it.

These different treatments of a small matter that took place on an immensely important day in U.S. history illustrate how our understanding of that history, and the principal actors in its unfolding, are influenced by the interpretation that different writers put on such matters. It is somewhat troubling that as we try to understand leaders and leadership we are confronted with the problem that our knowledge of central historical events is highly subject to the differing perspectives of various scholars. What can we know? How can we know it?

This chapter considers these questions by examining the implications of a particular variation on the general problem of differing historical perspectives. That is, how do we weigh autobiographical accounts of events by the actors themselves? Is there something distinctive about these accounts, or are they best thought of as just one more rendering of history, to be compared on an equal footing with treatments by other writers? We will approach these questions by considering one of the most famous autobiographies in American history, the aforementioned *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*. Its treatment of Lee's surrender at Appomattox is fascinating in its own right, but it also stands in interesting comparison to those of other biographers, of Lee as well as Grant, and of various Civil War historians.

In considering these accounts the overall aim of the chapter is to address two sets of questions. First, what can we learn about what Grant thought, felt, and did on that historic day, and what can we learn more generally about Grant as a leader and about leadership itself? Second, in our efforts to learn these things, what challenges are posed by the existence of so many different accounts of what took place at Appomattox? We will proceed as follows. First, Grant's *Memoirs* will be described briefly. Second, we will compare several aspects of his account of meeting Lee at Appomattox with other accounts. Third, we will do our best to address the questions above about Grant and about the problems of learning about Grant. Finally, we will discuss the implications of our efforts.

PERSONAL MEMOIRS OF U. S. GRANT

Ulysses S. Grant was born in 1822, graduated from West Point in 1843, and fought in the Mexican War in 1846 and 1847. After serving in the peacetime army until 1854, he rejoined his wife and four children and tried unsuccessfully to make a living in several independent business ventures. In 1860 he became a clerk in his father's store in Galena, Illinois, where he was supervised by his two younger brothers. The next year the Civil War broke out and Grant rejoined the army as a colonel. Three years later he was head of all Union military forces, and in another four years he was elected president of the United States, serving from 1869 to 1877. By the summer of 1884 Grant faced financial ruin and impending death from throat cancer. He was persuaded to write his memoirs to provide financial security for his family. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) arranged to publish the memoirs (and, in the same year, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*) with his own publishing firm. Grant wrote the two-volume, 275,000 word memoirs in less than a year, while enduring extreme pain during the final months of his illness. He died on July 23, 1885, a few days after finishing the final editing.

Since their publication *Personal Memoirs* have been regarded as a masterpiece of autobiographical military history. (They also secured his family's financial future, earning nearly $500,000 in royalties.) For example, twentieth-century biographer William McFeely notes that Grant's "force informed the work of other bold writers including Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson." McFeely also quotes from one of Gore Vidal's "brilliantly iconoclastic essays": "it simply is not possible to read Grant's memoirs without realizing that the author is a man of first-rate intelligence."[4] The writing is direct, clear, fast-moving narrative. It is modest but not humble. The author shows great respect for his opponents, especially Lee. The day after the surrender at Appomattox,

> I thought I would like to see General Lee again; so next morning I rode out beyond our lines toward his headquarters.... Lee soon mounted his horse, seeing who it was, and met me. We had there between the lines, sitting on horseback, a very pleasant conversation of over half an hour.... I then suggested to General Lee that there was not a man in the Confederacy whose influence with the soldiery and the whole people was as great as his, and that if he would now advise the surrender of all the armies I had no doubt that his advice would be followed with alacrity. But Lee said, he could not do that without consulting the President [Confederate president, Jefferson Davis] first. I knew there was no use to urge him to do anything against his ideas of what was right.[5]

The Surrender at Appomattox

Following victories in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi during the first three years of the war, most notably at Vicksburg in 1863, Grant became head of all Union armies. He came east, and starting in May 1864 engaged Robert E. Lee in a series of battles that ended in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, the next month. The siege lasted until the spring of 1865 when, on April 2, Lee abandoned Petersburg and the Confederate government abandoned the nearby capital at Richmond. Lee's army tried to escape to join forces with those of General Joseph Johnston. Grant's and Lee's armies raced west, battling along the way. On April 7 Grant started an exchange of messages with Lee suggesting that Lee surrender so as to avoid further bloodshed. After a final failed attempt to break away from surrounding Union forces at dawn on April 9, Lee agreed to meet Grant later that day to discuss terms of surrender. The meeting took place at the home of Wilmer McLean in the small town of Appomattox Court House.

For this chapter we have primarily considered treatments of the meeting at Appomattox by the following authors in volumes published in the years noted: Douglas Southall Freeman, 1935, in his classic four-volume biography, *R. E. Lee;* MacKinlay Kantor, 1950, in a book for juveniles, *Lee and Grant at Appomattox;* Bruce Catton, 1969, in his second volume on Grant's Civil War leadership, *Grant Takes Command;* Shelby Foote, 1974, in the third of his monumental three-volume *The Civil War: A Narrative;* William McFeely, 1981, in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Grant: A Biography;* Brooks Simpson, 2000, in *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822–1865,* the first of two expected volumes; Jean Edward Smith, 2001, in *Grant,* today widely considered the best single volume biography of Grant; and Charles Bowery, 2005, in his military and management-oriented book, *Lee & Grant: Profiles in Leadership from the Battlefields of Virginia.*[6] These treatments are compared with Grant's own account in his memoirs.

Relevant to such comparisons is a widely discussed paper in social psychology by Edward E. Jones and Richard E. Nisbett, "The actor and the

observer: divergent perceptions of causality."[7] Jones and Nisbett argue that actors tend to attribute their behavior to external causes—objects, people, and events in the environment. They see their behavior as appropriate responses to what surrounds them. Observers of another person's behavior tend to attribute that behavior to internal causes, that is, personal qualities of the actor. The divergent perspectives are illustrated, for example, when an individual laughing during a movie attributes his or her laughter to the quality of the film while an observer of the person's laughter attributes it to the individual's good sense of humor. Jones and Nisbett argue while particular attributions are influenced by many factors, there is a pervasive tendency for actors and observers to lean toward external versus internal explanations, respectively. They specifically contend that biographers generally attribute their subjects' behavior to personal qualities, while autobiographers attribute their behavior to situations or external contingencies. As we consider the treatments of Grant at Appomattox, we will keep this attributional divergence in mind. However, we must note that all recent treatments of Appomattox are influenced to some extent by Grant's *Personal Memoirs*. Thus in this case biographers sometimes adopt the external perspective of the autobiographer.

There are a number of specific incidents at Appomattox about which different authors have written. We will consider four: Grant's migraine headache; Grant getting lost when Lee tried finally to arrange the surrender meeting; Grant's mud-spattered appearance; and the dynamics of the meeting itself, especially Grant acceding to Lee's request to permit cavalry and artillery soldiers to keep their horses.

The Headache

Grant suffered a severe migraine on the night before and the day of the surrender meeting. He describes it in some detail.

> On the 8th I had followed the Army of the Potomac in the rear of Lee. I was suffering very severely with a sick headache, and stopped at a farmhouse on the road some distance in rear of the main body of the army. I spent the night in bathing my feet in hot water and mustard and putting mustard plasters on my wrist and the back part of my neck, hoping to be cured by morning.

A few sentences later he writes of the next day: "I proceeded at an early hour in the morning, still suffering with the headache, to get to the head of the column." Shortly thereafter, when he received a message from Lee finally agreeing to meet to discuss surrender, he writes: "When the officer reached me I was still suffering from the headache; but the instant I saw the contents of the note I was cured."[8]

Grant does not make any explicit attributions about the cause of his headache but implicitly attributes relief to Lee's decision to surrender. Even more implicit is the attribution that his headache was caused by uncertainty and tension about what Lee would do. Some other writers treat the matter as did Grant. Bruce Catton: "his headache left him altogether the moment he read Lee's last letter." [9] Charles Bowery: "When he received Lee's dispatch asking for a meeting to discuss the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia, the headache magically disappeared." [10] Brooks Simpson is more explicit about the tension and uncertainty linked to the headache: "If the promise of finishing the job in the morning pleased Grant, the notion that Lee would not surrender until compelled to do so suggested that finishing the job might be bloody work. Grant's head continued to ache." [11] Jean Edward Smith goes further. He suggests that more than the hoped for but still uncertain surrender was at work. In addition, Grant was characteristically troubled by such symptoms at such times: "Grant, who was sometimes beset by psychosomatic ailments leading up to major events, was suffering from a severe migraine." [12] Thus Smith places the headache into a more complete picture of Grant's psychological makeup.

Grant Gets Lost

Another aspect of the surrender day is treated in a more varied way by different writers. The meeting was actually delayed for several critical hours because Grant could not be found. Lee contributed greatly to the confusion. On the 8th Grant wrote to Lee, outlining the terms of surrender: "there is but one condition I would insist upon, namely: that the men and officers surrendered shall be disqualified for taking up arms ... until properly exchanged." [13] In response Lee wrote Grant proposing to meet the next morning, not to discuss surrendering his army, but rather an overall political settlement to the war. But then at dawn on that next morning, as noted above, Lee ordered a final attack on Union forces in an effort to escape. At about the same hour as Lee's attack, Grant responded to Lee's message with one saying that he could not discuss political terms—only the surrender of Lee's army. Several hours later Lee finally realized the hopelessness of his position and, in response to Grant's most recent note, wrote the headache-relieving message:

> I received your note of this morning on the picket-line whither I had come to meet you and ascertain definitely what terms were embraced in your proposal of yesterday with reference to the surrender of this army. I now request an interview in accordance with the offer contained in your letter of yesterday for that purpose.[14]

Unfortunately for Lee, Grant had taken Lee's previous message proposing to discuss a political settlement as a sign that Lee meant to keep fighting (which Lee did), and that he must do the same. Thus he pushed forward to get to the front. But then he had to take a detour. In *Personal Memoirs* he explained: "to go direct I would have to pass through Lee's army . . . I had therefore to move south in order to get upon a road coming up from another direction." [15] Thus Grant was for a time out of communication with some of his staff. Almost no one knew where he was. Grant's explanation for taking the detour makes an attribution to obvious external contingencies: he could not ride through Lee's army. But not all writers accept so simple an explanation.

For starters, we note that some writers do not mention that Grant was hard to find. MacKinlay Kantor does note the fact, without explaining it: "The trouble with the whole thing was that General Grant was hard to find. He was on a different road from the one where some of his subordinates thought him to be." [16] Shelby Foote mentions the problem and essentially repeats Grant's attribution: Grant "had to make a wide detour to avoid running into Confederate" forces.[17] However, Foote does mention a further consideration. Grant was annoyed that Lee's penultimate message suggested that he meant to fight on, and Grant did not think it important to wait around for further word. He needed to move forward, as best, and as fast, as he could.

The wild card in discussing these excruciating hours is William McFeely.

> One would expect that with hopes so high for an affirmative message from Lee, he would have alerted officers to his whereabouts at every imaginable point. Instead, finding one road blocked, he went off with Rawlins, Porter, and Babcock to look for another, without leaving word of his destination. Perhaps there was a curious want of confidence at a moment when none but Grant could imagine such a thing; perhaps he dreaded still another rebuff by Lee . . . he . . . put himself out of touch with his own generals—and with Lee.[18]

McFeely also notes that Grant had made himself hard to find on other occasions, though he does not attribute those events to lack of confidence. But the implication is that there is something about Grant that causes him to separate himself from others at critical moments.

McFeely's treatment is important in a number of respects. Published in 1981, it was the first major biography of Grant in several decades, and it stood alone as a major study for almost 20 years. Because it stood alone for so long, and because it won the Pulitzer Prize, McFeely's biography was the received wisdom until only recently. Furthermore, McFeely's overall perspective is more negative than most all of the subsequent treatments of Grant. Although he treats Grant's overall behavior at Appomattox quite favorably ("From the moment Lee's note arrived, Grant was in perfect command of himself, and

from then on every move of the day was a quiet triumph played out with consummate skill"),[19] his global impression of Grant is best revealed in his Introduction: He wrote that Grant is

> a curious choice for the subject of a biography if the writer is not an admirer of warfare and is not inordinately fascinated by political corruption. . . . No amount of revision is going to change the way men died at Cold Harbor, the fact that men in the Whiskey Ring stole money, and the broken hopes of black Americans in Clinton, Mississippi, in 1875. . . . I am convinced that Grant had no organic, artistic, or intellectual specialness. He did have limited but by no means inconsequential talents to apply to whatever truly engaged his attention. The only problem was that until he was nearly forty, no job he liked had come his way—and so he became general and president because he could find nothing better to do.[20]

As we turn below to the matter of Grant's appearance at the surrender meeting, we will see again that McFeely treats the Appomattox surrender differently from most other writers. And again, he ascribes Grant's behavior to somewhat negative personal qualities.

Grant's Appearance

It has become part of the Appomattox folklore that Lee looked resplendent and that Grant looked, basically, like a slob. One of his aides wrote "Grant, covered in mud in an old faded uniform, looked like a fly on a shoulder of beef." [21] Lee "wore a bright new uniform, with a sash and a jeweled sword, looking every part the patrician he was." [22] In his memoirs Grant mentions the matter twice.

> When I had left camp that morning I had not expected so soon the result that was then taking place, and consequently was in rough garb. I . . . wore a soldier's blouse for a coat, with the shoulder straps of my rank to indicate to the army who I was." Two paragraphs later he writes: "In my rough traveling suit, the uniform of a private with the straps of a lieutenant-general, I must have contrasted very strangely with a man so handsomely dressed, six feet high and of faultless form. But this was not a matter that I thought of until afterwards.[23]

Most authors make the same attribution that Grant does. His baggage train had been delayed two nights before and he was moving fast to keep up with Lee. For example, Smith writes: "He had left all of his baggage behind on that night ride to Sheridan and was still wearing the mud-splattered uniform in which he started out." [24] However, McFeely suggests that the matter is more complicated, and that Grant's appearance is intentional, not accidental, and, like getting lost, is attributable to Grant's want of confidence, rather than the exigencies of travel during combat. Furthermore, he characterizes Grant's

claim about not expecting to meet Lee so soon as a "disingenuous apology."[25] In making this case McFeely cites several passages in *Personal Memoirs* where Grant mentions having left his uniform and baggage behind on other occasions. The key to his argument is a quote where Grant mentions being teased by a young boy for wearing his West Point uniform shortly after he graduated from the military academy: "The conceit was knocked out of me . . . by circumstances . . . which gave me a distaste for military uniform that I never recovered from."[26] McFeely argues that Grant

> could have rearranged the Appomattox meeting if it were not going to be conducted exactly as he wanted it to be. He had wanted to be away from headquarters when called to talk to Lee; he had wanted to ride straight in from the field. His attire had been chosen as long ago as the day the little boy mocked the fancy-dress uniform of the West Point graduate; the worn clothing gave him the same sense of confidence that the elegant uniform gave Lee.[27]

McFeely is not the only writer who makes an internal attribution. Charles Bowery does as well, but he only suggests that Grant's dress was in keeping with his character:

> The patrician Lee looked every inch the general in his immaculate dress uniform and sword, but Grant looked, if anything, like a common soldier. . . . Instead of a sword, Grant carried field glasses. He was, as always, all business. The way the two men dressed reflected perfectly their contrasting styles.[28]

The Meeting

When Grant met Lee in the small parlor of Wilmer McLean's home in Appomattox, there were nearly a dozen aides present. Most were Grant's. Lee's sole attendant was Colonel Charles Marshall, grandnephew of Chief Justice John Marshall. Nearly all of those present wrote accounts of the meeting. There was little disagreement about what was said. And subsequent writings all agree as to the sensitivity, generosity, and wisdom of Grant's actions. In contrast, there is more variation in reports about what each man was thinking and feeling. And there are diverging attributions about why Grant acted as he did. While there is widespread consensus that this was Grant's finest hour, there is some disagreement about whether his actions that day reflected a deep and genuine magnanimity or whether he simply rose to the occasion at that moment. Somewhat overlooked in the many treatments of the meeting are Lee's actions and demeanor, and how both men effectively negotiated the details of the surrender.

After the final exchanges of notes established that Grant and Lee would meet, Charles Marshall selected the McLean house as the venue. Lee arrived at around 1:00 PM accompanied by both Marshall and Grant's aide, Orville

Babcock. The three waited silently for about a half hour until Grant rode up, and entered the room with several staff members. Grant wrote:

> We greeted each other, and after shaking hands took our seats. . . . What General Lee's feelings were I do not know. As he was a man of much dignity, with an impassable face, it was impossible to say whether he felt inwardly glad that the end had finally come, or felt sad over the result, and was too manly to show it. Whatever his feelings, they were entirely concealed from my observation; but my own feelings, which had been quite jubilant on the receipt of his letter, were sad and depressed. I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one [of] the worst for which a people ever fought, and one for which there was the least excuse.[29]

For a time Grant and Lee discussed old times, particularly meeting each other briefly during the Mexican War: "Our conversation grew so pleasant that I almost forgot the object of our meeting." Lee refocused the discussion and asked Grant for the terms he would propose for the surrender of his army. Grant replied that they were the same as stated in his written messages: "I said that I meant merely that his army should lay down their arms, not to take them up again during the continuance of the war." After falling off again into "matters foreign to the subject which had brought us together," Lee suggested "that the terms . . . ought to be written out. I called to General Parker . . . for writing materials, and commenced writing."[30]

Grant remarked "When I put my pen to paper I did not know the first word that I should make use of in writing the terms. I only knew what was in my mind, and I wished to express it clearly, so that there would be no mistaking it."[31]

There are two remarkable aspects of the terms that have been discussed differently by various writers. After Grant put in writing the stipulation that the men of Lee's army should lay down their arms and related equipment, he then concluded:

> This will not embrace the side-arms of the officers, nor their private horses or baggage. This done, each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes, not to be disturbed by United States authority so long as they observe their paroles and the laws in force where they may reside.
>
> *Very respectfully,*
> U. S. Grant
> *Lt.-Gen.*[32]

With these words Grant allowed the officers to keep equipment that would ordinarily have been surrendered. More extraordinary, especially given his refusal the day before to discuss any political issue, Grant essentially issued amnesty to all the men in Lee's army, including most importantly, Lee

himself. There certainly were many members of the federal Congress who thought that Lee, President Jefferson Davis, and other Confederate leaders should be tried for treason and hanged. What accounts for Grant's actions?

Before addressing these issues, one other fascinating and consequential aspect of the meeting must be described. Since it involves a great deal of nonverbal behavior, it is somewhat difficult to convey. Indeed it has been described in slightly but importantly different ways by different writers. In describing it here, we will use documented words from their exchange, but add our own sense of the emotions that accompanied them, based on the various accounts in the works we have been discussing. We will also treat their significance for ending the Civil War. Finally, we will take the liberty of trying to capture the sense of the moment as a scene from a play, with stage directions, starting where Grant finishes writing the words above.

- - - - - - - -

Grant rises from the small table at which he wrote the surrender terms, crosses the room, and places the order book in Lee's hands.

Grant *(gently):* Will you read this, General Lee, and see if it covers the matter fully?

Lee places the book on the table before him, takes out his glasses, and polishes them carefully, one lens at a time. He crosses his legs, puts on the glasses, and reads slowly without expression. Finally,

Lee *(somewhat more warmly than heretofore):* This will have a very happy effect on my army.

Grant: Unless you have some suggestions to make in regard to the form in which I have stated the terms, I will have a copy made in ink and sign it.

Lee *(hesitating):* There is one thing I would like to mention. The cavalrymen and artillerists own their own horses in our army. I would like to understand whether these men will be able to retain their horses.

Grant *(flatly, gazing squarely at Lee):* You will find that the terms as written do not allow this.

Lee *(slowly rereading the terms, regretfully):* No, I see the terms do not allow it. That is clear.

Grant *(pausing, musing aloud):* Well, the subject is quite new to me. Of course I did not know that any private soldiers owned their animals, but I think this will be the last battle of the war—I sincerely hope so—and I take it that most of the men in the ranks are small farmers, and it is doubtful whether they will be able to put in a crop to carry themselves and their families through the next winter without the aid of the horses they are now riding. I will arrange it this

way. I will not change the terms as now written, but I will instruct the officers I shall appoint to receive the paroles to let all the men who claim to own a horse or mule take the animals home with them to work their farms.

Lee *(relieved and appreciative):* This will have the best possible effect upon the men. It will be very gratifying, and will do much toward conciliating our people.

- - - - - - - -

Thus Lee, who had very little bargaining leverage to begin with, succeeded in making a good deal better.

Like the differences in appearance between Grant and Lee, their exchange about horses has become part of American folklore. In 1962 President John F. Kennedy made a witty reference to it. Kennedy had responded furiously and forcefully when the head of the United States Steel Corporation, Roger Blough, announced a large increase in steel prices. Kennedy felt this action violated a carefully negotiated labor contract his administration helped hammer out with the steel workers union. Under great pressure, Blough rescinded the increase. Kennedy wanted to maintain cordial relations with Blough and invited him for a meeting at the White House. When an aide asked how the meeting had gone, Kennedy remarked that he had let him keep his horses for the spring plowing.

As noted above, these exchanges have been both described and explained very differently by the authors considered in this chapter. There is consensus that Grant was sensitive and wise in being so generous. By acting as he did, he ensured that Lee moved toward reconciliation himself. Both commanders' examples of good will were followed quickly by most men in their respective armies and by many people outside those forces. But the reasons that Grant behaved so magnanimously have been treated very differently. These treatments reflect different authors' mind-sets about Grant and Lee, as well, it seems, as their "worldviews," or core beliefs, implicit or explicit, about causality and human nature.[33]

Grant himself merely describes the exchange with Lee. After writing "Lee remarked again that this would have a happy effect," he simply continues. "He [Lee] then sat down and wrote out the following letter:. . ."[34] Douglas Southall Freeman picks up at the moment after Lee says, "No, I see the terms do not allow it; that is clear":

> Grant read his opponent's wish, and, with the fine consideration that prevailed throughout the conversation—one of the noblest of his qualities, and one of the surest evidences of his greatness—he did not humiliate Lee by forcing him to make a direct plea for a modification of terms that were generous.[35]

Writing in 1935 from Richmond, Virginia, Freeman is, of course, extremely generous in all that he writes about his subject in his four-volume *R. E. Lee.*

More generally Freeman takes a benign view of the people he writes about, with notable exceptions such as Lee's subordinate general James Longstreet. Thus it is in keeping with Freeman's overall view of the world that Grant had greatness. It took a great man to defeat Lee, and then to treat him so generously. Charles Bowery, writing 70 years later, shares Freeman's sunny perspective on both Lee and Grant: "The exchange that then occurred reminded everyone present of the greatness of these two men. . . . Grant's magnanimity and Lee's concern for his men touched all of those present." [36] Both authors attribute Grant's behavior to fundamental, and highly admirable, personal dispositions.

Jean Edward Smith and Bruce Catton have a more complex explanation. Grant's behavior reflected not only his own personal qualities but also those of Abraham Lincoln. When Grant wrote that he "did not know the first word that I should make use of in writing the terms. I only knew what was in my mind," it seems clear that very much on his mind was the recent meeting he had with Lincoln at Grant's headquarters at City Point, just east of Petersburg. Lincoln conveyed his general thought that the terms of reunion should be as generous as possible to arrive at a stable, just peace at the earliest possible moment. His approach was "Let 'em up easy." These authors argue that Grant was following Lincoln's approach in departing from the "Unconditional Surrender" Grant of 1862 at Fort Donelson, the Grant that Lee feared might imprison him. Smith summarizes the "Lincoln plus Grant" attribution as follows: "Writing rapidly, he brought the war in Virginia to a close with less than 200 well-chosen words, reflecting the charity that Lincoln desired and his own innate generosity." [37]

Catton makes a similar assessment.

> Grant's powers today were limited: he was allowed to do no more than fix the terms on which Lee's army was to be surrendered. Yet in the final sentence of his letter [where Grant wrote that the men would be allowed to return home, "not to be disturbed by U.S. authority"] he reached far beyond this limitation, taking everything that Lincoln felt and everything that he himself felt about the necessity to make a peace that would include no reprisals.[38]

Shelby Foote's treatment is similar to the Smith/Catton Grant/Lincoln account but with a twist, adding a reason why Grant may have permitted soldiers to take their horses home: "Then Grant relented. Perhaps recalling his own years of hardscrabble farming near St. Louis before the war—or Lincoln's remark at City Point—. . . he relieved Lee of the humiliation of having to plead for the modification of terms already generous." [39]

There is a third explanation of Grant's generosity that focuses on an external cause, Lee's sword. This goes as follows: seeing Lee's sword, Grant suppressed a wish to take it, as Lee most likely expected he would. Having

suppressed that personal wish, Grant expanded a momentary generous impulse to include under it other officers. MacKinlay Cantor: "momentarily the general stopped writing. His glance was resting, not on the proud hurt face of his defeated enemy, but on the beautiful sword at Lee's side." [40] Brooks Simpson expands this description:

> he outlined in simple language the process by which the officers and men . . . would stack their arms and record their paroles. That done, he paused and pondered what to write next. For a moment he looked at Lee, his eyes coming to rest on that beautiful sword. There was no reason, he decided, to humiliate Lee by asking the Confederate general to hand over that ceremonial side arm as a trophy of war. Nor was there any need to deprive officers of their side arms, horses, or baggage.[41]

Both imply that Grant was spurred to generosity by seeing Lee's sword.

It is possible that the sword account was prompted by the way Grant discussed it in his memoirs.

> The much talked of surrendering of Lee's sword and my handing it back, this and much more that has been said about it, is the purest romance. The word sword or side arms was not mentioned by either of us until I wrote it in the terms. There was no premeditation, and it did not occur to me until the moment I wrote it down.[42]

Thus Grant mentions the sword but then says it had nothing to do with his generous terms. Perhaps in denying that the sword had any impact, Grant stirred the suspicion that it did.

Sometimes what authors do not say is as interesting as what they do. William McFeely discussed in some detail an essentially psychological explanation—Grant's lack of confidence—for two rather minor pieces of the Appomattox story, Grant's getting lost and Grant's appearance. However, after saying that Grant attained "perfect command of himself" after reading Lee's final note, McFeely is quite spare in his account of Grant's writing the terms of surrender and the subsequent exchange about letting the cavalrymen and artillerists keep their horses. When Grant is behaving "with consummate skill," little is made of it. But McFeely explores in more detail the awkward elements in Grant's behavior at Appomattox.

The Surrender

I have asserted that the final exchange between Lee and Grant concerning horses and side arms was consequential and set a model for both armies, as well as others in both the Union and the Confederacy. Lee himself remarked that Grant's generosity would "do much toward conciliating our people." The tone that was set on that occasion played out three days later during a

formal surrender that Grant had insisted upon. The Union officer in charge of the ceremony was future Medal of Honor winner, future president of Bowdoin College, and future governor of Maine, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. His Confederate counterpart was General John B. Gordon, future governor of Georgia, the man to whom Lee had assigned the final breakout attempt at dawn on April 9. As the proceedings began, Chamberlain was inspired by the sight of the Confederate columns moving toward him to surrender their arms. He suddenly gave the order for the Union soldiers on either side of the long lines moving past them to "carry arms," a sign of respect. Chamberlain wrote,

> At the sound of the machine-like snap of arms, General Gordon started . . . then wheeled his horse, facing me, touching him gently with the spur so that the animal slightly reared, and, as he wheeled, horse and rider made one motion, the horse's head swung down with a graceful bow, and General Gordon dropped his sword-point to his toe in salutation.

The sign of respect was returned. Chamberlain continued: "On our part not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word, nor whisper or vain-glorying, nor motion of man . . . but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead." [43] (Chamberlain's eloquence, of course, inspired the title for Bruce Catton's 1954 Pulitzer Prize winning *A Stillness at Appomattox*.) Thus the magnanimity of Grant's comportment radiated through the ranks of both armies and beyond.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have considered how Ulysses S. Grant wrote about the surrender at Appomattox in his own memoirs, and how a number of other writers have characterized and explained the same events. The other writers include three Grant biographers, McFeely, Simpson, and Smith; two civil war historians, Catton and Foote; a Lee biographer, Freeman; the author of a book for juveniles, Kantor; and a management specialist from the military, Bowery. The authors remark upon different details of the surrender day, describe them somewhat differently, and make in some cases quite divergent attributions for Grant's behavior. They quite clearly vary in their overall opinion of Grant, though they all believe that his actions in the crucial moments of his meeting with Lee were both generous and wise. The differences in their global understanding of Grant color their descriptions and attributions. Further, though this is our own much more subjective reading, their assumptions about human nature and causality in general also flavor their writing.

The points on which there is most divergence concern Grant's disappearance, his dress, and his magnanimity. Regarding Grant's being lost for several

hours, those who even mention it generally go along with Grant's own explanation, that he was simply reacting to the external circumstances. He could not ride through Lee's forces. Foote adds that he did not think waiting on Lee was in order since Lee had indicated an unwillingness to surrender. McFeely proposes a unique explanation: Grant absented himself on similar momentous occasions so as to regain confidence.

Regarding Grant's dress and appearance at McLean's house, most writers endorse Grant's own explanation that in the race of the two armies, his baggage had been lost. Once again McFeely differs. He explicitly dismisses Grant's explanation as "disingenuous" and again links Grant's behavior to a childhood humiliation and a compensatory attempt to gain confidence. Bowery also notes the impact of the childhood humiliation.

The events at the actual meeting between Grant and Lee on the day of the surrender are the most fully treated. All accounts characterize Grant's actions as both magnanimous and wise. Grant himself makes no attempts to explain them. He simply narrates Lee's behavior and his own. Others have put forth a range of explanations. The simplest (Freeman and Bowery) is that Grant's personal generosity and greatness were at work. The more complicated version (Catton and Smith) is that Grant's own magnanimity combined with Lincoln's wishes, themselves due at least in part to Lincoln's own magnanimity, paved the way for Grant's generous behavior. Other explanations include the notion that Grant's difficult early career contributed to his actions (Foote) and that Grant's suppressed wish for Lee's sword led him to be generous (Kantor and Simpson). McFeely, who speculated about the earlier elements in the story, does not at all characterize or explain Grant's behavior in the meeting. He does resume characterizing Grant's behavior, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, in describing the "flatness" in "the most expressionless of victory messages."

What does all of this mean? First, it is notable that there is support for the Jones and Nisbett theory of actor/observer divergences in attribution. Implicitly or explicitly Grant consistently explains his behavior as the natural and reasonable thing to have done in the particular situation. Some of the writers cited here endorse Grant's explanations, and others make attributions to various personal characteristics. Assuming that the descriptive and attributional divergences we see in this case are part and parcel of many historical accounts of people and events, we must be guarded about any sense of knowledge and understanding we have of leaders, and therefore leadership. But readers, like writers, form their own views, probably whether they want to or not. We know from the psychological literature that our conclusions about people are informed by what the culture teaches us, and those conclusions take hold automatically, without our awareness. We can at least be aware of the fact that there is quite literally a "received wisdom" that inhabits

our perceptions and evaluations, and that it is probably a good idea to consciously consider and think critically about what we have perhaps unconsciously come to believe.

Despite whatever efforts we might make to be open- and fair-minded, it is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, not to make our own attributions, to draw our own onclusions. As noted above, it is an automatic process. But we can at least do so with our eyes wide open—as much as possible—both to the biases transmitted from others and to the ones developed on our own.

With these caveats we hope it is appropriate to relate our own construction of Grant's behavior at Appomattox, the quality of his *Memoirs*, and his overall leadership. Certainly Grant's behavior at Appomattox was generous. There is no divergence among authors on this point. There are differences in explaining the causes of his generosity, but not the generosity itself. Our concern is that Grant's generosity is a behavior that psychologist Fritz Heider would say "engulfs the field." [44] It is so powerfully salient that neither other aspects of Grant's behavior nor nonobvious causes of his generosity get much attention.

It seems to us that Grant's generosity "engulfs" or overshadows a more basic quality of Grant's personality—his intelligence. Like Lincoln, Grant's goal was first to crush the rebellion, but then construct a peace that would get the South back on its feet and back to work as quickly as possible. This demanded extremely fine-tuned measures of firmness and flexibility. At the crucial moment when Lee asked whether artillerists and cavalrymen could keep their horses, Grant's immediate response was no. He quickly reversed field, not because he felt sorry for Lee or saw a ceremonial sword or because of strong impulses toward generosity. Rather, he was smart enough to realize that it was the best way to achieve the goal of a stable peace. Certainly Lee wanted such a peace as much as Grant, but both those above (Jefferson Davis) and below him (many Confederate officers) were pushing hard for a continuation of the war, most likely through endless guerilla fighting. Grant's wise concession made it easy for Lee: "I will arrange it this way . . ." Lee was induced to feel gratitude and relief, which forged in him a commitment "toward conciliating our people." Importantly, that commitment soon led Lee to accept the presidency of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia (now Washington and Lee University), providing for the South a vivid example of peaceful, constructive reengagement in normal life.

We also hope that the quotes from *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* have given the reader a sense of their direct, forceful modesty, and thus that of Grant himself. Grant was not generally regarded as much of a speaker or conversationalist. He is regarded as a clear, fluid writer. When he was commanding general, one of his subordinates, George Meade, commented, "There is one striking thing about Grant's orders: no matter how hurriedly he may

write them on the field, no one ever had the slightest doubt as to their meaning, or ever had to read them over a second time to understand them." [45] This same clarity appears in Grant's statement of the surrender terms to Lee: "each officer and man will be allowed to return to their homes, not to be disturbed by United States authority." Likewise, Grant's presidential rhetoric is notable for its directness and clarity.

What can be said about Grant's overall leadership, and what of that overall picture can be drawn from the preceding discussion? Of course, Grant led in two quite different domains, as commanding general and as U.S. President. In a 2006 volume in a "Great Generals Series," which includes books on Eisenhower, Patton, Stonewall Jackson, and MacArthur, series editor General Wesley Clark writes, "Grant was the general whose strategic brilliance, tactical acumen, and courage won the Civil War for the Union"; and "Above all, Grant had the unique combination of almost instinctive common sense in battle and strategic vision . . . to . . . which every program of military leadership development ultimately aims. . . ." [46] This appraisal has emerged as the consensus view of military historians since J. F. C. Fuller's 1929 *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* first made such an assessment.[47]

No such consensus exists about Grant's presidential leadership. In recent "greatness" ratings Grant has risen from one of the two or three worst presidents to some position above the bottom ten. One recent article (seriously) suggested he should be regarded as our greatest president.[48] Grant accomplished much of what he wanted in foreign and economic affairs but suffered serious defeats in efforts at reform, protecting Native Americans, and, most importantly, Reconstruction. But what is most remembered about his two administrations are various scandals. None involved him personally, but several involved people close to him.

Can the qualities that produced *Personal Memoirs* and Lee's surrender at Appomattox also be seen in Grant's overall military and political leadership? I think they can. Wesley Clark points to Grant's strategic vision and brilliance. Grant was highly intelligent and generally had well-grounded good judgment. Grant also had a coolness under pressure (in combat and in politics) that was remarkable, and that enabled him to use his intelligence and good judgment under the most trying and dangerous circumstances. Clark notes his "common sense in battle." One of his officers, amazed that Grant seemed to be unperturbed by shells exploding all around him, said "Ulysses don't scare worth a damn." [49] Grant also had a raw force and drive. It was by no means flamboyant, but his energy and capacity to do things forcefully and quickly are notable.

Writing in 1962, the critic and commentator Edmund Wilson argued that qualities of cool confidence and great energy marked *Personal Memoirs*.

> This capacity for inspiring confidence, this impression Grant gave of reserves of force comes through in the *Personal Memoirs* without pose or premeditation. Grant faltered a little in the later chapters . . . when his suffering blurs the text; but in general the writing of the *Memoirs* is perfect in concision and clearness, in its propriety and purity of language. Every word that Grant writes has its purpose, yet everything is understated. These literary qualities, so unobtrusive, are evidence of a natural fineness of character, mind and taste; and the *Memoirs* also convey the dynamic force and definiteness of his personality . . . the narrative seems to move with the increasing momentum that the soldier must have felt in the field.[50]

In addition to intelligence, common sense, and inspiring drive, in *Personal Memoirs* and in his meeting with Lee, Grant manifested an unusual trust in other people. If it were not for that, Lee and Grant might never have concluded the Appomattox surrender. They both had subordinates who mistrusted the other and opposed their meeting. However, Lee was reassured that Grant would be lenient by his "old war horse," General James "Pete" Longstreet, who had been a groomsman in Grant's wedding. Grant had no one to reassure him. On the contrary, on the morning of the surrender, Generals Meade and Sheridan strongly urged Grant to finish the destruction of Lee's army rather than negotiate a surrender. Bruce Catton writes "If any general ever had the killer instinct it was Phil Sheridan." [51] But Catton continued, "Grant wanted a victory that could be turned into a lasting peace, and Sheridan did not have the recipe for it." [52] In the event, the wisdom of Grant's decision to meet Lee would be tested by whether or not Lee used the ceasefire to try to escape. The memoirs state:

> I was conducted to where Sheridan was located with his troops drawn up in line of battle facing the Confederate army near by. They were very much excited, and expressed their view that this was all a ruse to enable the Confederates to get away. . . . and they would whip the rebels in five minutes if I would only let them go in. But I had no doubt about the good faith of Lee, and pretty soon was conducted to where he was. I found him at the house of Mr. McLean with Colonel Marshall . . . awaiting my arrival.[53]

Suffice it to say that Grant's faith in others served him well on April 9, 1865. It did not serve him well at several junctures prior to the Civil War, on many instances during his presidency, and, most poignantly perhaps, when he trusted others with his finances just prior to commencing *Personal Memoirs*.

In addition to Grant's highly trusting disposition, there is another more elusive and dissonant quality, related perhaps to his faith in others, that contributed to some of the disappointments of his life prior to the Civil War, his presidency, and his business endeavors toward the end of his life. As recent biographer Josiah Bunting notes, there is an occasional "torpor" that overtook Grant at times.[54] He could be surprisingly passive. This quality stands

in great contrast to the determination, drive, and force he manifested consistently during the war, inconsistently as president, and once again in finishing *Personal Memoirs* days before his death.

In sum, there is a consistency to the direct, grounded, intelligent, and generous prose in *Personal Memoirs.* Those qualities also governed Grant's actions at Appomattox. Others have painted and explained those actions in different ways. Like the actors described in Jones and Nisbett's theory of actor/observer divergences in attribution, Grant simply saw them as the right thing to do under the circumstances.

NOTES

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12. Smith, *Grant,* 401.
13. Grant, *Personal Memoirs,* 551.
14. Ibid., 554.

15. Ibid., 553.
16. Kantor, *Lee and Grant at Appomattox*, 83.
17. Foote, *The Civil War*, 938.
18. McFeely, *Grant*, 218.
19. Ibid., 218.
20. Ibid., xi.
21. Catton, *Grant Takes Command*, 464.
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24. Smith, *Grant*, 398.
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