

Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations

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Few events in American history have received as much attention as the Civil War. Almost every battle and skirmish has been thoroughly examined and reexamined, and several scholarly and popular journals specialize in analyzing the conflict. Over eight hundred histories of Civil War regiments have been published, and more are under way. More than fifty thousand books and articles have been published on the Civil War. Indeed, much excellent work has been done on that conflict — especially on the military aspects of the war.¹

Despite this vast outpouring of literature, we do not know much about the effects of the Civil War on everyday life in the United States. Surprisingly little has been written about the personal experiences of ordinary soldiers or civilians during that struggle. The best studies of the lives of common soldiers are still the two volumes written over thirty years ago by Bell I. Wiley. Very little has been published on civilian life in the North or the South during the war years and almost nothing is available on the postwar life course of Civil War veterans.²

If scholars analyzing the Civil War have neglected the lives of common soldiers

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¹ One of the best critical bibliographies of the Civil War is still J. G. Randall and David H. Donald, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lexington, Mass., 1969), 703–834. For an excellent, detailed bibliography, see Eugene C. Murdock, *The Civil War in the North: A Selective Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1987). The best one-volume study of the Civil War is James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988).

² Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge, 1943); Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Baton Rouge, 1952). A less satisfactory volume intended for the popular market is Bell I. Wiley, *The Common Soldier of the Civil War* (New York, 1973). The major study of life in the North during the Civil War remains Emerson D. Fite, *Social and Industrial Conditions in the North during the Civil War* (New York, 1910). As this essay was going to press, four new books addressing

and civilians, social historians of the nineteenth century appear to have ignored the Civil War altogether.³ Almost none of the numerous community studies covering the years from 1850 to 1880 discuss, or even mention, the Civil War. The classic study of Newburyport, Massachusetts, by Stephan Thernstrom and the investigation of Poughkeepsie, New York, by Clyde Griffen and Sally Griffen, for example, do not analyze the effects of the Civil War on the lives of the individuals in those communities. Similarly, three recent overviews of demographic and family life in America mention the Civil War only in passing.⁴

Yet the Civil War probably affected the lives of most mid-nineteenth-century Americans either directly or indirectly. Unusually high proportions of white males enlisted in the Union and the Confederate forces, and many of them were wounded or killed. Large numbers of soldiers on both sides deserted; they carried a stigma the rest of their lives. The survivors not only faced the inevitable problems of re-entering civilian society; some undoubtedly continued to have vivid remembrances of the bloodiest war in the history of the United States. Memories of the war were shared by a large percentage of the entire population, as almost everyone had a loved one, close friend, or relative who fought in that conflict. Nevertheless, most social historians have paid little attention to the impact of the Civil War on the lives of nineteenth-century Americans.

As a first step toward an assessment of the Civil War's influence, this article explores its demographic impact. By looking at the number of Union and Confederate soldiers who died and comparing the results with mortality in other wars one can gauge the magnitude of the Civil War. Having established that a very high proportion

some of these issues have been published: Randall C. Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought during the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1988); Reid Mitchell, *Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Their Experiences* (New York, 1988); Philip Shaw Paludan, "A People's Contest": *The Union and Civil War, 1861-1865* (New York, 1988); and James I. Robertson, Jr., *Soldiers Blue and Gray* (Columbia, S.C., 1988).

³ Several factors have led social historians to neglect the Civil War. Scholars working on the nineteenth century generally study either the pre-Civil War or the post-Civil War period rather than analyzing the middle third of the nineteenth century as a whole. Most historians have neglected the social history aspects of all wars, instead focusing mainly on military strategy and battles. Finally, interest in nineteenth-century social structure led to studies based upon cross-sectional analyses of population just before and after the Civil War with little attention to demographic changes in between. For examples of the recent interest in the social history of wars, see Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill, 1984); Myron P. Gutmann, *War and Rural Life in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Princeton, 1980); and J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).

⁴ Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964); Clyde Griffen and Sally Griffen, *Natives and Newcomers: The Ordering of Opportunity in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Poughkeepsie* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). For an important exception, see Michael H. Frisch, *Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972). A few labor historians discuss the impact of the Civil War on the labor movement, but they do not consider its overall effect on the lives of individual workers. See Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); and Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84* (Urbana, 1978). The demographic overviews are Walter Nugent, *Structures of American Social History* (Bloomington, 1981); Robert V. Wells, *Revolutions in Americans' Lives: A Demographic Perspective on the History of Americans, Their Families, and Their Society* (Westport, 1982); and Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York, 1988).

of military-age white males fought and died in the Civil War, the article considers how the peculiarities of that conflict may have affected the participants' wartime experiences. Then, preliminary results from an in-depth study of Newburyport, Massachusetts, during the Civil War, are used to sketch the social and economic background of those who fought and died in that conflict. Finally, the article examines the impact of the Civil War on the survivors. Given the paucity of research on the influence of the Civil War on the postwar lives of ordinary Americans, I offer a preliminary demographic analysis of the federal pension program using aggregate statistics as one indication of the type of studies that might be done. These few brief examples do not adequately cover the wide range of topics that should be addressed in future studies, but they do illustrate, at least from a demographic perspective, why we must pay more attention to the social impact of the Civil War on the lives of nineteenth-century Americans.

Civil War Casualties among Union and Confederate Soldiers

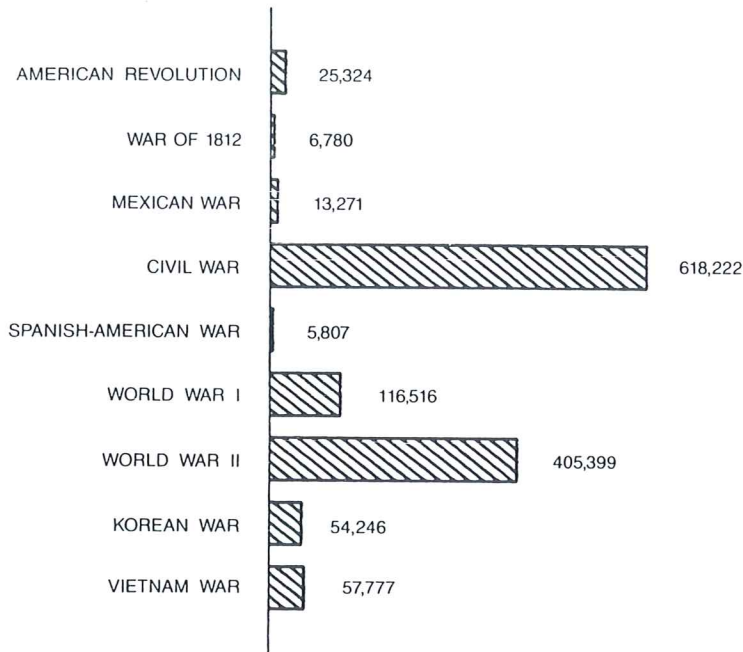
There are many ways of assessing the relative impact of wars on a population. One of the most obvious and simplest is to calculate the number of military casualties—a method particularly suitable in cases such as the American Civil War, where relatively few civilians were killed during wartime. Although it is difficult to obtain accurate information on even military deaths in the Civil War era, such data are more readily available and more reliable than estimates of civilian casualties or estimates of the economic costs of the war.

Was the Civil War an important event in our history from the perspective of the number of soldiers killed? The best estimate is that about 618,000 Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors died during the Civil War. (See figure 1.) The military deaths for the Civil War exceed by more than 50 percent the military deaths in World War II—the American war responsible for the second highest number of service-related deaths. Indeed, before the Vietnam conflict, the number of deaths in the Civil War almost equaled the total number killed in all our other wars combined.⁵

⁵ Information about military casualties is limited and often highly unreliable. For a useful summary, see Claudia D. Goldin, "War," in *Encyclopedia of American Economic History*, ed. Glenn Porter (3 vols., New York, 1980) III, 935–57. Goldin's estimates of casualties for the Mexican War, Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War were used. Her numbers for the other wars appeared too small and were replaced by data from other sources. For the American Revolution, see Howard Peckham, *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1974), 130. For the War of 1812 estimate, which includes a crude estimate of military deaths from nonbattle causes, see Wiley, *Common Soldier of the Civil War*, 118. For the Spanish-American War, see Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War* (Ann Arbor, 1974), 110. The figure for the Vietnam War is considerably higher than Goldin's estimate because it includes 10,449 Vietnam servicemen who died in accidents or from disease. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987* (Washington, 1986), table 549, 328. The reader should regard some of these estimates as intelligent approximations rather than definitive figures.

Robert Fogel and his associates are reanalyzing mortality in the nineteenth-century United States—including military deaths during the Civil War. For a preliminary analysis of their work on nutrition and mortality trends, see Robert W. Fogel, "Nutrition and the Decline in Mortality since 1700: Some Additional Preliminary Findings," in *Long Term Factors in American Economic Growth*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (Chicago, 1986). On antebellum mortality, see Maris A. Vinovskis, "Recent Trends in American Historical Demography: Some Methodological and Conceptual Considerations," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 4 (1978), 603–27; and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 25–39.

Figure 1
American Military Deaths in Wars, 1775–1973

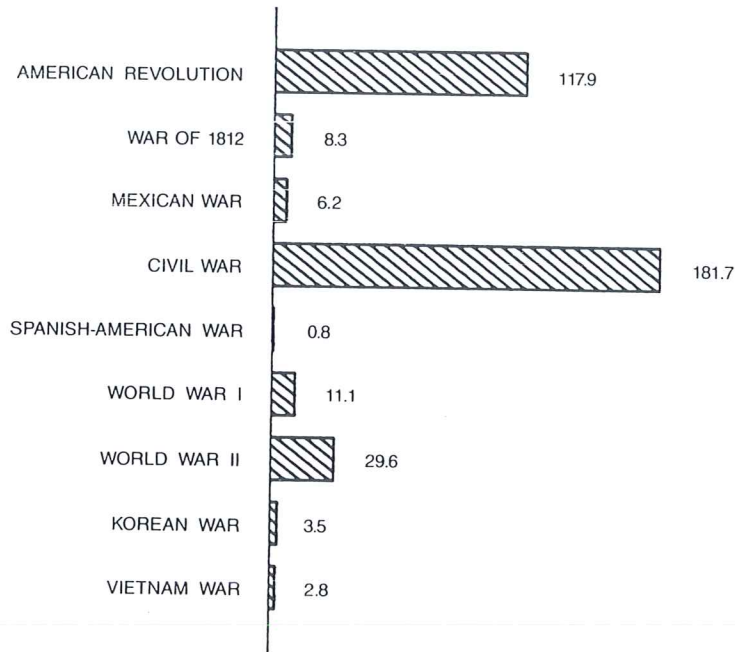


SOURCES: For the Mexican War, Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War, see Claudia D. Goldin, "War," in *Encyclopedia of American Economic History*, ed. Glenn Porter (3 vols., New York, 1980), III, 938–39. For the American Revolution, see Howard Peckham, *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1974), 130. For the War of 1812, see Bell I. Wiley, *The Common Soldier of the Civil War* (New York, 1973), 118. For the Spanish-American War, see Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War* (Ann Arbor, 1974), 110. For the Vietnam War, see U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987* (Washington, 1986), 328.

Another perspective on the extent of casualties in the Civil War can be achieved by computing the number of military deaths per 10,000 population. (See figure 2.) During the Civil War, 182 individuals per 10,000 population died; the comparable estimate for the next highest-ranked war, the American Revolution, is only 118. The United States suffered many military deaths during World War II, but the much larger population base at that time meant that the number of deaths per 10,000 population was 30—only about one-sixth of the Civil War ratio. The Vietnam War, which has caused such great emotional and political anguish in our times, inflicted only 3 military deaths per 10,000 population. Whether we consider the total number of military deaths or the ratio of deaths to the total population, the American Civil War is by far the bloodiest event in our history.

Since the two sections were very unequal in population and resources, a clearer picture of the impact of Civil War deaths emerges from comparing Union and Confederate losses. The North, with its much larger population, was able to field considerably larger armies than the South, and the North sustained greater military

Figure 2
American Military Deaths in Wars, 1775–1973
(per 10,000 Population)



SOURCES: On the Mexican War, Civil War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War, see Claudia D. Goldin, "War," in *Encyclopedia of American Economic History*, ed. Glenn Porter (3 vols., New York, 1980), III, 938–39. On the American Revolution, see Howard Peckham, *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1974), 130. On the War of 1812, see Bell I. Wiley, *The Common Soldier of the Civil War* (New York, 1973), 118. On the Vietnam War, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1987* (Washington, 1986), 328. Population estimates for all wars are from Goldin, "War," 938–39.

losses. It is estimated that about 360,000 men died in service to the Union; 258,000 died in service to the Confederacy.⁶

Though military losses in the North during the Civil War exceeded those in the South by nearly 40 percent, the relative impact of that struggle on the South was much greater because of its smaller population base. Looking at the North and South together, approximately 8 percent of the estimated population of white males aged 13 to 43 in 1860 (the individuals most likely to fight in the war) died in the Civil War. Considering the North and the South separately, about 6 percent of Northern white males aged 13 to 43 died in the Civil War, and about 18 percent

⁶ Goldin, "War," 938. Goldin's figure of 360,222 Union deaths includes both white and black soldiers. An estimated 36,000 black Union soldiers died in the Civil War. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867. Series II: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, 1982), 633n.

of their Southern counterparts died. Young white men in the South were almost three times as likely to die during the four war years as young men in the North.⁷

The heavy casualties experienced by military-age whites in the mid-nineteenth century are unparalleled in our history. Many young men died in the Civil War, leaving dependent widows and grieving parents and friends. Many who survived were wounded or disabled during the war and carried visible reminders of the conflict with them for the rest of their lives.⁸ Given the war's magnitude, most Americans who were adults in the second half of the nineteenth century probably either participated in the war or had close friends or relatives who fought in it.⁹

Characteristics of the Civil War

For many Americans the death of a close friend or relative was the central event of the Civil War. Yet reactions to the conflict were shaped not only by personal experiences but also by communities' responses to the war. Although there was considerable division within the North and South over the desirability of secession and the proper federal response to it, once the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter support for the war solidified in both sections. The early calls for volunteers were quickly answered. Most communities in both the North and South responded enthusiastically by pledging to help the dependents of those who left for the front and even raising money to purchase uniforms and weapons. Unlike the many who criticized American involvement in the Vietnam War from the start, few questioned the wisdom or necessity of supporting the war effort early in the Civil War.¹⁰

⁷ The estimate of white males aged 13 to 43 is based on data from the published federal census. Tennessee was divided on the basis of the secession vote in June 1861. The population of Virginia was subdivided into Virginia and West Virginia using county divisions from 1870. The Confederate and Union populations for Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia were apportioned using James M. McPherson's estimates of the division of military recruits from those areas. It was assumed that all individuals in the other Confederate and Union states and territories supported their own side. The result of these estimates is a crude approximation, but it provides an adequate basis for preliminary comparisons. U.S. Department of Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860: compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, 1964); James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire* (New York, 1982), 149–62.

⁸ The figures on the wounded are even less reliable than those on the dead. Goldin estimates 275,175 wounded in the North, but she does not even try to provide such data for the South. Goldin, "War," 938–39. It is difficult to evaluate the effect of wounds and war-related disabilities on the lives of veterans. William H. Glasson lists the causes of the 467,927 Union disabilities for which pensions had been granted by 1888, but it is impossible to ascertain their seriousness from the categories provided. William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, 1918), 138. Goldin and Lewis assume that wounded veterans lost one-half their potential earning ability, but they do not explain how they arrived at that estimate. Claudia D. Goldin and Frank D. Lewis, "The Economic Cost of the American Civil War: Estimates and Implications," *Journal of Economic History*, 35 (June 1975), 299–326.

⁹ Although the Civil War is the bloodiest experience in United States history, it is less extraordinary when viewed from a European perspective. The number of deaths per 10,000 population in the Civil War was slightly higher than the losses the British and Irish suffered in World War I, but only two-thirds the losses experienced by the Germans and one-half those of the French in the same war. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, 74. Civil War casualties can also be compared to those in other modern civil wars. Among the 106 civil wars between 1815 and 1980 that resulted in at least 1,000 military deaths per year, the American Civil War is tied with the Spanish civil war (1936–1939) for fourth place based on the total number of deaths and is ranked eighth in deaths per capita. Melvin Small and J. David Singer, *Resort to Arms: International and Civil Wars, 1816–1980* (Beverly Hills, 1982). See also Jack S. Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975* (Lexington, Ky., 1983).

¹⁰ On the initial responses to secession, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Seces-*

Everyone expected that the war would be very short, and therefore volunteers were enlisted only for a few months. Soon it became clear that neither the Union nor the Confederate forces could gain a decisive victory, and the news of heavy casualties at battles such as Antietam dampened the enthusiasm for volunteering. As a result, both sides had to resort to the draft to supply their armies with sufficient recruits. Draft riots in the North testified to the unpopularity of conscription. Although relatively few men were actually drafted, the threat of conscription induced states and communities to raise the requested troops by offering bounties. The setbacks on the military field and the increasing sacrifices demanded of the population led many, particularly in the North, to question the wisdom of continuing the war. Thus the initial enthusiasm for the war slackened as the casualties mounted and all hope for a quick victory vanished.¹¹

Despite the increasing difficulty of recruiting troops as the war continued, both sides raised large armies. Altogether, more than 3,000,000 men (including about 189,000 blacks who fought for the Union) served in the Civil War. Nearly 2,000,000 whites joined the Union forces and 900,000 the Confederate cause.¹² In the North and South combined, about 40 percent of whites of military age (aged 13 to 43 in 1860) served in the armed forces. Although the North fielded more than twice as many men as the South, a much smaller percentage of whites of military age participated from the North (35 percent) than from the South (61 percent).

As the previous section indicates, large numbers of soldiers and sailors were killed in the Civil War. Therefore the chances of someone enlisted in the war dying was high. More than one out of every five whites participating died. Again, the casualty rates were much higher in the South than in the North. Approximately one out of six white males in the Union forces died, whereas more than one out of four of their counterparts in the Confederate armies perished. In part the higher mortality rate among Southern troops reflects the fact that many Confederate soldiers were

sion Crisis, 1860-1861 (Baton Rouge, 1950); and David Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York, 1976). On the role of local communities in providing assistance for the war, see Frisch, *Town into City*; and Emily J. Harris, "Sons and Soldiers: Deerfield, Massachusetts, and the Civil War," *Civil War History*, 30 (June 1984), 157-71.

¹¹ On the draft in the North, see Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Westport, 1971). Only 6% of the Union enlistments "can be attributed to the direct effects of the draft," according to Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington, 1955), 108. For an interesting quantitative analysis, see Peter Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Journal of American History*, 67 (March 1981), 816-34. On the draft in the South, see Albert Burton Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy* (New York, 1924). For a case study of class divisions within the Confederacy, see Paul D. Escott and Jeffrey J. Crow, "The Social Order and Violent Disorder: An Analysis of North Carolina in the Revolution and the Civil War," *Journal of Southern History*, 52 (Aug. 1986), 373-402. For a thoughtful, well-balanced account of the Democratic Party in the North, see Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York, 1977).

¹² The estimates of white males in the Union and Confederate forces are from McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 181. Recently he has revised his estimate of Confederate soldiers and sailors to 900,000. See McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 30n. Even the latter figure may underestimate the total whites in the war by excluding some who served in state militia units—particularly in the South. James M. McPherson to Maris A. Vinovskis, June 24, 1987 (in Maris A. Vinovskis's possession). The traditional figure for blacks in the Union armies is 179,000. See Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, eds., *Freedom*, 633n1. As many as 10,000 blacks may have served in the Union navy. See McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 355.

forced to remain in the armed forces throughout the war while Northern soldiers were allowed to return home after completing their scheduled tours of duty.¹³

Death rates during the Civil War were much higher than those in twentieth-century wars partly because participants were more likely to die of disease. Disease caused more than half the deaths among Union soldiers. Furthermore, due to the relatively primitive nature of medical care in the Civil War era, a much higher percentage of those wounded eventually died than in subsequent wars.¹⁴

Many soldiers and sailors abandoned the war, deserting their units. It is estimated that 200,000 Union soldiers deserted (80,000 of whom were caught and returned) and that at least 104,000 Confederate soldiers deserted (21,000 of whom were caught and returned). War-weariness and concerns about their families induced nearly one out of ten Union soldiers and nearly one out of eight Confederate soldiers to desert. If we assume that soldiers who died had not previously deserted, approximately 12 percent of surviving Union soldiers and 16 percent of surviving Confederate soldiers deserted. The many veterans who had once deserted may have experienced considerable difficulty in readjusting to civilian life as the stigma of desertion haunted them.¹⁵

The nature of Civil War recruiting also influenced the experiences of those who volunteered or were drafted. Groups of soldiers were often recruited from one locale and were usually formed into companies consisting of individuals from the same geographic area. At the beginning of the war, they sometimes elected their own officers, choosing popular political leaders or prominent individuals within the community.¹⁶

The practice of creating units from the same locality had important implications for soldiers' life courses. Rather than being separated from their peers and getting a new start in the armed forces as American servicemen did in World War II and do today, most men served with friends and neighbors who were familiar with their

¹³ On the differences in experiences between Confederate and Union soldiers, see Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*. For an excellent review of the recent studies of Civil War soldiers, see Marvin R. Cain, "A 'Face of Battle' Needed: An Assessment of Motives and Men in Civil War Historiography," *Civil War History*, 28 (March 1982), 5–27. About 33,000 of the estimated 179,000 black soldiers died in the Civil War or approximately 18%. Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, eds., *Freedom*, 633n1.

¹⁴ William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861–1865* (Albany, 1889); Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861–1865* (Boston, 1901). The estimate of those who died from diseases is low since it does not include approximately 30,000 Union soldiers who died of diseases in Confederate prisons. McPherson to Vinovskis, June 24, 1987. Despite efforts by both the North and the South to reduce deaths from diseases, more men on both sides died from diseases than from battle wounds. On deaths from diseases on the Union side, see Paul E. Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861–1865* (Springfield, Ill., 1968).

¹⁵ For the estimates on desertion, see McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 468. Since approximately 40% of Union and 20% of Confederate deserters were caught and returned to their units, some of them undoubtedly died from diseases or were killed in battle. In addition, some soldiers may have deserted more than once. Therefore, the number of surviving Union and Confederate soldiers who deserted was lower than the estimates presented in the text. For a discussion of the contemporary attitudes and practices toward deserters, see Ella Lonn, *Desertion during the Civil War* (New York, 1928).

¹⁶ On Civil War recruiting, see Murdock, *One Million Men*, 276–83; and Moore, *Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy*, 1–10.

social backgrounds and prior experiences. Those who distinguished themselves in the Civil War were considered local heroes, and those who deserted might not dare to return to their former homes. Indeed, how soldiers dealt with each other in the army often had repercussions on how their spouses or relatives treated each other at home during the war. Furthermore, since there was great variation in the mortality experiences of units, some communities lost relatively few of their loved ones while others must have suffered staggering losses. Thus, the manner of recruiting and assembling soldiers reinforced their previous experiences and sometimes dramatically altered the life of a whole local community.¹⁷

Certain characteristics of the Civil War—high rates of participation, high rates of disability and death, widespread desertion, service in locally based units—may have affected soldiers and sailors. But what about their personal experiences in that conflict? How did military service affect them at the time and after the war? The few works published on the lives of ordinary soldiers suggest that individuals reacted to military life and the war in many different ways. Some relished the opportunity to participate in a great undertaking and welcomed the danger and excitement that accompanied battles. Many others quickly tired of long marches and short rations and dreaded the terror of facing death at the next encounter.¹⁸ How their wartime experiences shaped their subsequent lives is unknown since little research has been done on Civil War veterans.

While there are a few general studies of the soldiers in the Civil War, there is even less information about the lives of civilians. Most historians assume that few civilians were wounded or killed during the fighting. The great majority of battles occurred in the South, so most Northern communities escaped direct physical damage. One might speculate that the devastation of crops and farm animals in the South during the later stages of the Civil War created severe hardships that weakened civilians and made them more susceptible to diseases. Furthermore, soldiers who were exposed to new diseases such as malaria may have brought them back to their own communities after the war.¹⁹

The economic impact of the war on the North was quite different from that on the South. While Southerners experienced more scarcity of goods and more war-related destruction of property, many Northerners benefited from economic growth. Both sides, however, suffered from high rates of inflation that reduced the real incomes of workers and from new wartime taxes that drained their resources. Some

¹⁷ For example, Samuel Cormany's part in helping to demote an inefficient noncommissioned officer poisoned his wife's formerly close relationship to that man's spouse at home. See James C. Mohr and Richard E. Winslow III, eds., *The Cormany Diaries: A Northern Family in the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, 1982), 369. Fox, *Regimental Losses*, 1–10; Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 63–66, 70–139.

¹⁸ On the varied experiences of combat in the Civil War, see Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, 1987). On the differences between Union and Confederate soldiers based on a content analysis of diaries and letters, see Michael Barton, *Goodmen: The Character of Civil War Soldiers* (University Park, 1981). Numerous published letter collections and diaries of individual soldiers provide useful information about Civil War experiences. For an annotated introduction to such materials, see Murdock, *Civil War in the North*, 529–65.

¹⁹ Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 12–36. It is difficult to obtain figures on civilian casualties in the Civil War. McPherson has guessed that about 50,000 civilians in the South perished because of the war. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 619n53.

historians have argued that overall the Civil War stimulated economic growth and prosperity in the North, but more recent scholarship emphasizes the negative economic impact of the war on the North. For example, the rate of industrialization and the growth of per capita wealth slowed during the Civil War decade, marking a major departure from earlier decades.²⁰ In addition, the growth of population by immigration was severely curtailed. Claudia D. Goldin estimates that the Civil War reduced immigration by approximately 1.3 million people—nearly twice the number lost in the armed conflict itself. She speculates that the combined effect of the losses in immigration and military deaths was to reduce the population by 5.6 percent from what it would have been without the Civil War; however, that figure is probably too high because Goldin overestimates the decline in immigration.²¹

Newburyport and the Civil War

A sizable proportion of military-age white males fought in the Civil War, and many of them died, suffered wounds, or deserted. But did the Civil War affect everyone equally, or were there large differences in the experiences of participants from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds? If it was a “poor man’s” fight, for example, as many contemporaries complained, then the human costs of the war would have been disproportionately borne by those in lower-class occupations.

Since there are no detailed national statistics on the characteristics of those who fought and died in the Civil War, it is convenient to pursue those questions on the local level, where participants’ characteristics can be determined.²² Although no city is representative or typical of the North as a whole, Newburyport, Massachusetts, provides a useful setting for such an investigation. In 1860 Newburyport was a small maritime community of thirteen thousand individuals with an ethnically diverse

²⁰ Stephen J. DeCanio and Joel Mokyr, “Inflation and the Wage Lag during the American Civil War,” *Explorations in Economic History*, 14 (Oct. 1977), 311–36. On scarcity and poverty in the South, see Paul D. Escott, “Poverty and Governmental Aid for the Poor in Confederate North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 61 (Oct. 1984), 462–80. Goldin and Lewis, “Economic Cost of the American Civil War”; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 816. McPherson argues that the Civil War had a positive economic impact on the North, but his assessment is not so well grounded as the work done by economic historians. For example, he does not calculate what the per capita income of the North would have been if the Civil War had not occurred.

²¹ The source for Goldin’s estimate of immigrants is the work of Chester W. Wright. Wright, however, estimates a total decrease of some 1.3 million people (3.8%)—635,000 due to Civil War deaths and 500,000 due to reduced immigration—not a 1.3 million decrease in immigration. I am indebted to James M. McPherson for raising questions about Goldin’s estimate of the decrease in immigration. Goldin, “War,” 947–48; Chester W. Wright, “Economic Consequences of War: Costs of Production,” *Journal of Economic History*, 3 (Dec. 1943), 1–26, esp. 11; McPherson to Vinovskis, June 24, 1987. The Civil War did not have a more profound long-term demographic impact partly because increased immigration after the war replaced many of those killed. On nineteenth-century immigration to the United States, see U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, 1975), series C89–119, I, 105–6.

²² Few scholars have studied the characteristics of those who fought in the Civil War, but a few historians have analyzed the backgrounds of soldiers in small units. Earl J. Hess, “The 12th Missouri Infantry: A Socio-Military Profile of a Union Regiment,” *Missouri Historical Review*, 76 (Oct. 1981), 53–77; David F. Riggs, “Sailors of the U.S.S. *Cairo*: Anatomy of a Gunboat Crew,” *Civil War History*, 28 (Sept. 1982), 266–73. On soldiers from a small, western Massachusetts community, see Harris, “Sons and Soldiers.” The only comparison of those who enlisted with those who did not is W. J. Rorabaugh, “Who Fought for the North in the Civil War? Concord, Massachusetts, Enlistments,” *Journal of American History*, 73 (Dec. 1986), 695–701.

population (almost entirely white but about one-fifth foreign born). The construction of five steam-powered cotton mills had revitalized the city economically in the 1840s and early 1850s, but it suffered hard times after the panic of 1857. During the Civil War itself the city recovered as the demand for its goods and services increased.²³

One of the major reasons for selecting Newburyport is the availability of excellent military records describing the role of its citizens in the Civil War. Although the city, like most other communities, did not keep complete and detailed records on the townspeople who contributed to the war effort, George W. Creasey, a Civil War veteran himself, devoted nearly three and a half decades of his life to meticulously tracing and recording the Civil War experiences of Newburyport soldiers. He consulted military records in Boston and Washington, D.C., and interviewed many survivors of the war. Although some errors may exist in his work, his compilation provides a more complete and comprehensive record than could be assembled today by someone relying only on surviving written documents.²⁴

As part of a larger study of Newburyport during the Civil War, the data compiled by Creasey from military records were linked to demographic and socioeconomic information in the federal manuscript census of 1860. In addition, high school attendance records were linked to the two data sets. Although the results reported here are only a preliminary assessment of the impact of the Civil War on Newburyport residents, they provide a more detailed analysis of participation in the Union forces than heretofore available and suggest the information that can be gleaned from community studies.

Compared with Northerners in general, Newburyport residents were more likely to enroll in the army or navy. The 1,337 different servicemen credited to the city represent 45 percent of the total number of males aged 13 to 43 listed in the 1860 Newburyport census, whereas throughout the North an estimated 35 percent of men of that age-group enrolled.²⁵ To gather background information on the servicemen from Newburyport, a subset of all of the soldiers and sailors who could be

²³ An additional advantage of using Newburyport is the availability of useful monographs about it. See, for example, Benjamin W. Labaree, *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764–1815* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); Susan Grigg, *The Dependent Poor of Newburyport: Studies in Social History, 1800–1830* (Ann Arbor, 1984); and Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress*. E. Vale Smith, *History of Newburyport from the Earliest Settlement of the Country to the Present Time* (Newburyport, 1854); John J. Currier, *The History of Newburyport, Massachusetts, 1764–1905* (2 vols., Newburyport, 1906–1909).

²⁴ George W. Creasey, *The City of Newburyport in the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865* (Boston, 1903). Creasey found that many servicemen's records were inaccurate and had to be corrected from other sources. Indeed, the reliance on any single set of data can be problematic due to reporting errors; therefore studies drawing on several sources of information are more reliable. Creasey gathered information on everyone in the military whose enlistment was credited to the city of Newburyport or who was a resident of that community but enrolled in another area. In addition, he included the military activities of some former Newburyport citizens who had moved elsewhere before the Civil War. He found information on 1562 soldiers and sailors—225 of whom were credited to other communities.

²⁵ The percentage estimates for Newburyport and the North are based on the total number of servicemen divided by the number of white male residents aged 13 to 43. Since some of the servicemen were under age 13 or above age 43 in 1860, the estimates are slightly higher than the figures would be if we used only the enlistees aged 13 to 43 in 1860. Unfortunately, we do not have complete and comprehensive national information on the ages of enlistees in the Union army and navy.

identified in the 1860 federal census for that city was created. The number of soldiers and sailors from Newburyport who could be linked to the 1860 census, however, was only 728 — about 55 percent of individuals credited to the city throughout the war and 48 percent of those listed in Creasey's compilation. Although there may be some biases introduced by using the linked set of military and census data, overall this sample provides a fairly accurate picture of the characteristics of males from Newburyport who served in the war.²⁶

The ages of Newburyport males serving in the Civil War ranged from 11 to 63 years in 1860. Most were in their late teens or twenties. Only one boy aged 11 in 1860 enrolled later and very few aged 50 and above ever enrolled. This analysis focuses on those aged 12 to 49 in 1860 (that category includes 98 percent of all soldiers or sailors identified in the manuscript census). Information on the military experiences of Newburyport servicemen comes from Creasey. The census provides data on age, ethnicity, occupation, wealth, and enrollment in school. School records report high school attendance.

In the only other study of those who joined or did not join the Union forces, W. J. Rorabaugh used cross tabulation to analyze his Concord, Massachusetts, data. Using that technique, Rorabaugh calculated the percentage of males enlisting by some other variable, such as their property ownership or occupation. That approach does not allow the analyst to make reasonable inferences about the relative importance of each of the independent variables (for example, property ownership or occupation) in predicting whether or not someone enlisted — especially when tests of the strength of those relationships are not calculated.²⁷ This study improves on Rorabaugh's statistical analysis by employing multiple classification analysis (MCA), which permits assessment of the relationship between each independent variable and whether or not someone from Newburyport enlisted. Thus, it is possible to determine not only the relationship between enlisting and ethnicity, separate from

²⁶ There are several possible explanations for the difficulty in linking enlistees with Newburyport residents enumerated in the federal manuscript census of 1860. First, perhaps a few individuals could not be matched because of inadequate or incorrect information. More likely, some 1860 residents of Newburyport moved elsewhere during the war and some enlistees migrated to Newburyport after the census was taken. Given the high population turnover of antebellum cities, it is difficult to match residents in any community with individuals described in records generated two to five years later — particularly males in their twenties, who were especially mobile. Some soldiers and sailors credited to Newburyport may have lived elsewhere in 1860 but decided to enlist there because of the relatively generous municipal bounties that Newburyport offered to avoid resorting to the draft. In a comparable study of enlistments from Concord, Massachusetts, W. J. Rorabaugh matched 47.8% of those on the military list for that community with the manuscript census data for 1860. Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War?" 697.

It is not clear what biases may result from the failure to find many Newburyport soldiers and sailors in the federal manuscript census of 1860. I have used information from Creasey on the age, nativity, and rank at first muster of all soldiers and sailors in a multiple classification analysis (MCA) of individuals who were linked compared with those who were not. It reveals that those aged 19 and under in 1860 were more apt to be found in the 1860 census than men in their early twenties, individuals in the army (especially noncommissioned officers) were more apt to be found than those in the navy, and the native-born were more apt to be found in than the foreign-born. On most indicators of what happened to someone during the war (such as being wounded or killed), there was little difference between the matched and unmatched records. On the issue of desertion, however, there was a significant difference. Only 2% of those linked, but 13% of those not linked, deserted.

²⁷ Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War?"

the effects of the other variables, but also the relative ability of the different variables to predict the likelihood of an individual's enlisting.²⁸

Since many of the young teenagers who reached military age during the war had not yet entered the labor force or accumulated any personal property in 1860, the sample was separated into two groups. For individuals aged 12 to 17 the occupations and wealth of their parents were used as the indicator; for those aged 18 to 49 their own occupations and wealth were used. To minimize any distortions introduced by using different criteria for the two subgroups, separate multiple classification analyses were run on each group. The two groups were analyzed for the influence of six variables on the enlistment of Newburyport men: age, ethnicity, occupation, wealth, school attendance, and educational attainment.²⁹

As expected, age was the best predictor of whether or not someone enlisted in the armed forces. About one-half of those aged 16 to 17 in 1860 fought in the Civil War, as did nearly four-tenths of those aged 18 to 24. Only one-sixth of men in their thirties in 1860 joined the Union forces, and only one-twentieth of those in their forties.³⁰

There is considerable controversy over the participation rate of foreign-born men in the Union army. Many scholars claim that foreign-born soldiers predominated in Northern units, but more recent work suggests that foreign-born men were represented at a rate equal to, or less than, that of native-born men. In Newburyport the foreign-born were much less likely to enlist in the Union forces than the native-born. Aliens who had not taken out naturalization papers were not liable to the military draft, and many foreigners in the North were hostile to the entire war effort—especially those who perceived it as an unnecessary crusade to free slaves. Somewhat surprisingly, second-generation Americans were even more likely to serve than children of native parents. Perhaps second-generation youth, who were liable to the draft, wanted to display and prove their attachment to the United States despite any misgivings their parents may have had about the war. Alternatively or in addition, second-generation Americans may have been less able to avoid military service by hiring substitutes or paying the three-hundred-dollar commutation fees. Ethnicity was the second best predictor of participation in the Civil War.³¹

²⁸ Due to limitations of space, the MCA results reported in this essay will not be reproduced in detail. A more comprehensive analysis of the Newburyport soldiers in the Civil War will be published elsewhere later. Anyone interested in the specific tables referred to in this paper should consult the longer, preliminary version of this essay available from the author. For a clear and lucid introduction to the use of MCA, see Frank Andrew, N. J. Morgan, John A. Sonquist, and Laura Klem, *Multiple Classification Analysis* (Ann Arbor, 1973).

²⁹ The division of Newburyport males into two subgroups aged 12 to 17 and 18 to 49 is based on an analysis of the pattern of school attendance in the town on the eve of the Civil War. See Maris A. Vinovskis, "Patterns of High School Attendance in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1860," paper presented at the American Historical Association Meeting, New York City, Dec. 1985 (in Vinovskis's possession).

³⁰ Rorabaugh found a similar pattern in Concord: 35% of those aged 16 to 20 in 1860 enlisted, 22% of those aged 21 to 29, 13% of those aged 30 to 39, and 8% of those aged 40 to 49. Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War?" 696.

³¹ The most detailed study of foreigners in the Union forces emphasizes the disproportionately high rate of enlistment by the foreign-born. Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Union Army and Navy* (Baton Rouge, 1951). For recent questions about that interpretation, see McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire*, 358–59. Rorabaugh also found that the Irish were less likely to enlist than the native-born population. Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War?" 697. Unfortunately, he did not distinguish between the participation of second-generation Americans and

Many contemporaries portrayed the Civil War as a “poor man’s” fight since the well-to-do could afford to hire substitutes or pay commutation fees.³² Therefore, one might expect that in Newburyport unskilled workers or their children would have enlisted in disproportional numbers. Yet the results of the MCAs reveal that among those in the 12 to 17 age-group the sons of fathers employed at high white-collar or skilled jobs joined at much higher rates than the sons of unskilled workers. Among adults, the skilled workers were also more likely to enlist than the unskilled workers, but in that age-group the few individuals in high white-collar occupations were particularly adverse to serving and enrolled at a very low rate (although most of that differential disappears once we control for the effects of the other independent variables).

With regard to wealth, the expected pattern of greater wealth predicting lower enrollment is confirmed but with a surprising similarity in the two rates. The rate of enrollment for youths with parents having less than one hundred dollars total wealth was 29 percent, and the rate for those with the wealthiest parents was 24 percent. Adult males whose total wealth was one thousand dollars or more were less likely to enlist than those with less wealth. Therefore, although there were differences in the rates of enrollment by occupation and wealth, those differences are not large enough to justify describing the war as a “poor man’s” fight.³³

The effect of education on enlistment can be gauged by asking two questions: Did attendance at school deter enlistment? How did the level of education attained affect enlistment? Since most children in nineteenth-century Newburyport completed their education well before they were likely to enlist, few would have declined to join in order to complete their schooling.³⁴ Those who indicated in the census of 1860 that they were still enrolled in school (either common school, high school, or college) were less likely to enlist than those who had already entered the labor force—even after one controls for the effects of other factors such as the age of the child. Current enrollment in school was the weakest predictor of military participation.

A better indicator of the influence of education on enlistment was high school training. That measure of education was the third best predictor of enlistment. A

that of young men with native-born parents. Since very few men from either Newburyport or Massachusetts were drafted, it is unlikely that large numbers of second-generation Americans there who lacked funds to hire substitutes or pay commutation fees were drafted. The draft, however, may have induced such individuals to “volunteer” (and thus secure generous bounties) since otherwise they were likely to be drafted. Creasey, *City of Newburyport in the Civil War*, 124–25, 135–36.

³² Murdock, *One Million Men*, 178–217.

³³ Rorabaugh, looking only at the native-born population, found that the propertyless were much more likely to enlist than the propertied. Enlistees were also underrepresented among the mercantile and professional elite, but overrepresented among propertied small shopkeepers, clerks, and skilled workers in their twenties and skilled workers in their thirties. He speculates that “a combination of economic and social malaise” on the eve of the Civil War may explain the socioeconomic differentiation he found in enrollments. Rorabaugh, “Who Fought for the North in the Civil War?” 699. Although Rorabaugh’s suggestions are intriguing, they are limited by the small cell sizes in his analysis and his inability to adequately control for the effects of other potentially important variables. Nevertheless, his call for more attention to the socioeconomic differentials in enlistment as well as his attempt to relate them to larger developments in antebellum society are to be commended.

³⁴ Vinovskis, “Patterns of High School Attendance in Newburyport!”

great swell of patriotic fervor swept through the Newburyport high schools after the war began, yet former high school students were less likely to enroll than those who had not attended any high school. One out of every five former high school students enrolled, but almost one out of every three who never attended high school enrolled.³⁵

Thus far we have examined some factors that might predict which Newburyport residents would participate in the Civil War. We now turn to a consideration of the effects of that experience on the participants. Four important measures of the impact of military service are the likelihood of dying, being wounded, being discharged as disabled, or deserting. Many of the studies of the effects of twentieth-century wars on the life course of individuals focus on experiences such as marriage, education, or job mobility without adequate attention to those more direct outcomes of participation in a war.

Of the Newburyport servicemen identified in the manuscript census and aged 12 to 49 in 1860, 13 percent died of wounds or disease during the Civil War. That percentage is somewhat lower than the aggregate estimate that 17 percent of all white Union soldiers and sailors died in the Civil War. To a large degree the lower mortality rate for Newburyport reflects the high proportion of Newburyport men who served in the navy, since the navy suffered fewer losses than the army.

Approximately 16 percent of Newburyport soldiers and sailors were wounded but survived. Altogether, 29 percent of the town's servicemen were either wounded or killed during the Civil War. Only 2 percent of those in the military who could be identified in the federal manuscript census deserted, but as indicated earlier, a much higher proportion of those who could not be identified deserted. Adding the small number who deserted, 31 percent of all Newburyport soldiers in the sample either died, were wounded, or deserted. Thus one out of every eight servicemen from Newburyport who fought for the Union died, and one out of every five who survived the war was either wounded or had deserted.

Many Newburyport soldiers and sailors, including some of the wounded, were discharged from the armed forces as disabled. Almost one out of every five servicemen was discharged due to a disability.³⁶ Altogether at least 42 percent of those who fought in the Civil War from Newburyport were killed, wounded, deserted, or discharged as disabled. Thus, the immediate adverse effects of the war on many participants' life courses are evident.

Newburyport soldiers' and sailors' chances of being killed or wounded during the

³⁵ We have no measure of the years of schooling received by adult males. However, the federal manuscript census of 1860 did indicate the literacy of adults. Many nineteenth-century commentators and twentieth-century historians assumed that illiterates were disproportionately likely to serve in the Union forces. The results of the MCA on males ages 20–49 in 1860 present a different picture. In Newburyport 19% of literate men enlisted, but 6% of the illiterate did. Even after the effects of age, ethnicity, occupation, and wealth are controlled for, illiterates were still less likely to enlist—although the differential between the two groups was considerably narrowed. Overall, an adult male's literacy was the weakest predictor of his participating in the Civil War.

³⁶ Since Creasey did not always indicate whether or not someone discharged for wounds was disabled, the actual percentage of discharged servicemen who were disabled was probably higher than the 20% figure.

Civil War varied, depending on their ages and socioeconomic statuses.³⁷ As before, the sample was subdivided into those aged 12 to 17 in 1860 and those aged 18 to 49 in 1860 so that young teenagers without occupation or personal wealth could be assigned to appropriate social and economic categories. Each group was analyzed to determine the extent to which age, ethnicity, occupation, wealth, and service experiences can predict casualty outcomes, but space limits us to only a brief discussion of the results.

Servicemen aged 12 to 14 in 1860 were less likely to be killed or wounded than those aged 15 to 17. The obvious explanation for the differential is that many of them became old enough to join only late in the war and therefore served shorter times. Among soldiers and sailors aged 18 to 49 in 1860, the youngest and the oldest were the most likely to be killed or wounded.³⁸ Although age is the strongest predictor of enlistment in the Civil War, it is the weakest predictor of whether or not a serviceman died or was wounded.

Foreign-born and second-generation soldiers and sailors were more likely to die or to be wounded than servicemen with native parents. Perhaps foreign-born soldiers were more susceptible to diseases since they tended to be less affluent than their native-born comrades. Although foreign-born youths and adults were the least likely to enlist in the Union forces, they were much more likely to be casualties than native-born troops of either age-group.

Servicemen from disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to be killed or wounded during the Civil War than servicemen with higher-ranking jobs or greater wealth. The generally inverse relationship between socioeconomic status and the probability of dying or being wounded, even when the effects of the other independent variables are controlled for, raises intriguing questions. Was the health of Newburyport's lower-status citizens generally poorer at enlistment, leaving them more susceptible to diseases? Or were they assigned to units that were given particularly dangerous missions?

The last factor to be considered is the particular branch of service that a Newburyport enlistee joined. This variable was subdivided into three categories—the experience of army privates, of army officers, and of those who enlisted in the navy. Among the younger enlistees, army officers were more likely to be killed or wounded than army privates or those who joined the navy. Among servicemen aged 18 to 49 in 1860, however, army officers were less likely to be wounded or to die than army privates or those in the navy. Overall, this variable was the best predictor of whether or not a serviceman was killed or wounded in the Civil War.

Our examination of Newburyport servicemen indicates widespread participation in the war effort among males aged 13 to 49 in 1860. Although there were some

³⁷ Separate MCAs were run on whether or not someone was killed, was wounded, or deserted and whether or not someone was killed, was wounded, was disabled, or deserted. The results of the latter two analyses were generally similar to the one based on whether or not a serviceman was killed or wounded (although the percentage of servicemen affected was higher).

³⁸ Future investigations will calculate the likelihood of being killed or wounded, taking into consideration the total months enrolled in the armed forces.

occupational and wealth differences in the rates of enlistment, Union soldiers and sailors were not disproportionately recruited from the lower socioeconomic groups in Newburyport. Second-generation Americans were the most likely to enlist, and the foreign-born were the least likely. Despite the strong support for the war in the secondary schools, those Newburyport youths who received more education were less likely to enlist—even though most of them had already completed their education. However, among adult males Newburyport illiterates were underrepresented in the Union forces.

If the likelihood of a Newburyport resident's participating in the Civil War differed only moderately depending on his occupation, wealth, or level of education, the likelihood of his being killed or wounded differed considerably depending on those variables. Servicemen from the lower socioeconomic segments of Newburyport society were much more likely to be killed or wounded than those from the more privileged segments. In addition, the foreign-born servicemen experienced particularly high rates of casualties even though they had been less willing to enlist initially. The relative casualty rates among privates and officers in the army were mixed for the two age-groups, but in both groups those in the navy were much less likely to be killed or wounded.

Civil War Pensions and Union Veterans

Almost nothing has been written about the postwar experiences of Civil War veterans. Although considerable work is available on the aggregate economic impact of the Civil War, social historians have ignored the impact of that conflict on the large number of veterans who survived. Undoubtedly, wounds and war memories affected many Union and Confederate soldiers decades after the war and helped determine their employment opportunities. Well after the war itself had ended, the Civil War experience continued to shape the outlook of some, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.³⁹

But the influence of the Civil War went beyond the devastation caused by the loss of lives and property or by the memories imprinted on the minds of the survivors. The pension programs created for Union soldiers had a profound and long-

³⁹ On the economic impact of the Civil War, see Ralph Andreano, ed., *The Economic Impact of the American Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Stanley L. Engerman, "The Economic Impact of the Civil War," in *The Reinterpretation of American Economic History*, ed. Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman (New York, 1971), 369–79; Goldin, "War"; Goldin and Lewis, "Economic Cost of the American Civil War"; and Patrick O'Brien, *The Economic Effects of the American Civil War* (Atlantic Highlands, 1988). We have no general studies of how being a Civil War veteran affected a man's employment after the war. But see Daniel E. Sutherland, "Former Confederates in the Post-Civil War North: An Unexplored Aspect of Reconstruction History," *Journal of Southern History*, 48 (Aug. 1981), 393–410. For an analysis of 1250 Tennessee Confederates based on questionnaires administered between 1915 and 1923, see Fred A. Bailey, *Class and Tennessee's Confederate Generation* (Chapel Hill, 1987). For an intriguing interpretation and an introduction to the literature on the postwar effects of the Civil War on Southerners, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York, 1987). On the lifelong impact of Civil War experiences, see Hiller B. Zobel, "Enlisted for Life," *American Heritage*, 37 (June/July 1986), 56–64; and George M. Fredrickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York, 1965). Unfortunately, nothing comparable to Fredrickson's work on intellectuals has been done on the postwar experiences of common soldiers.

lasting impact on the lives of veterans. On July 14, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law an act that became the basis for all subsequent federal pension legislation until 1890. It provided for monthly payments to men totally disabled and to the widows of those killed during service. Before the end of the war, further legislation granted higher compensation to veterans suffering specific disabilities (such as the loss of both hands or both feet). After the war, Union veterans or their dependents received additional payments whereas their Confederate counterparts received neither federal nor state aid. Only after Reconstruction did some of the southern states provide even minimal help for Confederate veterans.⁴⁰

From 1861 to 1885, 555,038 pension claims were filed alleging the existence of service-caused disabilities, and 300,204 of them were allowed. Likewise, 335,296 claims of widows, minor children, or dependent relatives were filed during the same period for deaths of soldiers due to war-related causes, and 220,825 of them were allowed. Many of the claims were judged invalid because the pension law required claimants to prove that the serviceman's disability or death was due to military service. As a result, there was great political pressure in the late 1880s to provide Civil War pensions for all who had served in the Union forces. On June 27, 1890, Congress passed a new pension act, providing that anyone who had served in the Union forces for ninety days or more during the Civil War, had received an honorable discharge, and was disabled for any cause whatsoever was entitled to a pension. The Act of 1890 eventually provided assistance to thousands of Union veterans as they became incapacitated by illnesses associated with aging.⁴¹

Some analyses of the legislative and administrative aspects of federal pension aid in the nineteenth century are available, but virtually nothing has been done from the vantage point of the veteran or his dependents.⁴² It is very difficult even to speculate about the probable impact of the program on individual veterans or their families, since the necessary data have never been compiled or analyzed. Nevertheless, using very fragmentary published statistics, the contours of the federal pension program for Union veterans can be sketched.

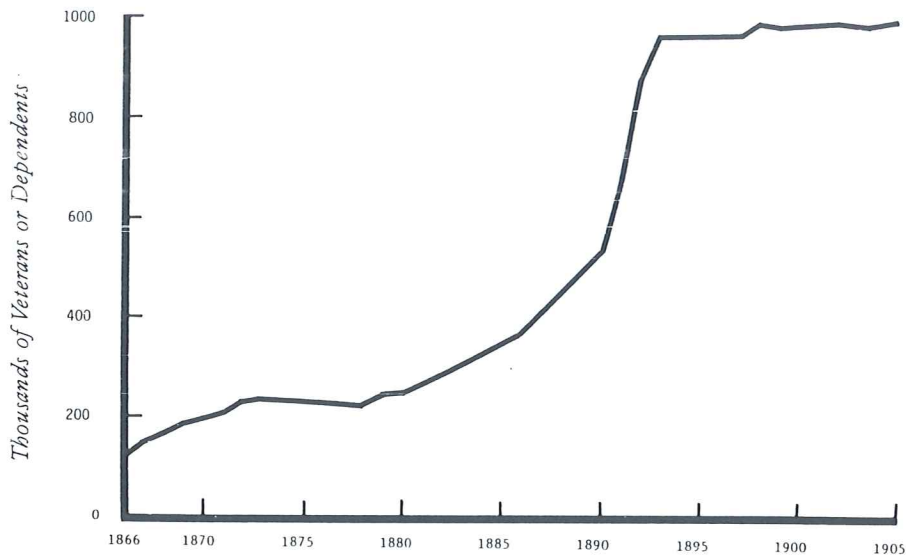
The number of Union veterans and veterans' dependents receiving federal pension benefits immediately after the Civil War was rather small, but it grew rapidly in the late nineteenth century—especially after the passage of the Act of 1890, which relaxed eligibility requirements. (See figure 3.) The number of veterans or their dependents receiving federal pensions rose from 126,722 in 1866 to a high of

⁴⁰ On the federal legislation affecting Civil War veterans, see William Henry Glasson, *History of Military Pension Legislation in the United States* (New York, 1900), 20–106; Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 123–42; Gustavus A. Weber and Laurence F. Schmeckebier, *The Veterans' Administration: Its History, Activities, and Organization* (Washington, 1934), 137–59; and Gustavus A. Weber, *The Bureau of Pensions: Its History, Activities, and Organization* (Baltimore, 1923).

⁴¹ Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 125–42; Heywood T. Sanders, "Paying for the 'Bloody Shirt': The Politics of Civil War Pensions," in *Political Benefits: Empirical Studies of American Public Programs*, ed. Barry S. Rundquist (Lexington, Mass., 1980), 137–59.

⁴² On Northern veterans' agitation for more federal pension support, see Mary R. Dearing, *Veterans in Politics: The Story of the G.A.R.* (Baton Rouge, 1952). On the composition of the Grand Army of the Republic at the local level and the types of individuals who joined it, see Stuart Charles McConnell, "A Social History of the Grand Army of the Republic, 1867–1900" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1987).

Figure 3
Veterans or Their Dependents Receiving Federal Pension Benefits, 1866–1905



SOURCE: William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, 1918), 273.

999,446 in 1902 (at the later date a few pensioners were veterans of the Spanish-American War). The last Union veteran survived until 1956; and in 1987, 66 widows and children of men who had fought for the Union or the Confederacy remained on the federal pension rolls.⁴³

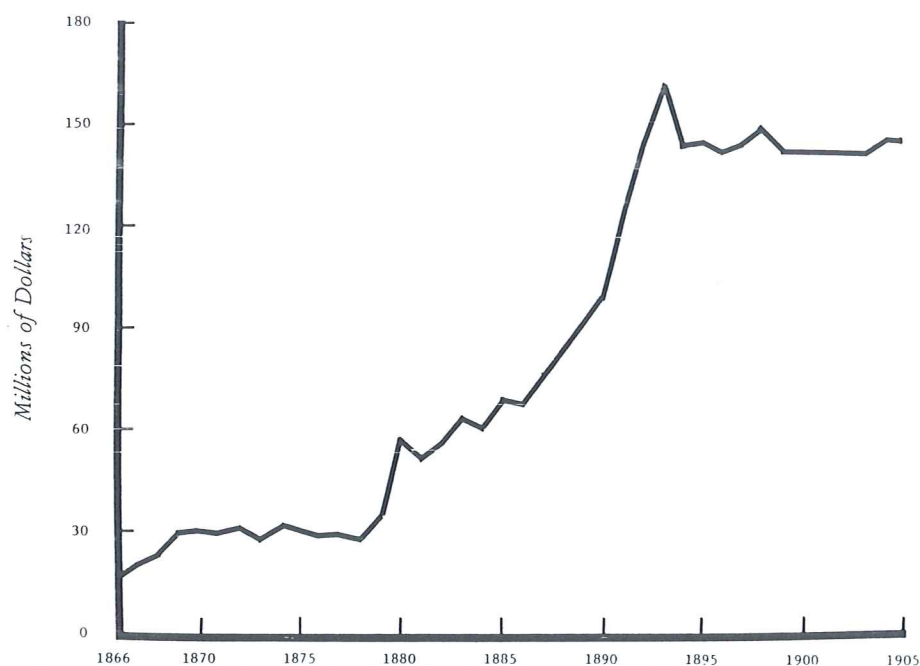
Initially, many of the recipients of veterans' benefits were widows or children of deceased Union soldiers—58 percent in 1866. But as the eligibility requirements for pensions were relaxed and as more veterans themselves applied for them, the proportion of widows or other dependents who received such benefits dropped to 19 percent in 1891.⁴⁴

The percentage of surviving Union soldiers receiving a federal pension also changed dramatically over time. (See figure 4.) In 1866 only 2 percent of Union veterans received any financial assistance from the federal government for their services in the war. By 1895 that figure had jumped to 63 percent—largely as the result of the changes in pension legislation. In fact, by 1900 the Pension Bureau began to treat the disability pensions as old-age assistance to Union veterans. Commissioner H. Clay Evans instructed the examining doctors: “A claimant who has reached the age of 75 years is allowed the maximum rate for senility alone, even when there are

⁴³ Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 273. Since 1862, federal policy had stated that those who were not loyal to the Union during the Civil War were not eligible to receive the benefits of the national pension laws. In 1958 a new law was passed that extended Civil War pension benefits to both Confederate and Union veterans and their dependents. Act of May 23, 1958, Pub. L. No. 85-425, 72 Stat. 133-34. The 1987 figures are from U.S. Veterans Administration, Office of Public Affairs, “America’s Wars,” Jan. 1988 (in Vinovskis’s possession).

⁴⁴ Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 144, 271.

Figure 4
Federal Veteran Benefits, 1866–1905



SOURCES: Calculated from William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, 1918), 144, 271; and U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, 1975), series Y960, II, 1145.

no special pensionable disabilities. A claimant who has attained the age of 65 is allowed at least the minimum rate, unless he appears to have unusual vigor and ability for the performance of manual labor in one of that age.”⁴⁵ Thus, by 1900 the United States government had in effect developed a very extensive and expensive old-age assistance program for veterans.

It is difficult to estimate exactly how important veterans’ pensions were for nineteenth-century Americans, but some general statements can be made. Overall, only a small proportion of the adult white population received veterans’ pensions—about 1 percent in 1870 and 4 percent in 1900. Thus, one might speculate that federal pensions had relatively little impact on Americans.

But such a conclusion does not take into account the age distribution of veterans. Since most soldiers in the Civil War were quite young, we need to follow the cohort of individuals who were in their late teens and early twenties during the Civil War. We find that 56 percent of all white males aged 25 to 29 and 34 percent of those aged 30 to 34 in 1870 were Union veterans. Similarly, 48 percent of all white males aged 55 to 59 and 29 percent of those aged 60 to 64 in 1900 were Union veterans.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 243.

(Since Union veterans constituted only about 70 to 75 percent of all veterans from the North and South together, an even larger proportion of white males in certain age cohorts had fought in the Civil War on either the Union or the Confederate side).⁴⁶

To understand nineteenth century Americans' experience with federal pensions, we need to bear in mind both the widespread military participation by men of certain cohorts and the increasing availability of pensions as those cohorts aged. One can roughly guess, given the percentages of Union veterans and the overall proportion of them who received federal pensions, that in 1870 only about 1 percent of white males aged 25 to 34 received such pensions. But by 1900, 30 percent of all white males aged 55 to 59 and 18 percent of those aged 60 to 64 were receiving federal pensions.⁴⁷ Thus a surprisingly high percentage of Civil War veterans received a form of old-age assistance from the federal government. Finally, if we take into consideration the pensioned widows and dependents of deceased Union soldiers, a high proportion of Americans of the cohorts that reached adulthood about the time of the Civil War benefited from federal aid in their old age, thirty or forty years before the creation of the federal Social Security system.

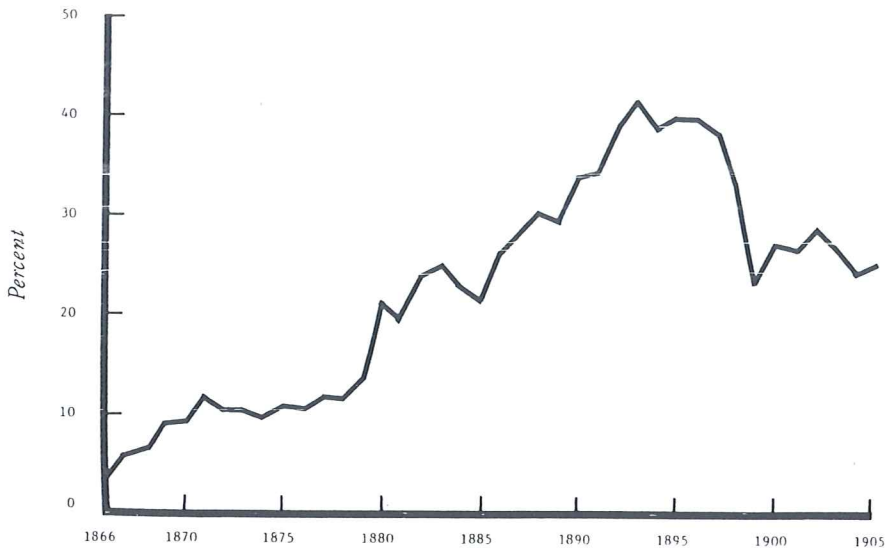
The financial aspects of the federal veterans' pension program also need to be examined. How much money was involved overall, what percentage of the federal budget went to veterans' pensions, and how much did the average claimant receive? The amount of money provided through the federal veterans' pension program started low and rose sharply. In 1866 the federal government spent \$15.9 million on veteran benefits. By 1893 it was spending \$165.3 million—an increase reflecting the rapid expansion of the number of veterans eligible for the benefits. As a percentage of the federal budget, expenditures for Civil War veterans greatly exceeded those for veterans today (which consume less than 3 percent of that budget). (See figure 5.) In fact, the percentage of the federal budget allocated to veterans' pension benefits rose steadily throughout the nineteenth century until the expenses associated with the Spanish-American War greatly expanded the total budget and thereby reduced the veterans' percentage. In 1893 veterans' benefits to former Union soldiers or their dependents constituted more than 40 percent of the overall federal budget.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Calculated from Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, series A119-34, I, 15-18; and series Y943-56, II, 1144. Since an estimated 5% of Union veterans were blacks, the data have been adjusted. The estimate that 70% of all veterans were Union veterans is from the federal census of 1890, which inquired about the veteran status of the population. See, U.S. Department of Interior, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (2 vols., Washington, 1895), I, pt. 1, 803-4. If one calculates the estimated number of Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors and subtracts the number killed, then Union veterans made up about 75% of all veterans in 1865.

⁴⁷ This estimate, which is only approximate, relies on the calculations of the percentage of whites in 1870 and 1900 who were veterans. Using additional data from William H. Glasson on the number of Union veterans receiving federal pensions in 1870 or in 1900 and assuming that the likelihood of having a federal pension was uniform for all age-groups of veterans, the percentage of white males receiving a federal pension could be calculated. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 144, 271.

⁴⁸ Calculated from Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, series Y336, Y971, II, 1104, 1145-6.

Figure 5
Veteran Benefits as a Share of Federal Budget, 1866–1905



SOURCE: Calculated from U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (2 vols., Washington, 1975), series Y336, Y971, II, 1104, 1115.

Finally, we need to consider the financial impact of the federal pension program on the recipients. If the amount of money per recipient was very low, then its influence, despite the large number of people it reached, may have been minimal. On the other hand, if the sum of money provided for veterans or their survivors was large, then the program played an important role in supporting significant numbers of Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In real dollars, the amount of money per recipient from the federal veterans' pension programs was substantial, and it grew rapidly in the 1880s. In current dollars, the average recipient received \$122 annually in 1866 (\$64 in 1860 money) and \$139 annually in 1900 (\$136 in 1860 money). Considering that the average annual earnings of all employees in 1900 was \$375, the average of \$139 provided by the federal pension program was substantial—especially by nineteenth-century standards.⁴⁹ Furthermore, since the Act of 1890 did not make veterans' pension payments conditional on economic destitution, some recipients may have used those funds as supplementary income.

In 1890 there were 195,000 white Civil War widows—approximately 10 percent of all white widows at that time. Since 69.3 percent of white Civil War widows in 1890 were those of Union soldiers, many of them were eligible for federal assistance.

⁴⁹ The average amount of money received per recipient is calculated from Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, 273. The average annual earnings, adjusted for unemployment during the year, is from Bureau of Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, series D723, I, 164.

Civil War widows, like veterans, were particularly concentrated in certain age-groups. In 1890, of white widows 65 and older, only 4.5 percent had been married to Civil War soldiers or sailors; but of those aged 45 to 54, fully 18.8 percent had been married to Civil War soldiers or sailors.⁵⁰

We know very little about the effects of the availability of federal benefits on the lives of the widows of Union soldiers or sailors. One intriguing analysis of rural and urban widows in Kent County, Michigan, in 1880 found that women who received a federal pension were slightly more likely to be living in their own households and much less likely to be working than widows who received no federal assistance.⁵¹

Although the federal pension program for Union veterans and veterans' widows has been mentioned in some accounts of American life in the second half of the nineteenth century, it has not received the attention it deserves. Just as social historians have ignored the impact of the Civil War on the life course of their subjects, so have they failed to investigate how the pensions granted veterans and widows benefited Americans after the war. Similarly, although researchers analyzing changing attitudes and behavior toward the elderly have noted the existence of the federal pension programs for Union soldiers, they have not attempted to investigate their scope and their importance to older Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵² Thus the influence of the Civil War on the lives of Americans between 1865 and 1920 remains to be considered.

Conclusion

During the past twenty-five years, the study of the lives of ordinary Americans, based on sources such as the federal manuscript censuses, has been one of the most exciting and productive areas of historical research. Employing sophisticated statistical and demographic techniques, social historians have revolutionized our knowledge of the experiences of individuals in the nineteenth century. Whereas the study of the American past had earlier been dominated by analyses of political, diplomatic, and military events, today attention has shifted to the investigation of social history.

Although the recent interest in social history has opened unexplored areas for

⁵⁰ Calculated from U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890*, I, pt. 1 (Washington, 1895), 831; and U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Eleventh Census: 1890*, pt. 2 (Washington, 1897), 576-79.

⁵¹ Amy E. Holmes, "Remembering the Noble Ladies: American Widows and the Civil War Pension System," seminar paper, University of Michigan, Dec. 1987 (in Vinovskis's possession).

⁵² For example, see W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790* (Baltimore, 1978); William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven, 1980); Carole Haber, *Beyond Sixty-Five: The Dilemma of Old Age in America's Past* (Cambridge, Eng., 1983). For a useful discussion that appreciates the importance of Civil War pension programs, see Ann Shola Orloff, "The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of the Origins of Pensions and Old Age Insurance in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1985).

study and introduced new social science techniques for analyzing the past, it has sometimes resulted in the neglect of the more traditional themes and events in our past. Unlike military, intellectual, political, or economic analysts, social historians have lost sight of the centrality of the Civil War. As this article has tried to demonstrate, the Civil War directly affected the lives of most Americans at that time and left behind a legacy that continued to influence them many years after Appomattox. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how any of us studying the life courses of Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century could have overlooked such a major and tragic experience.

The Civil War was the bloodiest experience in United States history. Almost as many Americans died in that conflict as in all the nation's other wars combined. Nearly one out of five white males of military age died in the South and one out of sixteen in the North. There was widespread participation in the war, but perhaps servicemen from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were particularly likely to be wounded, disabled, or killed.

Perhaps the experiences of men from a wide variety of backgrounds fighting together in the Civil War eased some of the class and ethnic tensions that plagued antebellum society. The camaraderie on the battlefield often continued after the war as veterans gathered in organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic to remember an idealized version of their wartime experiences. Like the fraternal orders of the period, which also cut across class lines, postwar veterans' organizations may have reduced the growing class tensions of an urbanizing and industrializing America during the last third of the nineteenth century.⁵³

The impact of the Civil War on the lives of Americans did not end in 1865 but continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The war left many survivors physically disabled and some emotionally scarred. While large numbers of Union soldiers or their widows received generous federal pensions, their southern brethren struggled unassisted to reconstruct their lives after being vanquished. The heritage of the war remained with many—from both sides—for the rest of their lives. There can be little doubt of the importance of the Civil War to that generation, but the exact nature of the war's impact is yet to be specified and analyzed.

The failure of social historians to study the impact of the Civil War on the lives of those who participated in it is not an isolated phenomenon. In general, we have ignored the effect of wars on the life courses of citizens. American scholars and readers have shown great interest in the nation's military heroes and exploits, but very little attention has been paid to the terrible costs of the conflicts to those who

⁵³ On the way local and national activities of the Grand Army of the Republic helped to integrate the North across ethnic and class lines, see McConnell, "A Social History of the Grand Army of the Republic." On the role of fraternal orders in transcending class divisions, see Mary Ann Clawson, "Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 27 (Oct. 1985), 672–95.

lived through them. Yet there is a resurgence of scholarly interest in the effects of wars on soldiers and civilians. As we pursue those questions further, we will be in a better position to understand the consequences of wars and appreciate the importance of specific historical events in the life course of individuals.⁵⁴

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⁵⁴ On the effects of wars, see Glen H. Elder, Jr., "Military Times and Turning Points in Men's Lives," *Developmental Psychology*, 22 (March 1986), 233-45; Glen H. Elder, Jr., "War Mobilization and the Life Course: A Cohort of World War II Veterans," *Sociological Forum*, 2 (Fall 1987), 449-72; Glen H. Elder, Jr., and Yoriko Meguro, "War-time in Men's Lives: A Comparative Study of American and Japanese Cohorts," *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 10 (Dec. 1987), 439-66; and John Modell and Duane Steffey, "A People's War to Protect the American Family: Military Service and Family Formation, 1940-1950," paper presented at the Social Science History Association annual meeting, Chicago, Nov. 1985 (in Vinovskis's possession). On the use of life course analysis to study the impact of historical events, see Glen H. Elder, Jr., "History and the Life Course," in *Biography and Society: The Life Course Approach in the Social Sciences*, ed. D. Bertaux (Beverly Hills, 1981), 77-115; Glen H. Elder, Jr., "Family History and the Life Course," in *Transitions: The Family and the Life Course in Historical Perspective*, ed. Tamara K. Hareven (New York, 1978), 17-64; Maris A. Vinovskis, "From Household Size to the Life Course: Some Observations on Recent Trends in Family History," *American Behavioral Scientist*, 21 (Nov./Dec. 1977), 263-87; and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Historian and the Life Course: Reflections on Recent Approaches to the Study of American Family Life in the Past," in *Life-Span Development and Behavior*, ed. Paul B. Baltes, David L. Featherman, and Richard M. Lerner (Hillsdale, 1988), 33-59.