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[Introduction to] The Thin Light of Freedom: The Civil War and Emancipation in the Heart of America

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Recommended Citation

Ayers, Edward L.. *The Thin Light of Freedom: The Civil War and Emancipation in the Heart of America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017.

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The
THIN LIGHT
of FREEDOM

THE CIVIL WAR AND
EMANCIPATION
IN THE HEART OF
AMERICA

EDWARD L. AYERS

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY

Independent Publishers Since 1923

New York | London

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W. W. Norton Special Sales at specialsales@wwnorton.com or 800-233-4830

Manufacturing by Quad Graphics, Fairfield

Book design by Chris Welch

Production manager: Anna Oler

ISBN 978-0-393-29263-3

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd.
15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

P R E F A C E

Our stories of the American Civil War and Reconstruction keep changing. The generation that fought the war celebrated its sacrifices and accomplishments. By the end of World War I, leading historians considered the Civil War a waste and a delusion. Scholars who lived through World War II argued that the war against slavery had been necessary, while those who experienced the Civil Rights movement judged that Reconstruction had left the nation unredeemed.

In our own time, we can see that the Civil War and its consequences, straightforward and familiar at a distance, prove intricate and surprising when considered at closer range. The immediate, complete, and uncompensated destruction of the most powerful system of slavery in the modern world, after all, seemed impossible just a few years before it came to pass. A massive political reconstruction of the United States, based on new constitutions and fundamental rights for formerly enslaved people, went far beyond what most white Americans had thought possible, or

desirable, in 1865. In recent decades scholars have found important complexities in every aspect of the conflict.

This book offers readers a close-up view of the Civil War and its aftermath that reveals those complexities, focusing on the desperate years of war from 1863 on in the Great Valley. That prosperous landscape, lying between the Blue Ridge and Appalachian mountain ranges and stretching across the boundary between the United States and the Confederacy, found itself at the center of the Civil War in these years. Without a single fixed target such as Richmond or Atlanta, the Valley was potentially one giant battlefield, with armies meeting anywhere, descending from any direction. Tens of thousands of soldiers surged through its farms and villages. Fields and towns burned while its sons and fathers died on distant battlefields. African Americans risked their lives to escape slavery, and black troops volunteered to defend the United States. Courthouses and town squares in the Valley surged with jubilant rallies and defiant speeches as Reconstruction redefined the fundamental laws of the nation.

The story told here follows a broad cast of characters from two Valley communities separated by only two hundred miles: Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Those characters include soldiers and civilians, men and women, enslaved people and freedpeople, politicians and ministers, teachers and Freedmen's Bureau agents, and Democrats and Republicans. This is history on a human scale.

The narrative draws on a digital archive called the Valley of the Shadow, which gathers and transcribes the historical record for Augusta and Franklin from the late 1850s to 1870. The archive holds the diaries and letters, newspapers and census returns, soldiers' records and Freedmen's Bureau reports, memoirs and photographs from which the story builds. The archive enables us to

see connections across time, across borders, and across the lives of many kinds of people. The history in this book attempts to recapture the perspectives of these people and to show events in forward motion, as they were lived, not reassembled as a path to the present. Some sections of the narrative appear in italics, stepping out of the story for a moment to suggest what it might tell us about larger issues of the nation's history.¹

The first book drawn from the Valley of the Shadow, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, traced events in Augusta and Franklin from John Brown's raid in 1859 to the eve of the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. That account showed how Americans descended into an all-consuming war that no one sought. *The Thin Light of Freedom* begins with the confident Confederate forces of Robert E. Lee invading Pennsylvania, carries the story through the years of escalating war, and continues into the Reconstruction that followed.²

Those are unusual beginning and ending points. Accounts of the Civil War often conclude at Appomattox with the laying down of arms, and leave the unfolding aftershocks and consequences of the war for other books. Accounts of the Reconstruction period, on the other hand, seldom dwell on the bloodshed, burning, and political struggles of the last two years of the Civil War even though those events drove and defined the terms of the Reconstruction that followed.

The geographic and chronological focus of the story helps us see that the remarkable advances of emancipation and Reconstruction were not the inevitable victories of a modern economy, the overwhelming might of the North, or the intrinsic justice of the national cause. In fact, the full consequences of the Civil War remained in doubt far into the conflict and through its prolonged aftermath. Even though abolitionists fought for black

freedom and citizenship for decades before the war, and though Republicans sought to stop the spread of slavery in the 1850s so that it would die of its own self-inflicted wounds, few people in 1860 dared imagine that slavery would be destroyed by 1865 and replaced with the rights of citizenship for formerly enslaved people by 1868.

Freedom had to be secured on every front after the war ended. Freedpeople searched for children and parents lost in slavery and war, affirmed marriages and established churches. Formerly enslaved people of all ages streamed into schools taught at first by devoted teachers from the North and then from among the freedpeople's own community. Isolated agents of the Freedmen's Bureau labored to establish economic and criminal justice. Eloquent black leaders emerged as soon as the political system opened to them. Republicans in the North worked to sustain freedom and opportunity by changing fundamental laws of the nation.

At every step, those who would advance freedom found themselves challenged and sometimes defeated. As this history shows, however, black freedom advanced faster and further than its champions had dreamed possible precisely because the opponents of freedom proved so powerful and aggressive. Without secession and the significant victories of the armies of the Confederacy, there would have been no full-scale emancipation in the 1860s. Without defiant former Confederates, an intransigent president of the United States, and Northern votes against African-American rights, there would have been no military reoccupation, Radical Reconstruction, and the most important amendments ever made to the United States Constitution. The enemies of emancipation and Reconstruction drove the revolution forward by their bitter

resistance, making the collective accomplishment of black freedom even more compelling for being won against such odds.

The opponents of black freedom remained strong after Reconstruction, retreating rather than surrendering after their defeats. The enemies of equality fought for decades to roll back the expansion of America's democracy, eventually undermining the voting and legal rights won in the late 1860s. Through violence and political manipulation, they hollowed out the democracy of their states and the nation. They won important cultural as well as political battles over the next century, as popular histories, novels, and films demonized the freedom that had been won at such great cost in the war and Reconstruction. Even during that long retrenchment, however, advocates of racial equality kept the thin light of freedom alive, determined that it would shine more brightly in a future they could not foresee.

Prologue

War had torn at the United States for two years, and yet the future of the nation and of slavery remained unsettled. By the summer of 1863 hundreds of thousands of men had died of wounds and disease in vast battles and obscure skirmishes, in lonely farmhouses and crowded hospital tents. The United States' armies and navies had conquered much of the territory claimed by the Confederacy. While slavery dissolved wherever those Federal forces established control, over three million enslaved people still labored beyond the reach of Union power.

Virginia, at the center of the fighting from the first battles of the war, remained the major stronghold of the rebellion. Even as Federal armies won crucial victories across the rest of the Confederacy, in Virginia Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson rebuffed the largest army ever assembled on the North American continent in 1862. Victories in 1863 over the Federal army at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville further elevated Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in the eyes of the Northern, Southern, and

foreign press. Now, in June 1863, Lee intended to dictate the next field of battle, win a great victory, force a dispirited United States to concede that it could not defeat the South, and declare the independence of the Confederate States of America.¹

With so much in the balance, people in both the North and the South pored over newspapers, following the armies' every movement. Anyone near those armies soon discovered, however, that the lines on the maps inscribed a false precision. Armies were not neat boxes and did not move along arcs defined by arrows and lines. Instead, armies rushed over landscapes like rank floods, leveling forests and devastating fields, stripping food and livestock, washing away in an hour the work of generations. Foreshadowed by wary scouting parties, flanked by fast-moving and restless cavalry, trailed by broken and desperate stragglers, watched by alert enslaved people and wary civilians, armies changed everything and everyone they touched.²



TRAVELING ON HORSEBACK, the tools of his craft in a wagon driven by an enslaved man named William, Jedediah Hotchkiss translated the gentle landscape around him into a landscape of war. Hotchkiss traced the dense networks of roads crossing ridges and woods. He noted the places where rivers ran shallow and slow and where the water became deep and dangerous. He observed where railroads passed over high bridges and through narrow passes. He gauged the distances between towns and villages, measuring possible routes of attack or retreat.

Hotchkiss was an unlikely Confederate. Born in upstate New York in 1828, in the 1850s he and his wife Sara had moved to Virginia to establish a school. Hotchkiss supported the Union for as



Jedediah Hotchkiss

long as Virginia remained in the Union, but when secession and then war came in 1861 he offered his services to the rebel troops camped in the mountains to the west of his home. Self-trained as a maker of maps, a close observer of nature and of people, Hotchkiss came to serve and believe in the Confederate cause.

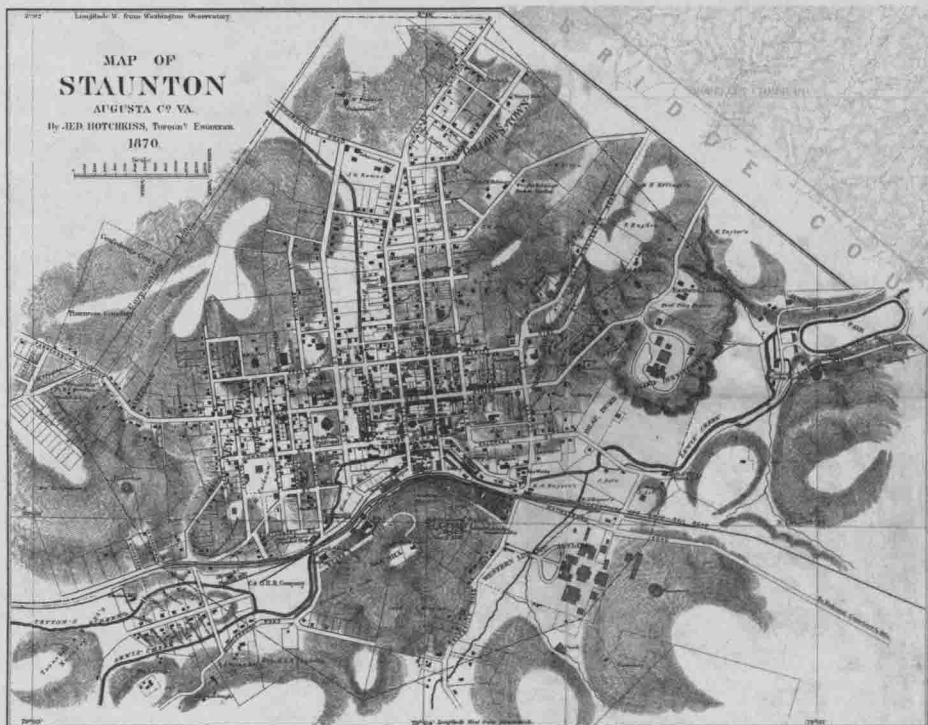
In 1862, General Stonewall Jackson protected the 200-mile-long valley in Virginia resting between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Allegheny Mountains, a critical strategic location and a major supplier of food to the Confederate army. Jackson ordered Hotchkiss to make a detailed map of that valley so the Rebel army could use the topography to its advantage. For weeks, Hotchkiss covered brown sheets of paper with pencil and pen, positioning the squares on a linen backing eight feet long so that the map could be carried in the field. The young mapmaker recorded the rising and falling of the complicated landscape, the twisting course from south to north of the Shenandoah River and its tributaries, the mountains towering to the east and the

west. Hotchkiss traced the route of the wide stone turnpike that stretched the length of the Valley.

Winchester, at the northern end of that turnpike, stood as the largest town in the lower Valley, where the Shenandoah River joined its tributaries with the Potomac. Winchester had been, and would remain, a battle-scarred place throughout the war, occupied in turn by the Union army and then the Confederates and then the Union again. The northern Valley of Virginia, bisected east-to-west by the Potomac River and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as well as the Valley Turnpike running north-to-south, stood at the crossroads of the eastern theater of the Civil War.

A hundred miles to the south, at the other end of the turnpike, stood Staunton. The pretty town of 4,000 people (pronounced "stan'tn") clustered on a range of hills, mountains hovering to the east and west. Staunton had served as the seat of Augusta County since the town's founding in 1747. The town boasted gas lights, civic and fraternal organizations, attractive hotels, and major state institutions such as an asylum for the mentally ill and an institute for the deaf, dumb, and blind. Jedediah and Sara Hotchkiss had chosen Augusta County as their home because its prosperity and refinements favored a school and raising a family.

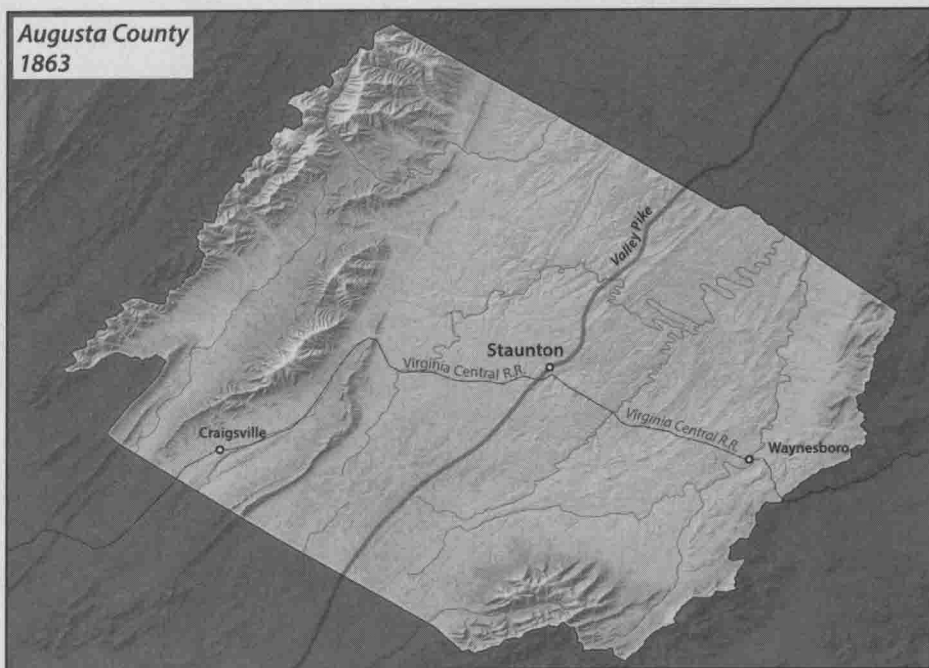
The Virginia Central Railroad ran east from Staunton through the mountains and the wealthy Piedmont and into the thriving industrial city of Richmond. The opening of the Blue Ridge tunnel in 1858, the longest railroad tunnel in the world, dug by Irish immigrants and enslaved laborers, sped the trains to the capital of Virginia and now the capital of the Confederacy. When the war began, builders had been extending the 195-mile-long railroad to the west, planning to connect it with the distant Ohio River. They ceased their work with the arrival of the war, but the rail-



Staunton, Virginia, 1870

road had been, and would remain, a focal point of war in Virginia, a target of destruction by the Federal troops and of defense by the Confederates.

Augusta County, benefitting from its rich and well-watered soil as well as its strategic location on the railroad and turnpike, enjoyed a diverse and prosperous economy in the 1850s. With twenty-five thousand inhabitants, Augusta was the largest and richest agricultural county in the state, woven together by a network of roads converging at Staunton, harvesting over a million bushels of corn, wheat, oats, rye, and buckwheat from the surrounding farms and plantations. The wheat grown in Augusta



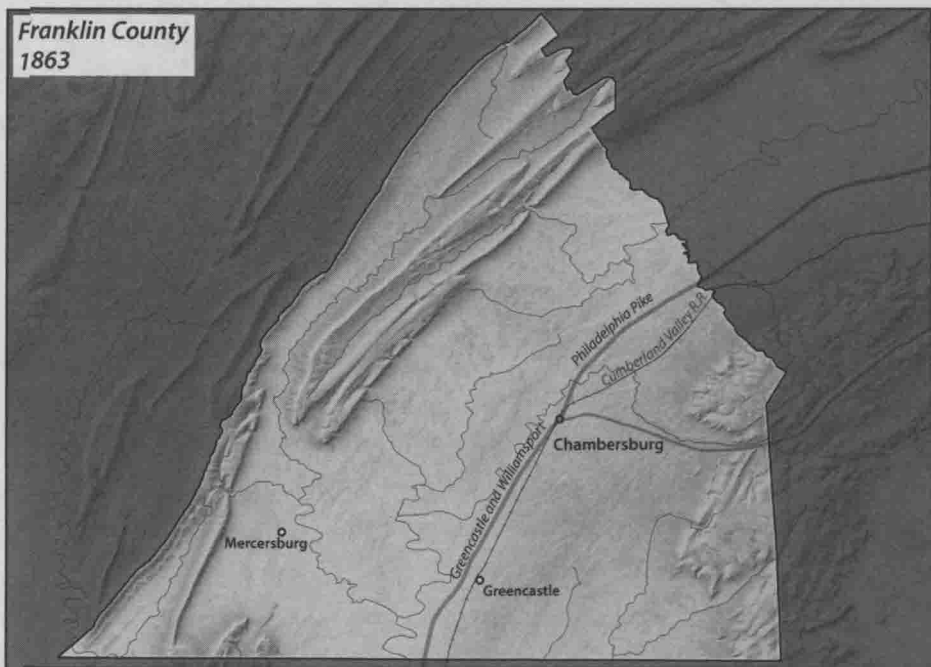
and milled in Richmond reached markets as far away as South America. In biblical profusion, the county's farms yielded nearly half a million pounds of butter and seventeen thousand pounds of honey.

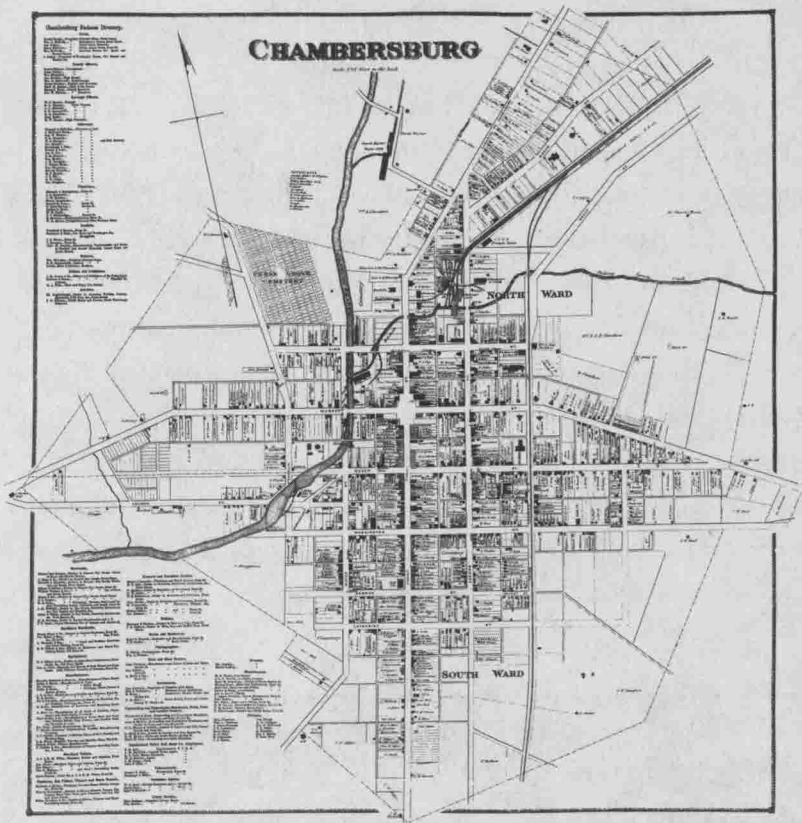
Jedediah Hotchkiss's map of the Valley stopped at Augusta's southern border. Had he extended it farther south it would have shown, seventy-five miles below Staunton and just on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge, the manufacturing center of Lynchburg. There, two railroads and a canal led to Richmond, providing a lifeline to the Confederate capital from the hinterland to the south that in the summer of 1863 had yet to be overtaken by the Union army. The rich and beautiful Valley of Virginia, from Winchester to Lynchburg, with Staunton in the center, shimmered as a precious prize to both the United States and the Confederacy.



ON THE UPPER BORDER of his 1862 map Jedediah Hotchkiss's careful lines trailed off into blankness. In the summer of 1863, however, the mapmaker hurriedly sketched, on a torn and irregular sheet of paper, the terrain on the northern side of the Potomac.

The Mason-Dixon Line defined the boundary between the United States and the Confederacy at the border of Pennsylvania. On the northern side of that line stood prosperous Franklin County and its tidy towns. Chambersburg, with its eight thousand people, served as the county seat for Franklin's forty thousand people. The town prided itself on its up-to-date character, orderly streets, bustling businesses, and growing trade. Dozens of stores and shops, banks, offices, and an imposing new courthouse sur-





Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, c. 1857

rounded Chambersburg's town square, the Diamond. The Cumberland Valley Railroad and a turnpike from Maryland passed through Chambersburg on their way north to the state capital in Harrisburg. A road to the east cut through a pass in mountains. At the end of that road, on the edge of his paper, without enough space to write out its name in a straight line, Jedediah Hotchkiss noted the small town of Gettysburg.³

Chambersburg produced two weekly newspapers: the *Franklin Repository*, the Republicans' paper, and the *Valley Spirit*, the

Democrats' paper. Tied to Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and the state capital by telegraph and railroads, those newspapers served as nodes on networks growing ever larger, faster, and denser. The Republicans and Democrats worked in every state in the North, in every county, town, and rural district. The party networks, like the networks of roads, rivers, and railways, had pulled the expansive United States together in the 1830s and 1840s and then had helped pull it apart in the 1850s. The newspapers carried opinion, passion, and error as well as accurate news of the world, circulating reports from the center to the periphery and back again. The newspapers both made and interpreted the history unfolding all around them.

The newspapers of America had conveyed shocking news since the 1850s. The struggle between the North and the South over the Fugitive Slave Law, which implicated all Northern communities in capturing and returning escaped enslaved people, and over the future of slavery in the western territories drove violence in Bleeding Kansas in 1854. In 1857, the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, denying that the federal government possessed the authority to stop the spread of slavery in the territories, had jolted white Northerners who had previously expressed little concern over slavery. The rise of the new Republican Party in the late 1850s, dedicated to stopping the spread of the slaveholders and their power, presented a new and frightening challenge to the slave states.

The election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 led seven Southern states to secede between November and February, before Lincoln took office in March. In the spring of 1861, Virginia struggled to stay in the Union but ultimately succumbed to the pull of other slave states and seceded when Lincoln called for troops to put down the rebellion in South Carolina. With the addition of Virginia—

the largest slave state—along with North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas, the Confederate States of America claimed territory the size of continental Europe and an enslaved population of nearly four million people. Since that spring of 1861 the armies of the United States and the Confederacy had descended into a war of a scale and duration few could comprehend. Virginia, previously perched on the northern edge of the South, suddenly became the very center of the Confederacy and the war.

The center of that war lay dangerously close to Franklin County, Pennsylvania. In May 1863 the Democrats' *Valley Spirit* painted a discouraging picture of the current state of affairs in the United States. The Republican administration of Abraham Lincoln, the Chambersburg paper lamented, held out "no encouragement, gives no basis upon which to build for the future, embraces nothing but hatred and vengeance, conquest and subjugation." The editor worried that some men "sick at heart and bereft of hope, disgusted at the angry criminations and recriminations which characterize the political discussions of this day, have resolved not to mingle with either political party." In the crisis of the Union, the paper warned, such aloofness was dangerous, for no man could afford to ignore politics. A man had to "believe some things in themselves to be right, and others to be wrong" and any man who would not declare which was which simply "lacks the moral courage to avow the right and denounce the wrong."

The conflict between the Democrats and the Republicans of the North shaped every choice the people of the nation made. The Democrats thought the issues were straightforward and simple: "The administration of Abraham Lincoln has not proven true to its pledges to the people." Fixated on slavery and the people held in slavery rather than on restoring the Union, Lincoln and

his party offered only an endless war and a “grand, consolidated government” in place of the old Union. The Democrats believed that “the old order of things can be restored”: the Union “as it was made by our fathers, with all the equal rights and liberties of the States and the citizens under the constitution.” That old Union included the right to slavery now and in the future.⁴

Republican papers would have nothing of such claims. One editor, from the small town of Waynesboro in southern Franklin County, reported a Union meeting in which the attendees pledged themselves “to an unconditional loyalty to the Government of the United States, to an unwavering support of its efforts to suppress the rebellion, and to spare no endeavor to maintain unimpaired the National unity, both in principle and territorial boundary.” They resolved “to bind together all loyal men, of all trades and professions, in a common union to maintain the power, glory, and integrity of the Nation.” The paper reported that some of the “copperheads,” as the Democrats were called after the venomous snake, hissed the speakers at the meeting, yelled cheers for the Confederacy, and broke the windows of the hall where the meeting was being held. “The man who asserts that nobody is disloyal in the loyal states must be one of two things, a fool or full-fledged traitor.”

Franklin County was the home of 1,800 African-Americans, some of whom had escaped over the Mason-Dixon Line into freedom in years past. Some white people in Franklin County sympathized with the slaveholders who lived just across the border and even captured escaped slaves for those slaveholders. On the other hand, white and black abolitionists in the county had long aided fugitives from slavery, steering them through the mountain passes to more secure freedom farther north. The abolitionist John Brown met with African-American leader Frederick Doug-

lass in Franklin County in 1859 as Brown planned his raid at Harpers Ferry. Abraham Lincoln won Franklin in 1860 with the same proportion of votes he had received in the North over all, about 56 percent.⁵

A brief report in a Franklin Republican paper told of local "Negro Recruits." An officer from the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment of the United States Colored Troops had visited Franklin County in April 1863 "and succeeded, in the short time he remained there, in enlisting twenty able-bodied Colored men for the United States service." Those recruits were on their way to join other black men from the county training in Boston. African-American soldiers had been authorized by President Lincoln in his Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 and now, only a few months later, dozens of black men from Franklin County were already serving in defense of the United States. The Republican paper made a point of capitalizing the word "Colored" in its report, offering a sign of respect few white people offered before the war.⁶

Jacob Christy, one of the earlier recruits from Franklin, saw the new men from the county arrive in camp in Boston. Christy wrote his sister Mary Jane back home in Mercersburg that he was "very glad to see them boys coming." Jacob and his fellow soldiers did not like Boston's climate, for even in May it was "very cold out here now we heft to wear our over coats all day." The African-American soldiers knew, though, that they would soon be heading into the Confederacy and "when we go down south it will be warm enough." The United States Colored Troops from Franklin would face Confederates who saw in the black soldiers what they most hated and feared in the Yankee nation.⁷

STAUNTON CONTINUED TO PUBLISH two weekly newspapers in the summer of 1863 despite the deprivations of war. The *Spectator* and the *Vindicator*, tied by the railroad and the telegraph to the Confederate capital in Richmond, told people in Augusta County about a war waged from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, from Kentucky to the Gulf of Mexico.

Three years earlier, the two newspapers of Staunton had been, like their northern counterparts, party papers. The *Spectator* had long stood as a bulwark of the Whigs, who celebrated the Union. That party and its paper believed in progress built on commerce, social improvement grounded in public-spirited citizens, moral improvement fostered by schools and churches, and Christian stewardship of the enslaved population. The *Spectator* had been one of the strongest voices in Virginia against secession, supporting delegates sent to Richmond in the winter of 1860 and 1861 to keep Virginia as part of the United States. When that effort had failed, the *Spectator* turned its devotion to the new Confederacy, shifting its loyalties overnight.

The *Vindicator* had been the paper of the Democrats. Like their compatriots in the North, the Southern Democrats believed in small government and untrammled slavery. They had supported secession, losing at the county level in Augusta but winning at the state level when Virginia finally left the United States in April 1861. Now, the editorials and letters of the *Vindicator* differed little from those of the *Spectator*, as both set aside their party loyalties. The leaders of the Confederacy argued that partisan struggle could only weaken the new nation and the citizens of the Confederacy would not perpetuate the party bickering of their past. Let the North consume itself and its energies with fights between the Democrats and the Republicans, they urged, and let unity bind together the Confederacy.



AUGUSTA AND FRANKLIN HAD SACRIFICED a great deal in the first two years of the war. Augusta had contributed 2,761 men to the Confederacy, Franklin 2,661 to the United States. Because Franklin's white population was almost twice as large as Augusta's, that meant that the Southern county had mobilized 75 percent of its men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five for the Confederacy and the Northern county had sent 40 percent to the Union army.

Augusta's men had already been involved in virtually every major battle in the eastern theater and had lost 619 men wounded and 106 men killed in action. Franklin's soldiers, fighting in fewer battles but caught in the bloody losses of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, had lost 143 wounded and 25 killed. Disease had taken more men from both sides than battle, with 149 from Augusta and 69 from Franklin having died over the preceding two years, with younger men more likely to die than older. Two hundred Augusta men had been captured by the enemy and 42 had been captured from Franklin's units.

Combined, Augusta County had already lost over a thousand men, about 40 percent of those who had left for the Confederate army. Franklin had lost 13 percent of the 2,500 men who had fought in the war from Tennessee to Virginia. The losses on both sides had devastated hundreds of families, leaving widows and orphans and grieving parents in every community in both counties. No one in the summer of 1863 could calculate how much more the people of Augusta and Franklin would have to give nor how or when the grinding war would end.



AUGUSTA COUNTY POSSESSED the same percentage of enslaved people as the Confederacy as a whole in 1860, about a quarter of its population. About a third of slave-owning families claimed only one enslaved person, but more than two dozen slaveholders held more than twenty people each, and a few even held forty. Slave prices had risen in the 1850s and remained high during the war, driven by the demand of the booming cotton plantations to the south and a slave trade that shipped people away from Augusta and their families every year. The average adult slave cost about 1,200 dollars in 1860, the equivalent to about 24,000 dollars today, so the 5,500 enslaved people of Augusta were worth over 6 million dollars to their owners, equal to 120 million dollars today.

These enslaved people benefited their owners not only as laborers but also as a flexible form of property, lent and borrowed, rented by the task or by the year, held as collateral or escrow. Some slaves sawed lumber or tanned hides and others milled wheat or distilled whisky. Others cooked and cared for children or catered to hotel guests.

Black and white people had lived alongside each other in Augusta for more than a century by the time war descended on the Valley. About a fourth of the African-American people in Augusta County revealed some white ancestry to the eyes of the census taker, their straight hair or light skin marking them as “mulatto.” About six hundred free black people made their homes in Augusta, often living with enslaved people and doing the same work.⁸

War strained slavery in Augusta. The Confederate government took, or “impressed,” enslaved men from the farms and plantations of Augusta and other counties to build fortifications around Richmond. The work was brutally hard, the conditions

for the workers dangerous and unhealthy even by the standards of slavery. Slave owners resented the loss of their strongest slaves and the risks to which they were put, but they protested in vain. The Confederate government announced in the spring of 1863 that “the Secretary of War has decided that no payment can be made” for “those whose slaves died while in the service of the Confederate States at labor on the fortifications.” The “existing laws” did not permit such payments, so slave owners “will have to await further legislation, of which, we are sorry to say, there is no prospect of the present session of Congress.” Defending slavery demanded the erosion of slave owners’ prerogatives.⁹

Willis Carter, a young enslaved boy, saw his father taken to labor on the Confederate fortification. As he recalled thirty years later, “impressment began upon the poor bondsmen in the South for the purpose of getting men to throw up breastworks.” As a result, “the poor slaves were seized in every section, dragged brutally to different places, and forced under the scourge to build fortifications.” Even more cruelly, the fortifications the slaves erected were intended to repel Federal armies “in whose hands was the proclamation of their emancipation” and to defeat “the men who sought to save the Union from a slavish disgrace that had already with its hideous crimes shocked the world from centre to circumference.”

Willis Carter’s father “fell a victim to this terrible command. He was impressed in Eighteen hundred and sixty three, was taken below Richmond Virginia to help fortify it where soon afterward, he had an attack of pneumonia which proved fatal.” Willis’s mother would raise him and his siblings on her own in Augusta County during the years of war and its aftermath. The Civil War, even as it held out the promise of freedom, took the lives of tens of thousands of enslaved men and women.¹⁰

The Staunton *Spectator* criticized as “a serious evil” the policy that seized “hundreds of our stoutest and most athletic negroes from farming operations, to work on the fortifications near Richmond.” Instead of impressing “our best farm hands,” why could not white “deserters, and other wrong-doers” be put to work on the fortifications? “Where too, are the idlers about Richmond, and the conscripts” in the camps where drafted men were being trained? “We think this system of employing negroes ought to be stopped.” Enslaved men were too valuable to use in defense of the Confederacy. Better to put useless white men to work.¹¹



RACHEL CORMANY, LIKE OTHER WOMEN on the Northern home front, lived far from the battlefields of the South and yet felt an intimate connection with the battles waged there. Rachel’s husband was a cavalryman in the United States Army, fighting in Virginia. She kept a diary recording the dread and hope, day by day and often hour by hour, that washed over her as news arrived from the front. “Got a letter from My Samuel. it is but short. He is still safe—but were under marching orders again,” she wrote in June 1863. “It has been over a week on the way—I almost feel like getting out of this to some place where the mail is uninterrupted, but then I fear, My Samuel might chance to come here & I would not see him so I shall stay.”

Rachel lived with her in-laws and a young daughter in Chambersburg. She grew frustrated with the lack of control she had over her own life. Fed up with relatives—“the meanest pile of dirt I have seen for some time”—Rachel resolved “to pack up & leave in the morning. I cant bear to think of being shut up without any news another week.” Rachel filled a trunk to head to Philadel-



Samuel Cormany



Rachel Cormany with Cora

phia, 160 miles to the east by train, the next day. Taking a morning walk with her young daughter, however, Rachel met Union soldiers who warned her that the Confederate army was invading Chambersburg from the south. At first, Rachel admitted, "I got so weak I could scarcely walk, but that was over in a few minutes & I could walk faster than before." She took her daughter back to the house to await, and then confront, whatever the war might bring.¹²



THE CIVIL WAR, EMANCIPATION, and Reconstruction began and ended as struggles over borders, both natural and man-made. War erupted when the Republicans declared that the western boundaries of the nation would no longer accommodate a voracious slavery and Confederates decided they would not be bound by such limitations. In the war that followed, the United States' military strategy focused on dividing and destroying the rebellion within the nation's borders. Armies and navies fought to control the boundaries of the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers, the shorelines of the Atlantic and the Gulf, the mountains of Appalachia, the plains of the West, and the railroads that fed the Confederate capital at Richmond.¹³

Boundaries between the battlefield and the home front eroded as both the North and the South mobilized vast numbers of men and demanded years of sacrifice. The national governments of both the United States and the Confederacy made demands on their citizens unimagined before the war, crossing lines of local and personal autonomy that Americans had taken for granted. Political parties within the United States fought unrelenting battles over the limits of the war, the purposes of sacrifice, and the meaning of loyalty. The boundaries that defined the roles of men and women shifted within both the Union and the Confederacy, war sometimes widening and sometimes diminishing the differences between males and females. Both sides breached the boundaries between guerrilla warfare

and formal warfare. Both celebrated vengeance against civilians and then worried about the cost and consequence of that vengeance.

The boundaries that defined humans as property stretched and then broke forever in these years. Enslaved people, in every way they could, pushed at the constraints that bound them. They slipped across the shifting lines between the Confederate army and the Union army. They joined with Federal troops as liberators whether those troops welcomed them or not. They sought freedom on narrow paths into mountains or on broad roads into occupied cities and contraband camps. The United States widened the war's purpose from the restoration of the Union to proclaim emancipation, enlist black men as soldiers, embrace black people as citizens, and reconstitute the government itself on a more democratic basis.

Time marked its own boundaries on the landscape of war, emancipation, and Reconstruction. Major battles became landmarks in time, points from which people repositioned themselves within history. An hour might forever alter the lives of soldiers and their families, of towns and counties. The ambitions, hatreds, and conflicts of war transgressed the boundaries between war and peace, reverberating deep into the postwar years. People revised the history through which they lived, rearranging and simplifying time so that stories flattered their purposes.

The Civil War constantly shifted borders and boundaries, on scales large and small. Everyone in Augusta and Franklin, whether black or white, male or female, soldier or civilian, had to negotiate those moving boundaries. They all knew that the men sweeping across the green landscape of Virginia and Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863 might redefine the shape of the future.