

Facial Recognition Software Is Helping Identify Unknown Figures in Civil War Photographs

Civil War Photo Sleuth aims to be the world's largest, most complete digital archive of identified and unidentified Civil War-era portraits



Civil War Photo Sleuth's software identifies up to 27 "facial landmarks" evident in images uploaded to database (Betaface.com/Civil War Photo Sleuth)

By Meilan Solly smithsonian.com
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A new facial recognition application pioneered by computer scientist and historian Kurt Luther peers into the past—specifically the American Civil War—to identify anonymous portrait sitters captured in thousands of photographs taken over the course of the bloody four-year conflict.

As Erica X. Eisen reports for *Slate*, Civil War Photo Sleuth (CWPS) is a three-pronged collaboration launched in August by Luther and his Virginia Tech students; editor Ron Coddington of *Military Images*; and Paul Quigley, director of the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies. The project, as Luther detailed in a 2017 article for *Military*

Images, features a digital photo archive, research tools and a thriving online community.

Users can contribute their own images from personal collections or upload snapshots spotted in books, museums, cultural institutions, shops and miscellaneous sites across the world. These photographs then join thousands held in national and state archives accessible to the public, enabling CWPS to work toward its goal of becoming the world's largest, most complete digital archive of identified and unidentified Civil War-era portraits.

According to *Slate's* Eisen, CWPS' software identifies up to 27 "facial landmarks" in every uploaded photograph. If participating sleuths want to learn more about a certain mystery figure, they can narrow down their search by filtering images for details such as unit rank and insignia (colonels fighting for the Union side, for example, wore distinctive shoulder straps with an eagle), photographer details, and inscriptions. Once the system gathers all known information, it cross-references the image with all of the photos in CWPS' database (which includes 15,000 reference images already identified) to present potential facial matches and, if known, names.

Writing for *Military Images*, Luther says that the array of facial landmarks used to compare photographs enables CWPS to find matches even if a soldier's facial hair changes or an existing snapshot captures him from a different angle. This feat is made all the more impressive by the limitations of Civil War images. By the start of the war, photographers were beginning to develop prints from negatives, a delicate process that nevertheless opened up the possibilities of the nascent medium. As Eisen of *Slate* notes, in addition to the quality and coloring of

these images, there were an array of limitations that make it a challenge to identify historical photographs today. Take, for instance, the prevalence of thick beards and mustaches, which could obscure vital facial features.

CWPS has already identified more than 75 photographs and has hundreds more catalogued for eventual identification. The process of identifying unknown figures in Civil War-era photographs requires amateur detectives to draw on an arsenal of tools and skills: As Luther writes in a separate *Military Images* piece, researchers often augment print resources with a growing body of online data, including genealogical charts, military records and photographic archives, as well as tips offered by burgeoning communities of sleuthing enthusiasts.

Luther has set the highly ambitious goal of identifying every photo in the project's database. While there are numerous difficulties associated with meeting such a goal, Luther embraces the challenge.

In 2013, he successfully tracked down a portrait of Oliver Croxton, his own great-great-great grand uncle. Describing the search in a 2015 column for *Military Images*, he summed up the mission driving CWPS, saying, "Every discovery has an impact."

Correction, 11/21/18: This story has been edited to reflect the correct number of photographs that Civil War Photo Sleuth has identified.

‘General Tubman’: Female abolitionist was also a secret military weapon

By: Catherine Clinton February 7, 2018



A bust of Harriet Tubman stands in the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center, a stop on the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, in Church Creek, Md. (Patrick Semansky/AP)

When the Civil War began, Harriet Tubman had already been a freedom fighter for more than a decade.

As a renowned abolitionist and intrepid Underground Railroad conductor who went into slave territory to lead refugees to safety in the North and Canada, she had undertaken numerous clandestine and dangerous rescues. Tubman wasn't afraid of assisting her escaped brothers and sisters either. In 1860 she helped liberate runaway slave Charles Nalle from a slave catcher in Troy, N.Y.

Shortly after Abraham Lincoln's call to arms in April 1861, Tubman realized that joining forces with the Federal military would

increase her effectiveness in the fight against slavery, and she volunteered for duty. She enrolled first as a nurse, and then expanded her efforts to serve as a scout and spy for the Union in occupied South Carolina. Her role as an American patriot is undisputed, but her service as a war hero was challenged at the time. Over the years scholars and schoolchildren have begun to recognize her significant contributions to guaranteeing Union victory in the Civil War.

Born in 1825 to enslaved parents on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the young Araminta, her birth name, was severely challenged.

Tubman later lamented: "I grew up like a neglected weed, ignorant of liberty, having no experience of it." In 1849, when she heard a rumor that her owner was planning to "sell her down the river," as siblings before her had been exiled to the Deep South, she decided to escape, to make her own journey to freedom.

In doing so, she was leaving her brother, sisters and parents behind and also deserting her husband, John, a free black, who refused to leave with her. Before she undertook the journey, she assumed her mother's name, Harriet, and her husband's last name, Tubman.

The rechristened and self-liberated Harriet Tubman arrived in Philadelphia unharmed and launched an illustrious career as a member of the Underground Railroad. By all rights, in legend and deed, Tubman was the "Great Emancipator," leading scores of escaping African Americans to freedom, often all the way to Canada. She built up a network of supporters and admirers, including William Lloyd Garrison and William Seward, to name but two who lauded her efforts.

When the slave power extended its tentacles into the North with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Tubman relocated to Canada along with thousands of other black refugees. Tubman risked her freedom again and again, not just by returning to the North, but also with missions into the Slave South. Her activities became even more notorious when Tubman became a staunch supporter of John Brown, who called her “General Tubman” long before Lincoln began handing out commissions.

Early in the war, Tubman informally attached herself to the military. Benjamin Butler, a Democrat, had been a member of the Massachusetts delegation to Congress and made a name for himself in the Union Army. A tough opportunist, Butler was often underestimated until his bully tactics began to pay off. Commissioned a brigadier general, Butler led his men into Maryland, where he threatened to arrest any legislator who attempted to vote for secession.

Trailing along with Butler’s all-white troops in May 1861, Tubman arrived at the camps near Fort Monroe, Va. The large fort and the nearby tent city of troops soon became a major magnet for escaped slaves. Tubman found herself in familiar territory.



How Harriet Tubman's military service added up to \$20 — a month

Her experience during the Civil War is a bona fide part of her legacy.

By: Kevin Lilley

By March 1862, the Union had conquered enough territory that Secretary of War Edwin Stanton designated Georgia, Florida and South Carolina as the Department of the South. Massachusetts Governor John Andrew, a staunch abolitionist, asked Tubman to join the contingent of his state’s volunteers heading for South Carolina, and promised his sponsorship. Andrew also obtained military passage for Tubman on USS Atlantic.

The Union troops along the coast of South Carolina were in a precarious position. They were essentially encircled, with Confederates on three sides and the ocean on the fourth. Nevertheless, Maj. Gen. David Hunter, the newly appointed Union commander of the region, had ambitious ideas about how to expand Northern control.

In November 1862, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson arrived with the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, and Colonel James Montgomery and the 2nd South Carolina were in the area by early 1863. Escaped slaves filled both regiments, and Higginson and Montgomery both knew Tubman from before the war. In those men, both abolitionists, Tubman had gained influential friends and advocates, and they suggested that a spy network be established in the region.

Tubman had spent 10 months as a nurse ministering to the sick of those regiments, and by early 1863 she was ready for a more active role. She was given the authority to

line up a roster of scouts, to infiltrate and map out the interior. Several were trusted boat pilots, like Solomon Gregory, who knew the local waterways very well and could travel on them undetected. Her closely knit band included men named Mott Blake, Peter Burns, Gabriel Cahern, George Chisholm, Isaac Hayward, Walter Plowden, Charles Simmons and Sandy Suffum, and they became an official scouting service for the Department of the South.



Harriet Tubman launched an illustrious career as a member of the Underground Railroad. Tubman was the “Great Emancipator,” leading scores of escaping African Americans to freedom, often all the way to Canada. She built up a network of supporters and admirers, including William Lloyd Garrison and William Seward, to name but two who lauded her efforts. (Library of Congress)

Tubman’s espionage operation was under the direction of Stanton, who considered her the commander of her men. Tubman passed along information directly to either Hunter or Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton. In March 1863, Saxton wrote confidently to Stanton

concerning a planned assault on Jacksonville, Fla.: “I have reliable information that there are large numbers of able bodied Negroes in that vicinity who are watching for an opportunity to join us.”

Based on the information procured by Tubman’s agents, Colonel Montgomery led a successful expedition to capture the town. Tubman’s crucial intelligence and Montgomery’s bravado convinced commanders that other extensive guerrilla operations were feasible.

Their confidence led to the Combahee River Raid in June 1863 — a military operation that marked a turning point in Tubman’s career. Until then, all of her attacks upon the Confederacy had been purposefully clandestine. But she did not remain anonymous with her prominent role in that military operation.

South Carolina’s lowcountry rice plantations sat alongside tidal rivers that fanned inland from the Atlantic and that had some of the South’s richest land and largest slave populations. Federal commanders wanted to move up the rivers to destroy plantations and liberate slaves in order to recruit more black regiments.

The raid up the Combahee River, a twisting waterway approximately 10 miles north of Beaufort where Tubman and her comrades were stationed, commenced when the Federal gunboats Harriet A. Weed and John Adams steamed into the river shortly before midnight on the evening of June 2, 1863. Tubman accompanied 150 African-American troops from the 2nd South Carolina Infantry and their white officers aboard John Adams. The black soldiers were particularly relieved that their lives had been entrusted not only to Colonel Montgomery but also to the famed “Moses.”

Tubman had been informed of the location of Rebel torpedoes — floating mines planted below the surface of the water — in the river and served as a lookout for the Union pilots, allowing them to guide their boats around the explosives unharmed. By 3 a.m., the expedition had reached Fields Point, and Montgomery sent a squad ashore to drive off Confederate pickets, who withdrew but sent comrades to warn fellow troops at Chisholmville, 10 miles upriver.

Meanwhile, a company of the 2nd South Carolina under Captain Carver landed and deployed at Tar Bluff, two miles north of Fields Point. The two ships steamed upriver to the Nichols Plantation, where Harriet A. Weed anchored. She also guided the boats and men to designated shoreline spots where scores of fugitive slaves were hiding out. Once the “all clear” was given, the slaves scrambled onto the vessels.

“I never saw such a sight,” Tubman described of the scene. “Sometimes the women would come with twins hanging around their necks; it appears I never saw so many twins in my life; bags on their shoulders, baskets on their heads, and young ones tagging along behind, all loaded; pigs squealing, chickens screaming, young ones squealing.”

According to one Confederate onlooker, “[Tubman] passed safely the point where the torpedoes were placed and finally reached the ... ferry, which they immediately commenced cutting way, landed to all appearances a group at Mr. Middleton’s and in a few minutes his buildings were in flames.”

Robbing warehouses and torching planter homes was an added bonus for the black troops, striking hard and deep at the proud master class. The horror of this attack on the

prestigious Middleton estate drove the point home. Dixie might fall at the hands of their former slaves. The Confederates reportedly stopped only one lone slave from escaping — shooting her in flight.

Hard charging to the water’s edge, the Confederate commander could catch only a glimpse of escaping gunboats, pale in the morning light. In a fury, Confederate Major William P. Emmanuel pushed his men into pursuit — and got trapped between the riverbank and Union snipers.

In the heat of skirmish, Emmanuel’s gunners were able to fire off only four rounds, booming shots that plunked harmlessly into the water. Frustrated, the Confederate commander cut his losses after one of his men was wounded and ordered his troops to pull back. More than 750 slaves would be freed in the overnight operation on the Combahee.

The Union invaders had despoiled the estates of the Heywards, the Middletons, the Lowndes, and other South Carolina dynasties. Tubman’s plan was successful. The official Confederate report concluded: “The enemy seems to have been well posted as to the character and capacity of our troops and their small chance of encountering opposition, and to have been well guided by persons thoroughly acquainted with the river and country.”

Federal commanders came to depend on her, but kept her name out of official military documents. As a black and a woman she became doubly invisible. This invisibility aided her when Union commanders sent her as far south as Fernandina, Fla., to assist Union soldiers dropping like flies from fevers and fatigue.

Robbing the “Cradle of Secession” was a grand theatrical gesture, a headline-grabbing strategy that won plaudits from government, military and civilian leaders throughout the North. After the Combahee River Raid, critics North and South could no longer pretend that blacks were unfit for military service, as this was a well-executed, spectacularly successful operation.

Flushed with triumph, Hunter wrote jubilantly to Secretary of War Stanton on June 3, boasting that Combahee was only the beginning. He also wrote to Governor Andrew, promising that Union operations would “desolate” Confederate slaveholders “by carrying away their slaves, thus rapidly filling up the South Carolina regiments of which there are now four.” Andrew had been a champion of black soldiers, a steadfast supporter of Hunter’s campaign to put ex-slaves in uniform.

The Confederacy discovered overnight what it took the Union’s Department of the South over a year to find out — Harriet Tubman was a formidable secret weapon whose gifts should never be underestimated. Federal commanders came to depend on her, but kept her name out of official military documents. As a black and a woman she became doubly invisible. This invisibility aided her when Union commanders sent her as far south as Fernandina, Fla., to assist Union soldiers dropping like flies from fevers and fatigue.

Tubman’s own health faltered during the summer of 1864, and she returned north for a furlough. She was making her way back South in early 1865 when peace intervened, so she returned to Auburn, where she had settled her parents, and made a home. Postwar, Tubman often lived hand to mouth, doing odd jobs and domestic service to earn her living, but she also collected money for

charity. She sought patrons to realize her dream of establishing a home for blacks in her hometown—for the indigent, the disabled, the veteran and the homeless.

“It seems strange that one who has done so much for her country and been in the thick of the battles with shots falling all about her, should never have had recognition from the Government in a substantial way,” chided the writers of a July 1896 article in *The Chautauquan*. Tubman echoed that lament: “You wouldn’t think that after I served the flag so faithfully I should come to want under its folds.”

In 1897 a petition requesting that Congressman Sereno E. Payne of New York “bring up the matter [of Tubman’s military pension] again and press it to a final and successful termination” was circulated and endorsed by Auburn’s most influential citizens. Payne’s new bill proposed that Congress grant Tubman a “military pension” of \$25 per month — the exact amount received by surviving soldiers.

A National Archives staffer who later conducted research on this claim suggested there was no extant evidence in government records to support Tubman’s claim that she had been working under the direction of the secretary of war. Some on the committee believed that Tubman’s service as a spy and scout, supported by valid documentation, justified such a pension. Others suggested that the matter of a soldier’s pension should be dropped, as she could more legitimately be pensioned as a nurse.

One member of the committee, W. Jasper Talbert of South Carolina, possibly blocked Tubman’s pension vindictively — it was a point of honor to this white Southern statesman that a black woman not be given her due.

Regardless, a compromise was finally achieved, decades after she had first applied for a pension based on her service. In 1888, Tubman had been granted a widow's pension of \$8 a month, based on the death of her second husband, USCT veteran Nelson Davis. The compromise granted an increase "on account of special circumstances." The House authorized raising the amount to \$25 (the exact amount for surviving soldiers), while the Senate amended with an increase to only \$20 — which was finally passed by both houses.

President William McKinley signed the pension into law in February 1899. After 30 years of struggle, Tubman's sense of victory was tremendous. Not only would the money secure her an income and allow her to continue her philanthropic activities, her military role was finally validated. Details of Tubman's wartime service became part of the Congressional Record, with the recognition that "in view of her personal services to the Government, Congress is amply justified in increasing that pension."

Tubman's heroic role in the Civil War is finally being highlighted and appreciated for what it was, part of a long life of struggling for freedom, risking personal liberty for patriotic sacrifice.

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Commentary

Atlanta Confronts Its Confederate Past

Atlanta recently became the first city to contextualize Confederate monuments in a state that bars their removal.

By F. Sheffield Hale Contributor Oct. 2, 2019. US News & World Report



A Confederate flag is planted next to the grave of Confederate soldier in the Oakland cemetery in Atlanta. (David Goldman/AP)

Following the violent white supremacist rallies in Charlottesville, Virginia, Southern cities have felt a renewed sense of urgency to address Confederate monuments. In Richmond, a task force recommended removing the Jefferson Davis monument while erecting new monuments and exhibit panels to provide a more complete representation of the city's history. In Savannah, Georgia, the city voted to relocate busts of two Confederate officers to a cemetery. None of these recommendations have yet been implemented.

This August, the city of Atlanta confronted the debate by installing large exhibition

panels next to four Confederate monuments, visually transforming them into artifacts in an outdoor historical exhibition. With this act, it became the first city to contextualize monuments in a state that bars their removal.

The debate over Confederate monuments extends a struggle rooted in the nation's post-Civil War and Jim Crow history. After the war ended, another conflict started about the war's history and its meaning – a battle that continues today.

Certainly, Confederate monuments to mourn the dead were erected in cemeteries soon after the Civil War. However, most monuments we see today were created years later as Jim Crow segregation laws institutionalized white supremacy and the Confederacy was memorialized as a tragic lost cause.

Although some argue that removing monuments destroys Civil War history, the version of the war that these monuments memorialize is historically inaccurate. Slavery was the primary cause of the Civil War, yet the postwar "lost cause" mythology developed by white Southerners denied this reality and recast the war and Confederacy as solely about honor, economics and states' rights. Southern white communities erected monuments as tools to reinforce this version of the war and uphold the power dynamic of segregation. While an obelisk in a cemetery commemorates loss of life, a statue of a Confederate soldier on horseback guarding a courthouse symbolizes power.

In a society undergoing rapid change, it's likely that much of the resistance to removing or re-examining these monuments is rooted in fear of losing power and position. Many who oppose removal of Confederate monuments are confusing "heritage" with

"history" – heritage in this case being history without the bad parts.

After nine African American church congregants in Charleston, South Carolina, were murdered by a white supremacist in 2015, we at the Atlanta History Center began to think more critically about history's role in modern racial tensions.

In 2016, in response to Charleston, the Atlanta History Center created an online toolkit to encourage community-driven, evidence-based discussions, believing that change inspired locally can be more effective than a top-down mandate. After those discussions, it became clear to us that the status quo of leaving a Confederate monument without addressing its historical meaning was not an option. If a monument couldn't be contextualized, it should be removed.

In 2017, Atlanta's mayor and City Council appointed an advisory committee, which I co-chaired, tasked with researching the history of local monuments and street names, gathering community input and making recommendations. Like much of the country, Atlantans who submitted comments were divided. Final recommendations included erecting information panels adjacent to two funereal monuments in a city-owned cemetery, renaming several streets and removing two monuments. In the end, since Georgia law prohibits monument removals, the city placed exhibition panels adjoining all four monuments.

Contextualization transforms an object of veneration into an historical object to be studied. Exhibition panels can answer fundamental questions about the object's history: Who created it? When? Why?

Since Atlanta placed exhibition panels near its monuments, other cities have followed suit. In September, officials in Decatur, Georgia, placed a plaque near a Confederate monument. In October, three signs will go up in Franklin, Tennessee.

We realize that our work doesn't end with exhibition panels. To come to terms with our past, conversations must continue.

So, if we must yell, let's yell at a monument. Let's argue about what it says about our history, and what that history means today. Let's discuss our own experiences and thoughts about the past. Let's ground our conversations through physical context beside monuments, and have the courage to approach these conversations with empathy, humility and patience. Through constructive dialogue centered on our shared past, we can work toward building the future we all want – and need.

F. Sheffield Hale is an Atlanta native, attorney and president and CEO of the Atlanta History Center

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Weighing cotton in Virginia, circa 1905.

Detroit Publishing Co. via Library of Congress

How slavery became America's first big business

Historian and author Edward E. Baptist explains how slavery helped the US go from a “colonial economy to the second biggest industrial power in the world.”

By P.R. Lockhart Vox.com

Of the many myths told about American slavery, one of the biggest is that it was an archaic practice that only enriched a small number of men.

The argument has often been used to diminish the scale of slavery, reducing it to a crime committed by a few Southern planters, one that did not touch the rest of the United States. Slavery, the argument goes, was an inefficient system, and the labor of the enslaved was considered less productive than that of a free worker being paid a wage. The use of enslaved labor has been presented as premodern, a practice that had no ties to the capitalism that allowed America to become — and remain — a leading global economy.

But as with so many stories about slavery, this is untrue. Slavery, particularly the cotton slavery that existed from the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the Civil War, was a thoroughly modern business, one that was continuously changing to maximize profits.

To grow the cotton that would clothe the world and fuel global industrialization, thousands of young enslaved men and women — the children of stolen ancestors legally treated as property — were transported from Maryland and Virginia

hundreds of miles south, and forcibly retrained to become America's most efficient laborers. As they were pushed into the expanding territories of Mississippi and Louisiana, sold and bid on at auctions, and resettled onto forced labor camps, they were given a task: to plant and pick thousands of pounds of cotton.



In this 1897 photo, African American men and boys are shown picking cotton on a plantation in Atlanta, Georgia. *Library of Congress*

The bodies of the enslaved served as America's largest financial asset, and they were forced to maintain America's most exported commodity. In 60 years, from 1801 to 1862, the amount of cotton picked daily by an enslaved person increased 400 percent. The profits from cotton propelled the US into a position as one of the leading economies in the world, and made the South its most prosperous region. The ownership of enslaved people increased wealth for Southern planters so much that by the dawn of the Civil War, the Mississippi River Valley had more millionaires per capita than any other region.

In recent years, a growing field of scholarship has outlined how America — through the country’s geographic growth after the American Revolution and enslavers’ desire for increased cotton production — created a complex system aimed at monetizing and maximizing the labor of the enslaved. In the cotton fields of the Deep South, this system rested on the continuous threat of violence and a meticulous use of record-keeping. The labor of each person was tracked daily, and those who did not meet their assigned picking goals were beaten. The best workers were beaten as well, the whip and other assaults coercing them into doing even more work in even less time.

As overseers and plantation owners managed a forced-labor system aimed at maximizing efficiency, they interacted with a network of bankers and accountants, and took out lines of credit and mortgages, all to manage America’s empire of cotton. An entire industry, America’s first big business, revolved around slavery.

“The slavery economy of the US South is deeply tied financially to the North, to Britain, to the point that we can say that people who were buying financial products in these other places were in effect owning slaves, and were extracting money from the labor of enslaved people,” says Edward E. Baptist, a historian at Cornell University and the author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*.

Baptist’s book came out in 2014, the same year that essays like the Ta-Nehisi Coates’s “The Case for Reparations” and protests like the Ferguson Uprising would call attention to injustices in wealth and policing that continue to affect black communities — injustices that Baptist and other academics

see as being closely connected to the deprivations of slavery. As America observes 400 years since the 1619 arrival of enslaved Africans to the colony of Virginia, these deprivations are seeing increased attention — and so are the ways America’s economic empire, built on the backs of the enslaved, connects to the present.

I recently spoke with Baptist about how cotton slavery transformed the American economy, how torture, violence, and family separations were used to maximize profits, and how understanding the economic power of slavery impacts current discussions of reparations. A transcript of our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

P.R. Lockhart

When you talk about the sort of myth-making that has been used to create specific narratives about slavery, one of the things you focus on most is the relationship between slavery and the American economy. What are some of the myths that get told when it comes to understanding how slavery is tied to American capitalism?

Edward E. Baptist

One of the myths is that slavery was not fuel for the growth of the American economy, that it actually the brakes put on US growth. There’s a story that claims slavery was less efficient, that wage labor and industrial production wasn’t significant for the massive transformation of the US economy that you see between the time of Independence and the time of the Civil War.

And yet that period is when you see the US go from being a colonial, primarily agricultural economy to being the second biggest industrial power in the world — and

well on its way to becoming the largest industrial power in the world.

Another myth is that slavery, in and of itself as an economic system, was unchanging. We fetishize machine and machine production and see it as quintessentially modern — the kinds of improvements in production and efficiency that you see from hooking up a cotton spindle to a set of pulleys, which are in turn pulled by a water wheel or steam engine. That's seen as more efficient than the old way of someone sitting there and doing it by hand.

But you can also get changes in efficiency if you change the pattern of production and you change the incentives of the labor and the labor process itself. And we still make these sorts of changes today in businesses — the kind of transformations that speed up work to a point where we say that it is modern and dynamic. And we see these types of changes in slavery as well, particularly during cotton slavery in the 19th-century US.

The difference, of course, is that this is not the work of wage workers or professional workers. It is the work of enslaved people. And the incentive is not “do this or you'll get fired” or “you won't get a raise.” The incentive is that if you don't do this you'll get whipped — or worse.

The third myth about this is that there was not a tight relationship between slavery in the South and what was happening in the North and other parts of the modern Western world in the 19th century. It was a very close relationship: Cotton was the No. 1 export from the US, which was largely an export-driven economy as it was modernizing and shifting into industrialization. And the slavery economy of the US South was deeply tied financially

to the North, to Britain, to the point that we can say that people who were buying financial products in these other places were in effect owning slaves and were certainly extracting money from the labor of enslaved people.

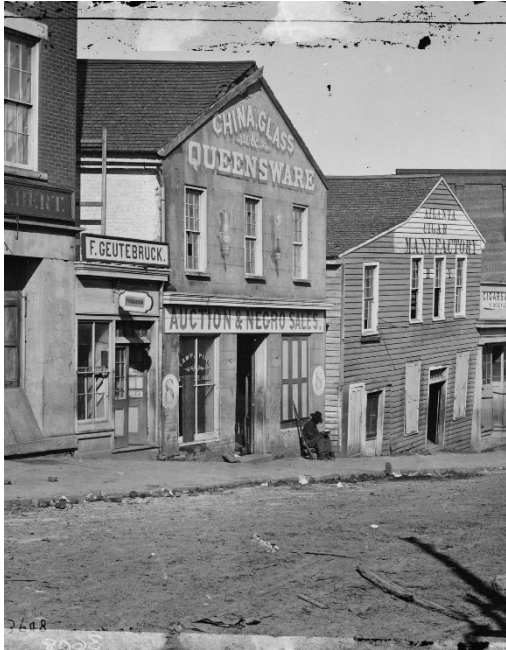
So those are the three myths: that slavery did not cause in any significant way the development and transformation of the US economy, that slavery was not a modern or dynamic labor system, and that what was happening in the South was a separate thing from the rest of the US.

P.R. Lockhart

As you detail in your work, the focus on cotton production changes what slavery in the US looks like post-1800. But before we talk about those changes, can you discuss what slavery looks like before the true advent of cotton?

Edward E. Baptist

This is tied to the [aforementioned] myths, but something to remember is that slavery is everywhere in 1776. At the time of the Declaration of Independence, slavery is legal in every one of the newly created 13 states. And for the most part, slavery is associated with the sectors of the economy most closely connected to the Atlantic world: systems of exchanges and markets that linked the new US to Europe, to Africa, to the Caribbean, and to Latin America.



The site of an auction block in Atlanta, Georgia, where enslaved people were sold, 1864. George N. Barnard via Library of Congress

Whether we're talking about enslaved people working in Virginia tobacco fields, where they produce significant amount of revenue for the British crown, or people in the rice fields in South Carolina and Georgia, or the enslaved people working as dock workers or servants in northern colonies like Boston, slavery is everywhere. But, over the next 20 years, as the US becomes independent and relationships in the Atlantic — transformed by revolutions in Haiti, the revolution in France, and imperial wars associated with those things — several shifts happen.

And largely due to the resistance of enslaved people and some changes in ideologies, you see the beginnings of the gradual end of slavery in the North.

So slavery, on one hand, shifts to become a Southern institution. At the same time, there's no longer as strong of a market demand for the products made in the South.

The food products made for Caribbean sugar colonies, where the enslaved aren't really given time to make their own basic rations [create one market for goods from the South], but the end of slavery in Saint-Domingue, which becomes Haiti, cuts off that demand from one of those main markets. In rice, there are hits to the market as well. And so much tobacco gets made that it overwhelms the market and the price drops. These are threats to the market strength of products made by enslaved people in the US South.

But right at this same moment, Britain begins its process of industrialization and its focus on cotton textiles. And pretty quickly the price for cotton rises dramatically. Enslavers in the Southern US realize that they can plant particular kinds of cotton inland almost right at the same time that the US is ensuring its power of what will become Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama. There's a vast new territory that is opening up when enslavers in South Carolina and Georgia are finding out that there is a new product that they can force people to grow and find a new market with.

P.R. Lockhart

And now that Southern enslavers have a new crop that they can force people to grow, how does cotton change what slavery looks like in the American South?

Edward E. Baptist

The first thing we need to do here is pivot from just talking about cotton as a matter of productive labor and think about reproductive labor as well. And reproductive labor is not just women bearing children, but all of the work that goes into raising a child into an adult. This is work largely done by

women, but also by family networks, and communities in general.



An enslaved African American family or families pose on the plantation of Dr. William F. Gaines in Hanover County, Virginia, 1862. G.H. Houghton via Library of Congress

In the US South, by the late 18th century — and in the case of Virginia and Maryland by the 1730s — what we see is that enslaved families and communities were raising children faster than adults died. So this means that the US, as it becomes independent, no longer relies on the African slave trade, which by the late 18th century is coming under more and more criticism.

Enslavers increasingly shift already enslaved people in the South and West into what would become the new cotton territories of the South. It's a vast system for producing cotton that is ultimately fueled by the theft of children from their families and communities who created them. And those who defended the Southern slavery regime would say, "Look, these are legal processes — people are bought, they're sold, that's the nature of slavery." But alongside

the theft of physical labor, this marks a theft of reproductive labor from enslaved people, and it serves as the crucial engine of the expansion of US slavery.

It is a set of internal slave trades, created by enslavers, financed not just by buyers and sellers in the South but by flows of credit into the region, starting with the land speculation of the late 1790s. And to give a sense of the scale, in the 1780s, as the US becomes independent, there's something like 800,000 enslaved Africans in the newly formed country.

Through the process of internal natural growth of the enslaved population — the reproductive labor if you will, and the additional importation of roughly 150,000 Africans decades before the international slave trade ended in 1807 — that 800,000 increases to 4 million people by 1860. Almost no enslaved African Americans lived in the Mississippi territory when it became a US territory in around 1800. But by 1860, the cotton regions have around 2 million enslaved people living in them.

The most important development in this shift, the making of this massive cotton-producing engine, is the internal slave trade. Estimates vary, but at least half a million people were directly moved, and they're mostly young adults reaching the peak of their productive labor capacity who are still young enough to be retrained by force.

And they *are* retrained by force. In most cases, they seem to have gone through a very disorienting time in which they are forced to pick cotton and also do all the other operations of a slave labor camp. But picking cotton is especially important because it is the bottleneck of production. They are forced to do this kind of labor and learn this kind of labor and this all happens

under the threat of violence and punishment if they don't learn how to do it fast enough.

P.R. Lockhart

Staying with that last point about the threat of violent punishment, you write about how, as the desire to increase cotton profits grows, enslavers focus on how to wring more and more profit from the labor of the enslaved.

And that increased productivity, you note, is largely a response to the threat and actual use of torture and violence. Can you talk about the ways that violence gets used as a means of forcing increasingly productive labor?

Edward E. Baptist

The first form of violence is the violence of the domestic slave trade itself, where people are chained, and forced to march hundreds of miles or are shipped around the cape of Florida. But after that, the violence is really in two forms. One is really a sort of policing violence, something we're sadly all too familiar with today, that focuses on constraining African American movement — you know, making sure that people don't leave the labor camp to which they have been sold. And with that, you see patrols and a readiness from whites to question any African Americans they don't recognize.

And once enslaved people are pretty much fixed in one place and are forced to go out into the cotton fields daily for work, what you see is during the day itself there is an increased level of supervision by whites.

In the South Carolina islands, and in a different way in the Chesapeake, enslaved Africans and African Americans often worked outside immediate white supervision,

and often outside direct measurement of their labor output.

So while in South Carolina, there's a daily task, in contrast to that, the people enslaved on the cotton fields of Mississippi and Alabama and Louisiana are forced to work all day; their work is measured and their labor output is increased over time. So we see that people are forced to work from dawn to dusk, often with direct white supervision, and those who stop working are yelled at to continue to work. At the end of the day, that output is weighed and recorded.

There's a sort of quintessentially modern idea that "if we enumerate how much people work, we can evaluate that labor better, and then we can demand more labor from them," and that's what happens [during cotton slavery]. Quotas for daily cotton picking and minimums that you have to make, or else you will be whipped, clearly increase over time.

There's a debate about whether or not if they increase because cotton seeds are better, or if because more labor is demanded and people are whipped for not producing enough, or see their quotas increase because they did produce enough. There's a debate about what is the causal factor in this increase, and I am okay with saying it's both. But you have a qualitatively different kind of labor which produces a quantifiable result — an increase of 400 percent in the average amount of cotton picked per day from 1800 to 1860.

P.R. Lockhart

I want to shift this conversation a bit, and move away from what's in your book to the book itself — how it was received after it came out, and what it says about how

America actually views and understands these kinds of histories.

One of the things you often highlight is the importance of centering the voices of enslaved men and women in the story of American slavery. And you've been criticized for doing that. At a time where the country is having more and more discussions about slavery and its impact on the present, why do you see centering the voices and lived experiences of the enslaved men and women as an important aspect of discussing this history?

Edward E. Baptist

I'll focus on two reasons. First, those voices are truly the wellspring of a tradition of interpretation. They've always been the other half — the true half — of this history [when we talk about “half that has never been told,” mentioned in the title of Baptist's book].

They're a set of crucial voices that in the US go from survivors of slavery to people like W.E.B. Du Bois and Cedric Robinson, and moving to the present in the works of economists like Sandy Darity and Darrick Hamilton. But they're a set of voices who are refusing to accept a story that says that what the survivors of slavery endured in the cotton fields has nothing to do with the wealth of the US today or the disproportion of the wealth between white people in the US on average and the wealth of black people in the US on average.



A convention of formerly enslaved people gathered in Washington, DC, in 1916. Left to right: unidentified, Anna Angales, Elizabeth Berkeley, and Sadie Thompson. Library of Congress

So on one hand, this is a tradition of people who make a very obvious point which seems clearly true to me. But on the other hand, this is a tradition that has been all too often ignored or downplayed or critiqued. It's crucial to center the voices of the people talking about their own situation not only because they understood it best and understood the facts of it, they also understood the philosophy of it.

Frederick Douglass gets told after he escapes from slavery that he needs to be charismatic, not intellectual. A white abolitionist tells him “give us the facts, we'll take care of the philosophy.” And he tells them no.

But I think centering those kinds of voices is crucial, and the interpretations that come from those voices, as a historian, that is the job. It's also an important thing when we get to my second point: that a huge component of white American identity is a quest for

historical innocence and historical exceptionalism. And this depends on having white voices telling the story.

As a white historian, the best thing I can do to disturb that is to bring nonwhite voices to the forefront in how I tell the story. Not just because these voices are correct, but because telling the story in this way helps — to a small extent — to do the work of helping a white reader be able to confront the history of their own identity formation, the history of their own wealth. I won't say that one book or one historian is going to take care of it, but that's the work that I can try to do.

P.R. Lockhart

You're now five years removed from the publication of *The Half Has Never Been Told*. Going off of your point about doing the work to push their voices to the forefront, in 2019, a year where we're commemorating 400 years since the arrival of roughly 20 enslaved men and women to what would become the United States (though not all scholars agree on this exact anniversary), do you think the country is more receptive to hearing these voices?

Edward E. Baptist

That's a tough question in 2019. I wrote the book over a long period of time, and when I started, people were writing different things and in some cases asking different questions about slavery. But there were a number of folks who had started to ask the questions that mine were inspired by, and were pushing the conversation toward — the works of Du Bois, Angela Davis, and the Caribbean tradition of study. I don't know where the conversation is going to go next.

But what I am happy to see is that because of the work of activists involved in the

Movement for Black Lives, and activists in the different reparations movements, some of the questions and critiques that a few of us historians tried to amplify are being amplified far more broadly and effectively by these forces in society. The question of reparations, for instance, comes up every 15 years or so as something that the media engages with, and there's predictably a backlash as you see a massive white resistance to the idea. And that backlash plays a role in burying these types of questions.

So I hope that whatever the policy outcomes might be, I hope that the conversations don't get buried by that resistance. And I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that we're talking about reparations in a moment where white nationalism is ascendant. And in the past, those kinds of phenomena have had the effect of not only producing violence, but they've also suppressed discussions about how we address a question of what is owed after slavery.

And the debt is so great that whites have little claim to say that something is too much to pay. They have no standing to argue that the wealth distribution should remain where it is today. There's no justifiable way — in my opinion — to make that argument. So I am worried that the violence of our time may suppress any movement toward a better resolution of the arguments implied by calls for reparations.

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'Atlanta is Gone': The Last Great City Falls to the Union



Library of Congress

By Gerald D. Swick History.net

Georgia Gov. Joseph E. Brown telegraphed a frantic plea from Atlanta to Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Richmond on June 28, 1864. He begged the chief executive to send reinforcements to the Army of Tennessee, which was being steadily forced toward Atlanta through the mountains of northern Georgia.

“I need not call your attention to the fact that this place is to the Confederacy almost as important as the heart is to the human body,” he said.

“I fully appreciate the importance of Atlanta,” Davis responded, but he had no troops to spare; his dwindling military forces had too many other points to defend.

Brown’s analogy was apt. Three railroads converged within Atlanta like arteries, carrying everything that sustained the South’s war for independence. The city itself was a major industrial center providing essentials ranging from small-arms ammunition to shoes.

In another message on July 4, Brown again insisted Atlanta must be saved—“The whole country expects this, though points of less importance should, for a time, be overrun.”

Davis probably had to suppress a rueful chuckle. From the very beginning of the war, Brown had fought with him over control of Georgia’s troops. The Confederate government was only three years old, but the governor thought it was already getting too big for its britches. The military draft instituted in April 1862 was unconstitutional and despotic in his eyes, demanding states send troops elsewhere that they might need to defend themselves.

Oh, Georgia did its share, all right, sending upward of 100,000 of its sons to serve the Confederacy, most going to Virginia. But Brown was so intent on keeping enough of them at home that the Georgia militia became known as “Joe Brown’s Pets.”

By the summer of 1864, however, the blue-clad wolf was howling at Atlanta’s door and Brown was desperate to save the self-proclaimed Gate City to the South. Atlanta, according to *The New York Times*, was “at once the workshop, the granary, the storehouse and the arsenal of the Confederacy.” The city and its environs were “of incalculable value.”

Situated near the border between the mountains in northern Georgia and the Piedmont’s rolling hills, the city was brimming with contradictions—its four-term mayor James Calhoun, for example, was a Unionist at heart but a faithful servant of the Confederacy.

Though Atlanta’s strategic importance was as obvious as a black bear in a cotton field, the city was the consolation prize in the contest between two armies vying against

each other in Georgia that summer. Yet whichever side possessed the prize by autumn would almost certainly win the war, be it Abraham Lincoln and the single nation Unionists or Jefferson Davis and the states-rights-are-supreme secessionists.

A History of Atlanta

Atlanta began in 1837 as a stake driven into the ground in the Georgia wilderness, on a ridge seven miles east of the Chattahoochee River. Stephen H. Long, chief engineer for a proposed railroad to Chattanooga, selected that spot as the southern terminus of what would become the Western & Atlantic Railroad. Settlers drifted in and a community sprang up, appropriately known as Terminus.

The name changed to Marthasville when the town was chartered in 1843, to honor the daughter of former Gov. Wilson Lumpkin, who had been prominent in establishing the railroad. Two years later, the town's name changed to Atlanta. Various stories claim that was the feminine form of Atlantic or a reference to the swift, powerful huntress of Greek mythology or the middle name of Lumpkin's daughter.

A second railroad, the Georgia Line, arrived from Augusta in 1846, and a third was completed in 1854. Money rolled in with the rails, and Atlanta boomed like no other Southern city. Its inhabitants were proud that their town was frequently compared to New York. On the eve of the Civil War, the city was Georgia's fourth largest, with some 7,750 whites, 1,900 slaves and about two dozen freemen of color. The enslaved proportion of Atlanta was low in a state where slaves accounted for 44 percent of the total population.

The victory of antislavery Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party in 1860 led slave-owners to conclude "the honor, safety and independence of the Southern people are to be found only in a Southern Confederacy," as the "Southern Manifesto" of December 1860 proclaimed. Atlantans for the most part didn't favor secession, but Georgia voted to secede, the fifth state to go.

When Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the Southern rebellion the following spring, Georgia became critical to Southern success in the war. The state's 68,000 farms produced 700,000 bales of cotton in 1860, and a sizable textile industry existed. No other state in Dixie could match the production of Georgia's 33 mills; at their wartime peak, they turned out more than a half-million yards of cloth a week. Atlanta became the Confederacy's second-largest clothing depot, after Richmond.

Georgia's location far behind the war's front lines made it the Confederate Ordnance Bureau's logical choice for a munitions center as well. Existing iron foundries, machine shops and rolling mills were converted to produce war materiel. The Confederate ironworks turned out artillery, armor plate and rails. Atlanta Machine Works produced forges for rifling muskets.

The Atlanta Arsenal was Georgia's largest. Employing nearly 5,500 workers, it was the primary ordnance supplier for the Confederacy's second-largest military force, the Army of Tennessee. Between March 1862 and war's end, the arsenal supplied more than 46 million percussion caps and 9 million rounds of ammunition—and thanks to its railroads, Atlanta could deliver those tools of death wherever they were needed.

To merely call Atlanta a rail center understates its true position. More than

1,400 of Dixie's 9,200 miles of track lay within Georgia, a total second only to Virginia, and the three railroads converging at Atlanta connected with the entire South.

The Western & Atlantic wound north through the mountains to Chattanooga to meet up with rails from Nashville and northern Alabama. Feeding off the W&A at Dalton, Ga., the East Tennessee & Georgia snaked toward Knoxville; near Kingston the W&A met the Rome Railroad that rolled west to the port town of Rome, where the Etowah River flowed into the Coosa.

Traveling southwest from Atlanta was the Atlanta & West Point. At two locations it joined a line called the Macon & Western, which penetrated southern Georgia and carried salt, fish, beef, pork and fruits from Florida. More significantly, the Macon & Western intersected the Central Line, the South's only contiguous railroad linking the Eastern Seaboard with the Mississippi Valley.

The road east from Atlanta, the Georgia Railroad, traveled to Augusta on the South Carolina border. From there, the Augusta & Savannah and the South Carolina railroads rolled on to Savannah and Charleston, respectively. Other lines branched off the South Carolina Railroad to carry trains through North Carolina to the Shenandoah Valley, Petersburg and Richmond. The South's various roads used different rail gauges, requiring frequent transfers from one train to another, but the rail systems that merged in Atlanta could get troops, war materiel and consumer goods, animals and messengers to any state of the Confederacy east of the Mississippi and some points beyond.

The railroads also made Atlanta a destination for thousands of wounded

soldiers and for refugees fleeing Union armies in other parts of the Confederacy. For a time Emilie Todd Helm, half-sister to Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, was among them.

Young Atlanta was already a rambunctious teenager compared to the South's older, more genteel cities, thanks to its rapid pre-war population growth. But its unprecedented population influx during the war blew the doors wide open.

Not enough lime could be procured to eliminate the stench from the city's outhouses. Rail passengers had to weave their way among stretchers of groaning, flyblown wounded at the depot. Deserters and stragglers wandered in. Crime soared. Anything not nailed down was fair game for thieves; if it was nailed down, they would simply look for a crowbar to pry it loose.

Petty thievery wasn't the worst crime. The city was horrified when a beautiful young widow who had fed Memphis for Atlanta was found raped and strangled in her bed. No one was ever charged. Shopkeepers and thieves, society matrons and destitute widows, plantation owners and slaves, soldiers and deserters all pressed together in Atlanta's streets. But someone was coming who would make its present troubles seem pale.

The Last Link of the Confederacy

In the summer of 1864, the *York Herald* declared Atlanta "The last link which binds together the southwestern and northeastern sections of the rebel Confederacy. Break it, and those sections fall asunder."

Breaking that link was the job of "Uncle Billy," Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh

Sherman, who had already led troops at Shiloh, Vicksburg and Chattanooga.

When Ulysses S. Grant was made commander of all Union armies in March 1864, he named Sherman his replacement in charge of the Military Division of the Mississippi—an area from the Appalachians to the Mississippi River.

Sherman assembled at Chattanooga a force comprised of the Army of the Cumberland under Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas (61,000 officers and men, and 9,000 cavalry), the Army of the Tennessee under Maj. Gen. James B. McPherson (24,000) and the Army of the Ohio commanded by Maj. Gen. John Schofield (13,000, including a cavalry division). Combined, they boasted about 250 artillery pieces. About 10,000 of the 110,000-man total would have to remain at Chattanooga to guard Sherman's railroad supply line from Nashville.

When Sherman's force crossed the Georgia line in early May, his orders from Grant were to "break up" the opposing army, then "get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources." If he couldn't destroy the enemy's army, he had to at least keep it from sending reinforcements north to where Grant was engaging Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

Grant's instructions made no direct mention of Atlanta, but both men had been supply officers and knew the rail line from Nashville to Atlanta was crucial to the Georgia campaign. Sherman's line of march, therefore, would be aimed toward the Gate City.

His first and most important order of business, however, was to "break up" the

opposing army. Enemy armies, not cities, were now the primary goal—Grant intended to destroy the South's ability to make war. Nashville had fallen in February 1862; the rebellion had continued. New Orleans had fallen. The rebellion continued. Memphis, Vicksburg, Chattanooga—none of those victories had ended the war. As important as Atlanta was, Sherman's most important target was the Army of Tennessee, strongly entrenched at Dalton under the leadership of a new commander.

Georgia in the Civil War

General Joseph Johnston—"Old Joe," his soldiers called him—had been sentenced to command the Army of Tennessee when its former leader, Braxton Bragg, resigned following the Confederate debacle at Chattanooga in late November. "Sentenced," because the paranoid Johnston suspected Jeff Davis and a circle of anti-Johnstonites had sent him to Georgia in order to destroy his career, which, frankly, hadn't been all that stellar so far despite a respectable record as a member of the U.S. Army before the war.

When he commanded in Virginia, the Federals had advanced to within a few miles of Richmond before Johnston was wounded, Robert E. Lee was put in command and the Yankees were driven back. Assigned to supervise the Department of the West, Johnston showed little imagination or vigor in the post.

Now at Dalton, he had been handed a dispirited, hungry army that had seen its blood shed on too many fields for no gain. In the soldiers' view, even its stunning rout of the Army of the Cumberland at Chickamauga the previous September had been tossed aside like an old chicken bone when Bragg chose to lay siege to

Chattanooga rather than crush the disordered and demoralized foe huddled below the mountains. Lincoln's War Department sent Grant, victor of Fort Donelson, Shiloh and Vicksburg, to end the siege. Bragg's army, its morale stretched as thin as its lines on the heights above Chattanooga, broke on Missionary Ridge and fed into Georgia.

Johnston had worked since January to restore morale, secure supplies, build up his army and create a series of defensive positions in the mountains of northern Georgia. But Jefferson Davis didn't want Johnston to fight from defensive positions. Misled as to the true condition of the Army of Tennessee, Davis wanted Johnston to recapture eastern Tennessee and carry the war to Sherman's army. With about 55,000 men and 154 guns, Johnston saw no hope for initiating an attack. Old Joe hoped instead to draw Uncle Billy into costly assaults on fortified positions, and then finish off the weakened Northern horde.

Sherman was having none of it. He had surveyed northern Georgia for the U.S. Army 20 years earlier and knew the terrain better than Johnston did. In the following weeks he repeatedly maneuvered the Southern forces out of one strong position after another, making only one ill-advised frontal assault at Kennesaw Mountain.

By mid-July he had also maneuvered Johnston out of a job. The Confederate army had fallen all the way back to fortifications just outside Atlanta. Davis and his military adviser—Bragg, whom Johnston had replaced—concluded Old Joe would not fight outside entrenchments. On July 17 they replaced him with a subordinate, feisty John Bell Hood, who'd had his left arm mangled by shrapnel at Gettysburg and then lost his right leg at Chickamauga.

Hood attacked a portion of the Federal force on July 20 while it was crossing Peach Tree Creek a few miles north of town. Desperate fighting, much of it hand-to-hand, diminished Hood's army by nearly 5,000 men; Sherman's by less than 2,000. The attack failed.

Still, Atlanta mocked Sherman's attempts to capture it. The year before, Col. Lemuel P. Grant, a native of Maine who had become the chief engineer of the Department of Georgia, devised a system of defenses around the city. Initially 10–12 miles of fortifications were built a mile from the city's center, with trenches, palisades and 17 redoubts holding five artillery pieces each. A second line was built behind the first; more forts were added and lines extended.

Local planters were ordered to lend slaves to provide the labor. Thousands of enslaved workers arrived in Atlanta to saw timbers, dig trenches in the red Georgia clay and cut down all trees on the hills in front of the breastworks so defenders would have clear fields of fire. They toiled in the Georgia heat, subsisting on barely enough food to keep them alive. Some managed to slip away; a few were hidden by courageous Unionists on the outskirts of the city.

When Sherman arrived in 1864, he faced the most heavily fortified city south of Richmond. Assaults would be suicidal—he had lost enough men using those tactics at Vicksburg and Kennesaw—but if he couldn't capture the city, he would destroy it.

The first artillery shell went whistling into Atlanta on July 20, the day of the Battle of Peach Tree Creek. For more than a month, hundreds of shells, some as large as 33 pounds, daily damaged buildings, plowed up yards, exploded overhead and killed or

wounded civilians and soldiers. Citizens went about their business, and thieves still made off with whatever they could. Atlanta refused to surrender—and time was running out.

Northern states would hold elections in October for state officials and congressional representatives. The presidential election would follow on November 8. Both would be referenda on Lincoln's policies, and the North was war-weary. More than three years of carnage had not restored the Union, and many Northerners' support for the struggle had dimmed because they believed Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made it a war in which white men were dying to free black men. That might play well in the abolitionist stronghold of New England, but not in states west of the Ohio River. Even Pennsylvania was teetering. Northern Democrats were offering the nation an "honorable peace," promising to negotiate an end to the war and possibly even restore the Union, with slavery intact. Their candidate was the former commander of the Army of the Potomac, Maj. Gen. George McClellan.

Lincoln himself doubted he would win re-election. Newspaper reports of Grant's early battles in Virginia had grossly exaggerated their effect on Confederate forces, creating unrealistic hopes in the North. That euphoria seeped away with the blood oozing from Grant's long stream of ambulances. Lee was slowly being forced back toward Richmond, but he remained unbeaten and continued to prove that he could turn seeming defeat into stunning victory.

Sherman, too, was providing Northern newspapers with extensive casualty lists, though not on the scale of Grant's. The Battle of Atlanta on July 22 cost 8,500 Confederate casualties and 3,600 Union—

including James McPherson. The battle at Ezra Church, on July 28, produced 3,500 Confederate casualties, but just 600 Union.

Sherman's men hadn't yet captured Atlanta, but they were far closer to that prize than Grant was to Richmond. The outcome of November's election, it seemed, lay on Sherman's shoulders— an ironic twist of fate, considering he personally would accept "a sentence to be hanged and damned with infinitely more composure than to be elected chief executive of this nation."

Sherman Takes Atlanta

All the railroads into Atlanta had been severed except the lines south of town. On August 26 the city woke to a sound it had not heard in more than a month: silence. No shells came shrieking over the rooftops. No musketry crackled. When Confederates ventured out of their trenches, they found a large portion of Sherman's works abandoned. Had "the vandals" been starved out and gone home?

Hardly. Sixty thousand Federals were slipping around Atlanta to cut Hood's last line of supply. The Confederate commander learned they were tearing up tracks at Jonesboro, and sent two corps on a night march to attack them. When the Battle of Jonesboro was over, 2,000 of Hood's men lay dead or wounded. Sherman had lost fewer than 200.

Even "give them the bayonet" Hood had to acknowledge he could no longer defend the city. On the night of September 1 an explosion rocked Atlanta, sending flames into the sky that were visible two miles away. A teenage girl, Mary Rawson, awoke to see the night sky "in a perfect glow," and flaming rockets bursting overhead. "Sparks

filled the air with innumerable spangles,” she recalled.

Unable to save 28 boxcars loaded with munitions, staff officers set fire to them as Hood evacuated his army. The resulting explosion fattened every building for hundreds of yards around, twisted iron rails and reduced railroad ties to splinters.

The next day, Mayor James Calhoun led a party of the city’s Unionists to surrender Atlanta.

“Atlanta is ours and fairly won,” Sherman telegraphed Lincoln on September 2. Throughout the North cannons roared and church bells clanged to celebrate the victory, while in Dixie diarist Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote, “Atlanta, indeed, is gone. Well, that agony is over. ...No hope, but we will try to have no fear.”

The butcher’s bill for the summer’s campaign in Georgia came to 31,600 dead, wounded and missing for the Federals and nearly 31,000 for the Confederates. For Unionists, the sacrifice was worth it. The fall of Atlanta, plus naval success at Mobile Bay, Ala., and Union victories in the Shenandoah Valley buoyed Northern confidence in Lincoln’s war policies.

The Union and Confederate commanders in Georgia both failed in their primary goal—destruction of the opposing army—but if Atlanta was a consolation prize, it was a grand one. The question of whether Johnston’s more conservative tactics might have held the city until after the Northern elections fueled post-war debate.

Sherman evacuated all civilians from the city, claiming he intended to fortify the town. But in actuality, he was going to fulfill his orders to “get into the interior of the

enemy’s country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources.”

He planned to make Georgia howl.

Gerald D. Swick has previously written about the Civil War for American History, Wonderful West Virginia and America’s Civil War. For more on the contest for Atlanta he recommends The Bonfire: The Siege and Burning of Atlanta by Marc Worthman and Atlanta 1864 by Richard M. McMurry.