

## *Death and the Civil War*

### *Program Transcript*

**Narrator:** On the evening of May 10th, 1864 -- as the Civil War ground on into its fourth straight year -- 26-year-old James Robert Montgomery, a private in the Confederate Signal Corps in Virginia, wrote a letter to his father back home in Camden, Mississippi, dripping blood on the paper as he wrote, from the horrific arm wound he had sustained a few hours earlier.

**Civil War soldier (Actor, audio):** Dear Father. This is my last letter to you. I have been struck by a piece of shell and my right shoulder is horribly mangled and I know death is inevitable. I am very weak but I write to you because I know you would be delighted to read a word from your dying son. I know death is near, that I will die far from home and friends of my early youth but I have friends here too who are kind to me. My friend Fairfax will write you at my request and give you the particulars of my death. My grave will be marked so that you may visit it if you desire to do so. It is optionary with you whether you let my remains rest here or in Mississippi. I would like to rest in the graveyard with my dear mother and brothers but it's a matter of minor importance. Give my love to all my friends. My strength fails me. My horse and my equipments will be left for you. Again, a long farewell to you. May we meet in heaven. Your dying son, J. R. Montgomery

**Narrator:** James Montgomery's friend, Fairfax, did write soon thereafter -- forwarding some of his effects -- and assuring his father that he had been conscious to the end, and that he had died at peace with himself and his maker. But it was little consolation. Though the grave had been marked, the family was never able to find it, and was thus never able to realize their fond hope of bringing their dead son home.

**Slate:** Death and the Civil War

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**Walt Whitman (Actor, audio):** The dead, the dead, the dead -- our dead -- or South or North, ours all -- our young men once so handsome and so joyous, taken from us -- the son from the mother, the husband from the wife, the dear friend from the dear friend...And everywhere among these countless graves we see, and ages yet may see, on monuments and gravestones, singly or in masses, to thousands or tens of thousands, the significant word Unknown. Walt Whitman, 1865

**Slate:** March 4, 1861, Abraham Lincoln's inauguration, Washington, D.C.

**Narrator:** Nothing in the experience of the 31 million people living in America on the eve of the Civil War could have prepared Americans for what was about to break over them over the next four years. It was only in part the shocking trauma of secession itself -- as the long festering debate over freedom and slavery -- union and states rights -- burst into the open following Abraham Lincoln's election in November 1860, and tore the country in two.

Something else would challenge Americans over the next four years -- something even more fundamental -- something different from the task of saving or dividing a nation, ending or maintaining slavery, or winning a military conflict. With the coming of the Civil War -- the first modern war, the first mass war of the modern age -- death would enter the experience of the American people, and the body politic of the American nation, as it never had before, on a scale and in a manner no one had ever imagined possible, and under circumstances for which the nation would prove completely unprepared.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** History is full of brutal surprises that we really don't see coming. Nobody predicted Antietam. Nobody predicted Gettysburg. What the Civil War brought was this terrible modern confrontation of a set of old 18th and 19th Century values with modern warfare -- and the result of course is mass slaughter that is harder and harder for anyone to explain even to themselves.

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**Narrator:** The unimaginable scale of the slaughter, the sheer numbers of the dead, would be all but impossible to comprehend. Nearly two and a half percent of the population would die in the conflict -- an estimated 750,000 people in all -- more than in all other American wars combined. Never before, and never since, have so many Americans died in any war, by any measure or reckoning.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Transpose the percentage of dead that mid-19th-century America faced into our own time -- seven million dead, if we had the same percentage. What would we, as a nation today, be like if we faced the loss of seven million individuals? And so it invaded just about everyone's life, in one way or another.

**Narrator:** The enormous tide of death unleashed by the war posed challenges for which there were no ready answers when the war began; challenges so large, they frequently overwhelmed the abilities of individuals and institutions to respond to them; challenges that called forth -- slowly at first, by fits and starts -- immense and eventually heroic efforts by individuals, groups and the government, as Americans worked to improvise new solutions, new institutions, new ways of coping with death on an unimaginable scale.

Before the Civil War, there were no national cemeteries in America. No provisions for identifying the dead, or for notifying next of kin, or for providing aid to the suffering families of dead veterans. No federal relief organizations, no effective ambulance corps, no adequate federal hospitals, no federal provisions for burying the dead. No Arlington Cemetery. No Memorial Day.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** The United States embarked on a new relationship with death during the Civil War in a whole series of ways. As a nation, it embarked on a new relationship with death because its survival would be assured and defined by the deaths of so many hundreds thousands of people.

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So it would become inseparable from death in that sense. In a second way, the United States would develop a new relationship with death in a national sense, because of the pension system, the reburial system, the bureaucracy of death -- that would transform the nature of the federal government. So it would become a different nation -- a stronger, more centralized nation with more responsibilities -- partly because of taking on these obligations that would grow out of Civil War death. But then there are all the changes for individuals, who were living in a world of mourning and loss in the North, and in the South, where ultimately 20 percent of the white men of military age were going to die, and where everyone had lost a loved one.

And so lives were shattered, in undefined ways, often because so many of the dead were unknown. And ideas about what death was would be changed by the intensity and widespread nature of this experience.

**Mark S. Schantz, Historian:** Certainly, as we think about the obligation of citizens to the state, and what the state owes its citizens -- particularly with regard to the thing that we, in some sense, is the only thing we really own, which is our own body and our own mortality. The Civil War made us rethink that definition as a country, and as a people. What do governments owe to their bodies -- to the bodies that make them up? And that becomes a central question in the war. In the Civil War, I think we come as a nation to the insistence that citizenship is predicated on the willingness of people to lay down their lives for the state. That's the absolute bottom line.

So I think the war casts not just a long shadow but a long sense of reality over who we are -- and how we deal with, really, those fundamental questions. You know everybody dies -- our mortality is assured. But the way we grapple with that reality changes over time. And the Civil War shows us that they did change, and how they changed. And to be alive to that change is something that the Civil War, I think, asks us to do.

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**Slate: Dying**

**Thomas Lynch, Poet and Undertaker:** I think when it comes to the sort of essentials for a good death -- a good funeral -- the essentials are a corpse, mourners -- somebody to broker the changed relationship between the living and the dead -- the peace between them -- something to say a version of, "Behold, I show you a mystery" -- and then transport -- some movement, do you know? -- from here to there. We get them home again. We get them to the further shore. We get them into their grave, their tomb, their fire, up into the tree. We get them -- if we, you know, live elsewhere -- into the side of the mountain, where the birds come and pick the bones clean, and then we describe the birds as holy. It's what we do. And humans, I mean, we've been doing it for 40 or 50,000 years. And the routine -- the fashion's, changed a little bit -- but the fundamental business is the same: corpse -- mourners -- sacred text -- transport. We move them.

What changed about that with the Civil War was not only the scope of mortality, but the geographics changed.

**Narrator:** America on the eve of the Civil War was a profoundly religious place -- a place of deeply rooted and almost universally held assumptions and beliefs -- about the meaning of death and dying, about the nature of God and the afterlife -- and about what constituted a good death, and the right way to die.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** One of the most striking differences between us in the 21st century and the inhabitants of the 19th century is our attitudes about death. And death was then very much a part of life, and seen as something that needed to be thought about constantly in order to live well, and, ultimately, to die well. This was very much a Christian approach to dying, and the United States was overwhelmingly Christian at this time. Approximately four times as many people attended church every week as voted in the election of 1860. And you could tell by watching how someone died what that life before

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had meant, and what the eternal life beyond was likely to be like. And an individual who was dying would die at home -- this was very much a part of Victorian culture, and defined a good death -- would be surrounded by loved ones, would indicate a readiness to die... a welcoming embrace of salvation and Christian principles; and then often last words for the loved ones surrounding the dying person.

**Mark Shantz, Historian:** From the 1820s on up until the Civil War begins there was this great evangelical awakening, North and South, going across the country. And with that comes a kind of totally redefined, more corporeal vision of heaven -- that all of our bodies will be reconstituted, and we'll have a big family reunion in heaven -- and we'll recognize each other, and be able to basically pick up where we left off. What you have is a universe that is telling people, "This is how it's going to be. You will see everyone that you know. And, in fact, you'll live in a purified body, and it will be whole. It probably will never get dark. There may not be oceans to separate us." I mean, it's the ultimate victory. Your body will come together again, no matter what's done to it. And you have a generation of people who have been taught, and understand that my husband -- my brother -- my son -- will be whole -- with me. And it's only a matter of time.

**Slate:** April 12 - 14, 1861, Fort Sumter, 15 wounded. 0 dead.

**Narrator:** It began as a lark, almost as a relief for many if not most Americans -- as a welcome bursting of the floodgates after decades of rising sectional mistrust, tension and animosity.

**George F. Will, Columnist:** The soldiers went off to war expecting this would be quick. The Southerners thought, "We have a cavalier tradition, we have a martial tradition. We'll bloody their nose and they'll think better of this. And they'll say let the erring sisters go in peace and we'll divide the country." The North thought, "Well, we'll just see about that. We're in the North, we're more industrial, we'll march off and settle this."

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**Mark S. Schantz, Historian:** If you've got Lincoln recruiting soldiers for 90 days, that tells you, in part, what people are thinking of the duration of the war -- that this will be fairly quick. And so I think the expectations for casualties, based on anything Americans had experienced before, would have just been infinitesimal.

**Narrator:** For three months, the fledgling armies parried and feinted, marched and counter-marched, skirmished and regrouped. By mid-June, the combined death toll stood at just 20. And then came summer, and the first intimation of what was to come -- at the battle of Bull Run, or Manassas, as the Confederates called it.

On July 21st, two enormous armies, nearly 60,000 men in all, blundered into each other on a field of battle, just 30 miles from Washington, D.C., in the lush Virginia farmland outside the tiny town of Manassas Junction. The day ended in a shocking and ignominious Union defeat and bloody rout -- one that stunned soldiers, officers, politicians and the public on both sides when the casualty figures came in. Nine hundred men in all had been killed and 2,700 wounded -- nearly half the battlefield deaths of the entire two-year long Mexican War -- in just 12 hours.

Three months after Fort Sumter, hopes of a brief and all but bloodless war, had begun to fade away.

**Slate:** August 10, 1861, Wilson's Creek, 2,349 casualties. 488 dead. March 6 - 8, 1862, Pea Ridge, 3,384 casualties. 550 dead. April 6 - 7, 1862, Shiloh, 23,741 casualties. 3,477 dead.

**George F. Will, Columnist:** It wasn't, I suppose, until Shiloh in the spring of '62 that both sides began to realize that massed armies clashing like this were going to be not decisive in any one battle. That it was going to be a war of attrition, a war of railroads of manufacturing, a modern war in other words: a war of societies against one another. That the North would

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have a great advantage but it would be an advantage brought to bear slowly and manifested incrementally and lubricated at every step of the way by blood.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Part of the death toll is the result of a military undertaking that engages such a large percentage of the population. Two point one million Northerners were mobilized -- about 880,000 Southerners. And it's also one in which there are ways to kill people that are newly developed, so the technology enables a level of killing -- weapons with much greater range -- rifled muskets, which have a greatly enhanced range over the smoothbore predecessors.

**J. David Hacker, Historian:** It is a perfect storm in that regard. The war has the misfortune of being fought at a time when military tactics, military strategy, was a step behind technology -- and of being fought about 10 years before we really have a proper understanding of what causes disease, how to prevent disease from breaking out, and how to treat what diseases we have. And, as a result, you bring all these men in from these isolated communities; they suffer massive outbreaks of camp diseases, and two out of three, roughly, of Civil War deaths are occurring in camps as a result of disease.

**Narrator:** What struck most people exposed to the horror of the new battlefield conditions was the almost complete lack of preparation for the bloody tide of death flooding off them. No one seemed to be in charge.

**Mark S. Schantz, Historian:** There's no systematic infrastructure for gathering the dead; for helping to identify them; for getting them home. There's no infrastructure for handling tens of thousands of maimed and dead soldiers. And so, you know, after Shiloh, bodies are just laying around on the field, and wild hogs are running out.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** I think it would have been inconceivable to people that they would have needed the scale of intervention that they should have had. And

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as the numbers consistently increased over the first years of the war, each battle surprised people -- because it was more than they ever thought was possible. And so they were always one assumption behind as they thought about death.

**Narrator:** From the start, in the North and the South, individuals and volunteer organizations stepped in to try to fill the void.

In June 1861, a women's group in New York City persuaded Abraham Lincoln to authorize the creation of a private relief agency -- the U.S. Sanitary Commission -- a volunteer group intended to help organize relief for the Union wounded and dead. Raising funds through private and community donations, and staffed in large part by volunteers, many of them women, it would soon prove invaluable, as would other voluntary organizations, like the U.S. Christian Commission.

As the number of dead and wounded soldiers coming into Washington swelled across the first year of the war, a 39-year-old clerk in the U.S. Patent Office named Clara Barton, saw first hand how ill-prepared the Army Medical Department was -- and lobbied the War Department to let her bring her own medical supplies to the battlefields. Outfitting her own wagon with bandages, and all the supplies she could gather, Barton headed out to the grimmest battlefields of the war as it relentlessly escalated over the next year and a half.

In the spring of 1862, Frederick Law Olmsted -- the designer of Central Park and now the director of the U.S. Sanitary Commission -- came south, to oversee relief efforts, following Shiloh and the bloody battles on the Virginia Peninsula. He was shocked by the inadequacy of the provisions made by the U.S. government, and watched silently as shiploads and trainloads of dead and wounded men were unloaded at the wharf.

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**Frederick Law Olmsted (Actor, audio):** They arrived, dead and alive together, in the same close boxcar, many with awful wounds festering. In this republic of suffering, individuals do not often become very strongly marked in one's mind.

**Narrator:** The systems in place in the Confederacy were even more rudimentary. Volunteer, church, and state-based charitable organizations, rose up in the South, too. But hampered from the start by fewer resources, Southerners would soon be even more overwhelmed than their Northern counterparts by the logistical challenges of grappling with so many dead soldiers.

**Slate:** May 31, 1862, Seven Pines, 11,165 casualties. 1,770 dead. June 27, 1862, Gaines Mill, 14,830 casualties. 2,377 dead. July 1, 1862, Malvern Hill, 8,657 casualties. 1,183 dead. August 28, 1862, Second Manassas, 25,251 casualties. 3,205 dead.

**Narrator:** Blown apart by canister or shell, shot through the head or lungs or guts, bleeding to death in the no man's land between the lines, or succumbing to typhoid fever or dysentery in a filthy army hospital or enemy prison camp a thousand miles away from home -- the brutal circumstances and great distances of the war shook to the core deeply held beliefs about the nature of the good death, and the right way to die.

Where sermons and religious tracts provided lessons about life's appropriate end, the battlefields and hastily improvised hospitals of the war provided material for a different sort of lesson -- one on how not to die: suddenly, violently, with little or no time to prepare for the end -- far from home, often alone, with no last words to impart, or a familiar face to look on -- unsurrounded by family or friends -- uncomforted by mothers, sisters and wives.

Anguished at the prospect of dying far from home, and determined not to die alone, soldiers worked to provide themselves with surrogates for the good death -- making pacts with tent mates and fellow soldiers to convey to their families what had happened to them in their final

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hours writing letters, crafting last words and sending them home through friends and comrades.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** What I find so striking is the kinds of improvisation that soldiers and the civilians around them in the battlefield -- nurses, doctors, others -- brought, to try bring the realities of the good death even in these almost-impossible situations. One of the most striking of these improvisations is the reports of soldiers on battlefields who surrounded themselves with pictures of their loved ones. Photography had just become a force in American life, and so soldiers could have these little photographs, often in cases, that they would take with them of their family members. And so the idea of a soldier creating his domestic deathbed on a battlefield by putting all these pictures around himself is just heart-wrenching.

**Narrator:** It was often complete strangers who would take upon themselves the mundane but essential and intensely personal work of death.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Dear Madam, As you in all probability have not heard of the death of your husband and as I was a witness to his death, I consider it my duty to write to you although I am a stranger to you. He died happy and I certainly think that he is now better off. A few minutes before he breathed his last he sang, "Jesus can make a dying bed as soft as downy pillows are," and said he would of liked to have seen you before he died. He said that the Lord's will be done and for you to meet him in heaven. He died as I wish to die and as I believe all persons wish to.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** Mr. William K. Rash. Your son R. A. Rash is no more. The Grim monster death has ravaged him -- but one consolation he died in the full discharge of his duty in the defense of his home and country.

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**Thomas Lynch, Poet and Undertaker:** What the Civil War showed us is the obligation of the living to care for the dead -- to do their best to get them home -- or at least to embody them in some way -- so they do not fall off the earth -- the implements, and the possessions, and the family Bibles, and the made-up stories about pre-death salvations. And the letters written home -- by surgeons who amputated limbs before the death occurred -- these types of kindnesses -- this is like Humanity 101 -- we do this for one another. Because somehow we see in ourselves the possibility -- this could happen to one of ours -- and we want this kindness done to us. And the kindness is not that we resurrect the dead -- the kindness is that we bear the bad news home.

**Narrator:** On battlefields where death could come with terrifying suddenness, many soldiers wrote home in the hours before the fighting began -- to share what might prove to be their last words with family members in advance.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** I wish you to have my last words and thoughts. Remember me as one who always showed his worst side and who was perhaps better than he seemed. I shall hope to survive and meet you again. But it may not be so, and so I have expressed myself in the possible view of a fatal result.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** Molly, I have often thought if I have to die on the battlefield, if some kind friend would just lay my Bible under my head and your likeness on my breast with the golden curls of hair in it, that it would be enough.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** This is the last you may ever hear from me. I have time to tell you I died like a man.

**Narrator:** On rare occasions, soldiers found themselves in a position to communicate with far away loved ones at the very moment of death itself.

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**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** September 17th, 1862. Near Sharpsburg. On the field. Dear Mother, It is a misty moisty morning. We are engaging the enemy and are drawn up in support of Hooker who is now banging away most briskly. I write in the saddle to send you my love and to say that I am very well so far. Dearest mother, I am wounded so as to be helpless. Goodbye if so it must be I think I die in victory.... Dearest love to father and all my dear brothers. Our troops have left the part of the field where I lay -- Mother, Mrs. Wilder. All is well with those that have faith.

**Narrator:** It was not only men on the field of battle who faced death in great numbers, under horrific conditions, far from home. From the moment hostilities began, fugitives slaves began fleeing plantations and farms in the south by the thousands -- streaming north across the Union lines in great numbers -- braving death at the hands of armed Home Guards, who scoured the woods and swamps hunting down fugitives with shotguns. Hoping to find freedom, the tens of thousands of men, women and children who crowded into the teeming Union "contraband" camps instead faced nightmarish conditions, inadequate food and shelter, and life-threatening illnesses and epidemics.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** They were essentially America's first version of large refugee camps. And some of them became disease-ridden death traps. We have plenty of accounts now of people dying -- like 10 a day, 20 a day in some of these contraband camps -- the young and the old -- people who had trekked hundreds of miles sometimes to get to these contraband camps. Freedom sometimes meant dying of disease in a refugee station somewhere in the Mississippi Valley or somewhere on the rim of Tennessee or outside Washington, D.C.

**Narrator:** Slavery itself had placed African Americans on a level of intimacy with death few white Americans could comprehend.

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**T. Strother (Actor, audio):** To suppose that slavery, the accursed thing, could be abolished peacefully and laid aside innocently -- after having plundered cradles, separated husbands and wives, parents and children; and after having starved to death, worked to death, whipped to death, run to death, burned to death, lied to death, kicked and cuffed to death, and grieved to death, a whole nation of people -- would be the greatest ignorance under the sun.

**Vincent Brown, Historian:** It's a crushing and terrible burden to bear to actually have to live your life through the will and desires of another. You can be killed at the whim of a master. You can be beaten summarily and there's nothing to stop a master from doing that. For African Americans, they're used to, every day, kind of understanding that they have, you know, no rights of citizenship, certainly, but almost don't have the full rights of personhood in the slave societies of the South. And so there's a kind of civil death there that they're suffering all along. If it's not death, it's less than full life. And there were slaves who would think death would be preferable to life under those conditions.

**Narrator:** As the death tolls mounted, and the number of fugitive slaves crowding the contraband camps grew larger, abolitionist leaders like Henry Highland Garnet and Frederick Douglass urged the Lincoln administration to take the boldest possible actions -- to free the slaves and to end the long-standing federal prohibition barring black men from fighting and dying in the U.S. Army -- offering a distinctively African American understanding of the difference between a bad death and a good one.

A bad death was death experienced under the crushing weight of slavery. A good death was death experienced by free men, battling to end evil, in the world.

**Slate:** Burying

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**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** September 5th, 1862. Day before yesterday we marched over the battleground. All of our men had been buried, but the Yankees lay just as they were killed. I never saw such a scene before. It must have been nearly a thousand. Our wagon actually ran over the dead bodies in the road. I don't suppose the dead Yankees of that fight will ever be buried. It will be an awful job to those who do it, if it is ever done.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** One of the most stunning realizations I've ever had as a historian is how much change there was in the sense of responsibility towards the dead in the course of the very short period of the Civil War. At the beginning of the war there was no sense that the federal government had a responsibility towards the bodies of soldiers lost in service to the state, and the Confederate government did not have that sense of responsibility either. There was no returning of bodies; or sense that bodies needed to be identified; or that there needed to be communication with families about what had happened to their loved ones.

**Narrator:** When the war began, commanding officers in both armies had been issued cursory general orders -- making them responsible -- in so far as circumstances permitted -- for the "decent interment" of the fallen. But as the war escalated, the existing resources were quickly overwhelmed -- and as late as September 1862, the Union army still had no regular burial details -- no grave registration units -- any adequate ambulance corps -- to remove the dead and dying from the field of battle.

Soldiers on both sides worried deeply, and with reason, about what would happen to their remains. "I have a horror," one soldier from South Carolina wrote, "of being thrown out in a neglected place or being trampled on as I have seen a number of graves here."

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** It is dreadful to contemplate being killed on the field of battle without a kind hand to hide one's remains from the eye of the world or the gnawing of animals and buzzards.

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**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** They dig holes and pile them in like dead cattle and have teams to draw them together, like picking up pumpkins.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** It is dreadful... to see the poor soldier just thrown in a ditch...and covered over without any box...

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** This is not how we bury folks at home.

**Slate:** September 17, 1862, Antietam, 23,607 casualties. 6,500 dead.

**Narrator:** Even in a very brutal conflict, Antietam stood out. Soldiers on both sides fought with a kind of madness -- a super-adrenalized fury -- heedless of the normal instincts of self-preservation.

Clara Barton arrived around noon -- as the bloodshed raged on the northern edge of a massive cornfield -- one of the worst killing places. She watched silently as surgeons hastily dressed mortal wounds with corn husks -- handed over the wagon load of medical supplies she had spent much of the past year gathering -- then did what she could to help scores of hideously wounded and dying men -- supplying lanterns for the surgeons from her wagon when the sun went down and the battle ended. The casualties had been staggering.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** The dead were almost wholly unburied, and the stench arising from it was such as to breed a pestilence. Stretched along, in one straight line, ready for interment -- at least a thousand blackened bloated corpses -- with blood and gas protruding from every orifice, and maggots holding high carnival over their heads.

**Narrator:** Five days after the battle of Antietam hundreds of Confederate corpses still lay rotting on the field. Origen Bingham, of the 137th Pennsylvania, was assigned with his

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regiment to bury the neglected dead. It was, he said, "the most disagreeable duty that could have been assigned to us. Tongue cannot describe the horrible sight."

To steel his troops to the hideous work, Bingham secured permission from the provost marshal's office to buy liquor for his men. One federal burial party found another way to make the work go faster, and simply threw 58 dead Confederate soldiers down a local farmer's well.

**Mark S. Schantz, Historian:** Five days after Antietam, Lincoln is out with a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and the war publicly begins to shift in its purpose. And then we get *The Dead of Antietam*, the Brady exhibit, which begins to give a kind of palpable physical shape to those bodies -- who have sacrificed to free other bodies. So both of those things begin to get definition by the end of 1862 -- emancipation and how we're going to deal with death in the war.

**Narrator:** Antietam had been far from a clear-cut Union victory. But the Union forces had not given ground. They had ended Lee's invasion of the North, at least for the time being -- and despite the enormous carnage, the bloody battle had given Abraham Lincoln the victory he needed -- and the additional military incentive -- to make public his intention to emancipate the slaves in states under rebellion, effective three months later.

On January 1st, 1863, the Proclamation went into effect. Almost immediately, tens of thousands of free blacks from the North and fugitive slaves from across the South rushed to join the Union army. Eager to fight, and if need be die in the cause of freedom and of saving a union now openly committed to emancipation, at least in part, the new black recruits would be paid less than their white counterparts -- routinely assigned the most menial and least desirable tasks -- including work on the horrific burial details -- and when finally allowed to fight, often given the most dangerous assignments.

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Of the 180,000 black Americans who would eventually serve in the Union army, one in five would perish.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** African-American soldiers can't expect any quarter from Confederates. They've known this from their lives as slaves. They've known that if they rise up, that the reaction will be so extreme as to force them not to contemplate it again.

**Narrator:** Unlike their white northern counterparts, black soldiers were routinely killed rather than being taken prisoners, and atrocities were common -- most notoriously at the battle of Fort Pillow in 1864 -- when nearly two-thirds of the approximately 300 black soldiers present were killed after having surrendered -- and their bodies thrown into the Wichita River.

**Slate:** Naming

**David W. Blight, Historian:** Back at the front, men -- soldiers on the line, officers, civilians who followed the army, and eventually families who went looking for their dead loved ones -- see the carnage of war...the dismembering of bodies and the loss of bodies, the loss of identities altogether. Could you even find Johnny if you went off to the front to find him? Very often the answer was "no." And even if you did find him he might be in a mass grave -- could you get him reinterred? People were confronted now with not only the death of youth, the death of loved ones, but death in faraway places -- death without a story wrapped around it. Death without knowing how did this happen.

**Civil War Soldier's Father (Actor, audio):** If I could have got to our child, and spoken loving and encouraging words to him, and held his dear hand in mine, and received his last breath, but it was not so to be...

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**J. David Hacker, Historian:** Well, neither the Confederate States of America or the federal government really had a system of personnel records when the war began... Statistics were collected, but the emphasis wasn't on the individual soldier. And there was no systematic attempt to collect who died -- to notify survivors. So people went missing; people went buried unidentified. The missing in action disappear, and never followed completely.

**Narrator:** Every great battle sent civilian populations on a mad quest for information. With no official responsibility on either side for notifying next of kin, newspapers north and south published long lists of the casualties after every major engagement, gleaned from official military reports. Families and friends anxiously poured over them -- hoping against hope not to see a familiar name.

**Woman (Actor, audio):** I do feel too anxious to see the papers and get the list of casualties from Co. K. And yet I dread to see it.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Then there was the problem of: Are you sure your loved one's dead? Has he been correctly identified? Because there were not formal processes, there were not dog tags, there were not adequate processes of notification -- those were informal, as well.

**Narrator:** The casualty lists were frustratingly inaccurate and incomplete. Sons or brothers listed as "slightly wounded" often turned out to be dead, husbands reported as "killed in action" later appeared unharmed.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** People were so eager for signs about the deaths of their absent loved ones -- what they were denied by not having them at home. When you were in New York State, and you were told that your son or husband had died in Virginia -- how could you be sure? You wanted that body home -- because you wanted to bury it -- because you wanted to see yourself and know yourself. That meant that bodies had to be

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shipped. How do you ship bodies in the 19th century? And how do you deal with the fact that bodies putrefy? So embalming becomes a very important force that it hadn't been in the years before the Civil War. And there are also other kinds of technologies, such as refrigerated transportation cases for bodies, that are devised and become much more common during this period.

**Narrator:** In the fall of 1862, the U.S. Sanitary Commission created a Hospital Directory to meet the growing demand for information about the wounded and the dead. They were soon inundated by inquiries from anxious families across the North, desperately seeking news.

**Civil War Soldier's Mother (Actor, audio):** Will you please to inform me at your earliest convenience, whether my son, Joseph H. Hampton, is alive or dead. If alive and wounded please be so kind as to state what his wounds are and where he lies and if cared for. And if dead -- oh pray, let me know it and relieve my anxiety...

**Civil War Soldier's Daughter (Actor, audio):** It is now four weeks since we received a letter from my dear father, and heard that he was very sick, and we have not heard a word since...My mother is almost crazy...because she cannot hear from my dear father. I wonder if any one there would please be so kind as to write a few lines back again -- whether my father is dead or alive. If we cannot pay you, the Lord will.

**Narrator:** Civilian volunteers like Katherine Wormeley, who worked for the U.S. Sanitary Commission, did everything they could to close the gap between dead and dying soldiers and their next of kin.

**Katharine Wormeley (Actor, audio):** So many nameless men come down to us, speechless and dying, that now we write the names and regiments of the bad cases and fasten them to their clothing, so that if they are speechless when they reach other hands, they may not die like dogs, and be buried in nameless graves, and remain forever missing to their friends.

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**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** About half of the 750,000 estimated dead...were never identified. So that meant that...there were hundreds of thousands of Americans, North and South, who never had the certainty of seeing a body; of knowing the story of how their loved one died; of whether that person suffered; whether that person was conscious at the time of death; whether that person had a lingering spell in a hospital; whether that person has a grave. And so for some of them, at least, there was a sense that the loved one might walk in the door. And they would write about it, knowing that was a kind of magical thinking -- that the person had, certainly, to be dead, if he hadn't been heard from for five years, a decade. And, yet, there was an inability to really emotionally resolve that loss.

**Thomas Lynch, Poet and Undertaker:** The notion that the dead are not only gone but disappeared: Gone we can take -- we have a religious context for that. But what we ask for is a sufficient remnant to say, "We consign; we choose the oblivion; we take them to the further shore and turn them back over to whomever's in charge here." And so, to me, the connection between the dead at Gettysburg...and the dead in tsunamis, and the dead at the World Trade Center -- is that we couldn't get their bodies back, to let them go at our own pace. Into oblivions that we define and choose. It's the only way we seem to be able to exact some comfort for us, do you know.

**Narrator:** Even under the best of circumstances -- when the body was found and identified and brought home -- the death of a loved one was the beginning of a long and agonizing journey -- that for many Americans lasted a lifetime.

In March 1863, Dr. Henry Bowditch of Boston, Massachusetts received a terse telegram from a cousin serving in the Union army with his only son, Nathaniel. The news struck him "like a dagger in my heart," he said.

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**Cousin of Henry Bowditch (Actor, audio):** Potomac Creek, March 18, 1863. Nat shot in jaw. Wound in abdomen. Dangerous. Come at once.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** So Henry Bowditch got on a train to go to Washington telling himself that Nathaniel had been wounded. And picking up, along the way, newspapers and other distractions that he thought an injured man might find amusing while he recovered. When Bowditch got off the train in Washington, he was met and told that Nathaniel had died. And Henry said he was stunned. He had not dared to let himself think that would be what he would learn.

**Narrator:** On receiving the news of his son's death, Bowditch said, he "fairly broke down." He was escorted by train and wagon to the camp of the First Massachusetts Cavalry, and taken to the tent where his son's body lay.

**Henry Bowditch (Actor, audio):** I scarcely know what to think or do. I seem almost stunned by the news. My whole nature yearns to see and hear him once again. God has been very kind to me all my life long, and I have an abiding faith that this blow is only a disguised blessing. Nevertheless, at times, I feel crushed.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** He talks about not wanting to show emotion in front of others. And, yet, soon it's clear that he is out of control. He cannot control this grief, and the depth of it just overwhelms him. He finds himself bursting into tears; he thinks he's been made like a woman or a child, in some ways, as he confronts this welter of emotion.

**Narrator:** Desperate to find some way to keep his dead son's memory alive -- and some tangible means of perpetuating his presence -- he had Nathaniel's body embalmed and brought home to Massachusetts, and buried him beneath an exact stone likeness of his saber in Mount Auburn Cemetery. But he felt the need to do more.

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**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Nathaniel died on the battlefield in a way that Henry Bowditch believed was not necessary if an adequate ambulance service had existed. And so Henry Bowditch begins to become an avid writer and advocate for an ambulance service in the Union Army.

**Narrator:** Hoping his status as a grieving parent would lend weight to his arguments, Bowditch published, "A Brief Plea for an Ambulance System for the Army of the United States." In it, he argued that the government had a wider obligation to the soldiers it asked to fight and die in its name.

**Henry Bowditch (Actor, audio):** If any government under Heaven ought to be paternal, the United States authority, deriving, as it does, all its powers from the people, should surely be such, and should dispense that power, in full streams of benignant mercy, upon its soldiers.

**Slate:** July 1 - 3, 1863, Gettysburg, 51,000 casualties. 7,786 dead.

**Slate:** Honoring

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Well, Gettysburg -- it's in the North, so it brings the North into the war in a way that it hadn't been. Many people in the North could escape the direct effects of the war in a way not much of the South was able to do...So, in a sense, Gettysburg makes it a national war, in its impact on civilian societies...It's the scale of that battle also. Seven thousand dead. Twenty-two thousand wounded -- being cared for in a town that had about what? Twenty-two hundred inhabitants. How could they take care of these dead and wounded?

**Narrator:** As Robert E. Lee and the badly battered Army of Northern Virginia retreated southward from Pennsylvania, ending the second and final Confederate invasion of the North,

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7,000 slain men and 3,000 dead horses lay strewn across the field in the summer heat. In three days, Union and Confederate forces had suffered almost as many casualties as in all previous American wars combined.

Once again, the work of burying thousands upon thousands of dead fell to the Union forces who held the devastated battleground -- and to the stunned citizens of Gettysburg itself, who were implored to help the beleaguered Union soldiers overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task before them. The mass burials proceeded in the summer heat. Confederates were buried in trenches containing 150 or more men; the decomposing bodies often hurled rather than laid to rest. Sometimes the rotting bodies ruptured, compelling burial parties to work elsewhere until the stench had dissipated.

Two soldiers from Maine received permission to return to the torn and shattered field, and search for any sign of a close friend they had last seen on the third day of battle.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** We found him face down, and with many others; the flesh eaten (in that hot climate) by maggots; but not so bad but that we could recognize him. When we went to bury him, all we could find to dig a grave was an old hoe in a small building. The bottom of the grave was covered with empty knapsacks; we laid in our beloved brother and covered him with another knapsack, and over all put as much earth as we could find. We found a piece of hard wood box cover and cut his name on it with a jackknife and nailed it to the tree at the head of his grave.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** And you read that the battle in July -- and people were still putting peppermint oil on their faces when frost comes in the fall -- because the stench of the dead bodies is still in the air. So months after the battle that miasma of death, and loss and decay is hanging over that town. How could people live through that and not be transformed?

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**Narrator:** Something new in the American experience would now begin to arise from the fields of Gettysburg -- as in the days, weeks and months following the battle the tiny Pennsylvania town now became the setting for one of the greatest collective efforts to honor the dead in the history of the republic. Though no formal policy or appropriation for burying the dead would emerge during the war itself, the year before, Congress had passed measures giving the president and the War Department the power to purchase land near battlefields -- as circumstance and public health concerns dictated -- often adjacent to the overflowing military hospitals. But the burial ground that now began to take shape south of Gettysburg -- one of five federal military cemeteries created during the war for the dead of a particular battle would go far beyond the practical needs of disposing of dead bodies.

Not long after the battle -- with financial help from every state in the Union that had lost men in the engagement -- a local lawyer named David Wills oversaw the purchase of 17 acres in the town -- which were soon taken over by the federal government.

In October, contracts were let for the reburial of Union soldiers on the new ground, at the rate of \$1.59 for each body. One month later, in November 1863, a host of dignitaries from Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, including President Lincoln himself, journeyed to Gettysburg -- to dedicate the new Soldiers' National Cemetery there.

Lincoln's brief but soaring remarks -- like the new burial ground itself -- with its rows of identical graves radiating symmetrically, and democratically, around the cemetery's central focus -- marked a seismic shift in governmental attitude and policy towards the dead -- one that said that the dead were no longer simply the responsibility of their families -- that they, and their loss, and their meaning, belonged to the nation.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** The Gettysburg Address is a statement about finding the redemption in the dead. But we need to remember that in that cemetery that day half those coffins weren't even buried yet, the graves were still open...This was a place of death, mass

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death where Lincoln is trying to craft this statement of -- "So, what does it mean?" It is a kind of elegiac statement that if this war has purpose, if all these dead have died for something meaningful, then it means we are going to redefine this country. In effect the Gettysburg Address is saying, "The first American republic just died here. It's being buried in those graves. We together now have to rebuild it. We have to remake it. We have to win this war first and then remake it."

**President Abraham Lincoln (Actor, audio):** Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot hallow -- this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work, which they who fought here have thus far so nobly, advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

**Vincent Brown, Historian:** If you imagine that there's a continuing relationship between the living and the dead -- that even though we're doing the acting, the dead continue to be in our thoughts -- and there's almost a kind of dialogue between the living and the dead that continues. In some sense, that dialogue requires that we make them speak. We make them

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mean something; we make them carry forward; we make them enter conversations that they had no part of; we make them do political work that they didn't do, or couldn't do, themselves. And I think that's one of the things that's going on in the Gettysburg Address, is the dead are being harnessed, right? They're being conscripted to a national political project that's going to carry forward in some other way.

**Mark S. Schantz, Historian:** What the war does is take notions of immortality that had been previously located in heaven -- in some afterworld -- you know, you'll be reconstituted -- and shift that sort of eternal frame to the state. And that your eternity, your lasting contribution, will be to the body politic -- and to the nation now that this new birth of freedom in America is based on the sacrifice -- and, literally, the martyrdom -- of Union troops; of American troops. That those deaths are redemptive. And they serve a theological purpose, but now they serve a political and civic end, too. They are literally rebuilding -- remaking -- reconstituting -- the American civic order.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** The words of the Gettysburg Address defined the nation as the product of these deaths. When we think about what the Civil War means to us, it's in no small part because of that linking, explicitly by Lincoln, of our national identity with those who gave their lives. From these honored dead.

**Slate:** Believing and Doubting

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** The arithmetic of war is set up by what happens at Gettysburg. Once the Confederate army had been weakened the way it was after Gettysburg, that sets the stage for the very bloody battles of the spring of 1864 -- for the Wilderness and beyond, and the kinds of losses that Grant knew he could afford to take because the Confederate army had been so wounded. And so the work of death was the work of the nation in the spring of 1864. Sixty-five thousand men over a period of six weeks or so.

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**Narrator:** In the spring of 1864 -- thanks in large part to Henry Bowditch's tireless efforts -- the United States government finally established an ambulance system to coordinate the orderly evacuation and treatment of the casualties from the battlefield -- just in time to receive the massive tide of dead and wounded men that now began to flood off the battlefields of Virginia -- as what would prove to be the bloodiest year of the war got under way.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** Nearly half the casualties of the Civil War were still yet to come after 1863 -- easy to forget that. What 1864 brought was a period of many, many months when the sheer scale of the carnage was bringing casualties on a scale now that all across the North caused a kind of war weariness -- a kind of questioning of purpose -- that risked everything. So it's still possible that this scale of death and suffering could itself have been the tipping point -- of victory or defeat in this war. Because the South, the Confederacy, doesn't have to conquer the North -- they just have to fight long enough to survive and make the North quit.

The scale of death and destruction in 1864 nearly overwhelmed that sense of purpose we heard from Lincoln at Gettysburg. And of course everything was at stake -- including emancipation at that point. But once it became clear that Confederate defeat was now likely -- and that becomes clear by September because of the fall of Atlanta and because of Sheridan's success in the Shenandoah Valley -- into September of '64, there's an awareness across the North that -- despite the scale of all this horror and loss -- that there's now some kind of end in sight.

**Slate:** April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant. April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln assassinated. April 26, 1865, Final Confederate forces surrender.

**Woman (Actor, audio):** Our country was dark with sorrowing women. The regiments came home, but the mourners went about the streets -- where the drawn faces of bereaved wife,

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mother, sister, and widowed girl showed piteously everywhere. The helpless, outnumbering, unconsulted women; they whom war trampled down, without a choice or protest; the patient, limited, domestic women, who thought little, but loved much, and loving, had lost all.

**Slate:** Accounting

**David W. Blight, Historian:** The South we have to acknowledge is a society of ruin. The destruction of the Southern economy in 1865 and 1866 is unlike anything any Americans ever experienced at any other time, at least on our home soil. The writers from Northern newspapers and magazines who went South after the war end up observing open coffins laying all over the place at cemeteries. They end up seeing old men and former slaves going around collecting bones because they could get a dollar for so many pounds of bones off battlefields. Those are the bones of men who died -- without a name, a place, they were never sent back to their families. This is what people would see if they went to those battlefields in 1865 and 1866 -- and for that matter for -- for many years afterward.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** It's not really until the war is over that the dead are attended to. Only when the military exigencies are finished can people really turn their attention to the dead.

**Narrator:** At the end of the war -- despite federal efforts at Gettysburg and elsewhere -- no official policy north or south existed for locating, identifying, re-burying and honoring the hundreds of thousands of men who had died in the four year conflict, or for comforting the even vaster army of widows and orphans left in its wake. Tens of thousands of soldiers lay unburied, their bones littering battlefields across the South. Still more had been hastily interred where they fell, far from family and home. Hundreds of thousands remained unidentified, their losses unaccounted for. Something had to be done.

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In the spring of 1865, Clara Barton -- who had done everything she could to help wounded and dying soldiers and their families during the war -- established the Missing Soldiers Office in Washington, D.C. -- to serve as a clearing house for tens of thousands of families desperate to track down information of any kind about their missing family member.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** She started gathering and publishing lists of the names of the missing -- urging individuals to respond if they had any information about the fate of those people. And in the course of the next few years she provided information about some 22,000 soldiers who, otherwise, would have remained completely unknown.

**Narrator:** Clara Barton herself helped lead an expedition to Georgia in July 1865 -- responding to information smuggled north by a former prisoner at the notorious Confederate prison at Andersonville.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Dorence Atwater had been imprisoned in Andersonville for much of the war. And his assignment in the camp had been to keep a record of those who were buried. But he had also kept a secret list of his own -- so that not only could a list of the dead be comprised, but also their graves could be identified and their bodies identified, as well. And so based on that list some 13,600 graves were established and 12,900 of them were identified.

**Narrator:** The reburial effort at Andersonville was a triumph. But the challenges it posed dwindled in comparison to those of locating, identifying and assuring proper burial for hundreds of thousands of dead soldiers scattered across a theater of war that stretched for a thousand miles.

In October 1865, Clara Barton pleaded the case for formal, coordinated governmental action and accounting of the dead.

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**Clara Barton (Actor, audio):** The true patriot willingly loses his life for his country -- these poor men have lost not only their lives, but the very record of their death. Common humanity would plead that an effort be made to restore their identity. The wife released her husband - - and the mother sent forth her son -- and they were nobly given to their country for its necessities. But never has wife or mother agreed that for the destruction of her treasures no account should be rendered her. I hold these men in the light of Government property -- unaccounted for.

**Narrator:** The accounting that would soon begin would transform forever the nature of American government.

In the fall of 1865, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs issued a new general order. It called on officers to provide an exhaustive survey of all the graves and battle cemeteries containing Union soldiers -- including a judgment as to whether bodies should be left in place or reinterred -- prompted in part by official fears of rising southern animus against the federal military occupation of the South.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Meigs, who had lost a son in the war, began to worry that not only was there a problem that there were a lot of soldiers whose graves had not been found but that there was an urgency to this -- because the increasingly virulent post-Confederate sentiment might lead to the destruction of some of these graves.

**Narrator:** Dispatching Captain James Moore to survey cemeteries in the East and Chaplain William Earnshaw in the West, Meigs assigned a 53-year-old chief quartermaster named Edmund Burke Whitman "to locate the graves of Union soldiers" scattered across a wide area of Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama. Able, diligent, and compassionate -- a former schoolteacher, and longtime abolitionist -- Whitman threw himself into the assignment with extraordinary conviction and determination. Convinced, he wrote, that "a knowledge and a record of every grave" must be "in the possession of some living person" -- he

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composed and distributed a remarkable circular -- seeking information from witnesses who could help him locate and identify the dead. The response was overwhelming.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** He was inundated with letters: from veterans who'd returned to their homes in in the North -- from families who had received letters from loved ones describing cemeteries -- from Sanitary Commission officers who had spent idle time in the aftermath of a battle perhaps. There had been thousands of record-keepers, who without knowing why they were keeping the records, or who would ever be the recipient of this information -- had collected information on these bodies during the war, and on these men. A lot of it very specific, so that Edmund Whitman could follow quite explicit directions: "Four miles out of Vicksburg, in the apple orchard, under the fourth tree, in the third row lies my brother -- as his comrade told me when he was shot."

**Edmund Whitman (Actor, audio):** On the left side of the Railroad going towards Atlanta about a mile off along a small creek near the Breast-works of the rebels by a big tree lies Isaac Weightman of the 29th Pennsylvania. The grave is marked by a piece of cracker box marked with a lead pencil. His body was buried in only his trousers. Any information will be a great solace to his mother who has given three sons and three sons-in-law to the armies of our country.

**Narrator:** Determined to find and identify as many of the bodies that littered the south as humanly possible, Whitman and his small team of clerks and soldiers set out on clear, cold windy day in March 1866. His team worked its way south across the scarred and torn battlefields of Tennessee.

At Shiloh, they found human bones scattered in "large quantities," he said -- and foraging hogs that the locals refused to eat because they had been living off the dead. They discovered 1,874 Union bodies -- succeeded in identifying 620 of them -- and moved on.

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Farther south, the Union dead seemed to be in even more distressing circumstances. Between Natchez and Vicksburg, they found "immense numbers" of bodies, he wrote -- Whitman estimated as many as 40,000 -- buried in river embankments, in woods, in cane brakes, some never buried at all.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** They weren't just on a battlefield -- they weren't in a cemetery. They were in every byway and lane and along every road where the armies marched, and in backyards of houses where, perhaps, they'd been cared for. When he came to a battlefield he would set his assistants out like a skirmish line, to just walk the entire acreage of where fighting had taken place.

**Narrator:** Whitman's journey, he said, produced "a daily deepening in my own mind," of the importance of the federal obligation to the dead -- as he witnessed the "total neglect" or "wanton desecration" of Union graves -- by a southern population whose "hatred of the dead," he wrote, seems even to exceed their earlier "abhorrence of the living." Union corpses were routinely discovered thrown naked and face down in pits. One body was found lying left to rot with a pitchfork still impaled in its back.

Frequently rebuffed in his search for information by hostile Southern whites, he turned increasingly to black southerners for help. "Most all the information gained," he reported, "was from negroes, who as I was told.... pay more attention to such matters than the white people."

Behind the African Colored Church near Bowling Green, Kentucky, Whitman and his team found 1,134 well-tended graves -- sheltering both black and white Union soldiers. The black carpenter who helped lead them to the site had made coffins and helped to bury many of the Union dead himself.

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If it was freemen and individual black civilians who proved critical to Whitman's efforts to locate corpses and graves, it was almost invariably units of the U.S. Colored Troops who were assigned the hard and disagreeable work of burial and reburial, and of locating and identifying the graves described in the thousands of letters he had received.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** So, ultimately, he and his team of assistants -- U.S. Colored Troops -- located more than 100,000 bodies over that section of the South. And he emphatically made the case for the need for safe, protected graves for the Union veterans. And he became an advocate for a national commitment to try to rebury all those bodies in national cemeteries.

**Narrator:** In the summer of 1866, as the reburial movement gained support in Congress, Edmund Whitman began laying plans for commencing "the general work of disinterment" when cooler weather came in the fall. When his superiors expressed concern about the scope and cost of the effort, Whitman held his ground -- arguing that the federal government stood in loco parentis to the Union dead -- and insisting "the work be well and thoroughly done -- with a true conception of its magnitude and significance."

Work on the massive federal undertaking had already begun when in February 1867. Congress passed formal legislation to establish and protect a vast system of national cemeteries, and authorized funds to support it.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** This was a governmental engagement of a level so uncharacteristic of what the federal government had been and done in the years before the war that it represented a transformation in our understanding of what is a nation state. To bury the dead is to say something to the citizens of the nation about a relationship that had not been acknowledged before -- and that we now take so much for granted, that it seems inconceivable that there could be military activities like the Civil War without a basic expectation that the government was responsible for those lost in battle.

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**Vincent Brown, Historian:** The United States spends some hundred millions dollars a year trying to recover people who are missing and presumed dead from World War II, Korea and Vietnam -- to this day. That's something that didn't happen before the Civil War. That didn't happen before this great effort to recover the Union dead on the part of the national state.

**Admiral Mike Mullen, 17th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:** There is no more sacred obligation I don't think that the United States of America has than to those who have borne the burden and sacrificed so much -- not just the military members but is also the family members because they too have sacrificed so much. The Civil War is the foundation for this. When I am at a graveside, at a funeral and I engage a family who's lost a son or a daughter or a brother or a sister, I always say that "I promise you, we will never forget." I want them to know that sacrifice was meaningful and will never be forgotten. We should never forget as a country those who served and those who sacrificed and ultimately those who've paid the ultimate sacrifice.

**Narrator:** The national reburial initiative was arguably the largest and most elaborate government program undertaken in the nearly 100-year history of the republic. Edmund Whitman himself put it most simply. "Such a consecration of a nation's power and resources to a sentiment," he wrote, "the world has never witnessed."

When the re-interment program was completed in 1871, 303,536 Union soldiers had been buried in 74 national cemeteries, and the War Department had expended \$4,000,306.26 on the effort to gather the dead -- the equivalent today of nearly \$75 million dollars. Fifty-four percent of the dead had been identified as a result of careful attention to the bodies -- and their original graves. A hundred and forty thousand of the Union soldiers recovered were never identified, and were interred in graves marked simply "unknown." Some 30,000 of the dead were black soldiers -- African American men who had fought and died in what was for them definitively a war against slavery, and who had themselves buried so many of the Union

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dead. Only a third were identified by name. Most were buried in areas designated "colored" on the maps for the new national cemeteries -- segregated in death, as in life -- and an indication that the Civil War was but the first battle in a much longer struggle.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** The federal government is through the course of the war forced -- and ultimately is willing to give rights to -- the Civil War dead -- Union dead. But the Confederate dead, even after reunification or the readmission to the Union, were never part of this process.

**Narrator:** Though some northern politicians had urged magnanimity in the name of decency for the Southern dead, they were far outweighed by those who deemed it unimaginable that soldiers who had tried to destroy the Union should be accorded the same respect as those who had saved it. But in the impoverished and embittered postwar white South, where virtually every household had lost a husband, father, brother or son, it did not pass unnoticed that \$4 million in public funds was being expended exclusively on dead northerners.

In 1866, when Congress first proposed establishing a national cemetery system for the Union dead, only it provoked outrage in the south. Northerners were wrong, the editor of Richmond Examiner thundered, to think the Confederate any "less a hero because he failed." If the Confederate soldier, he wrote, "does not fall into the category of the 'Nation's Dead,' he is ours -- and shame be to us if we do not care for his ashes."

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** It is a cause taken up by the white women of the South, who say that they are the mourners. They were the ones who brought Christ down from the cross. Mourning and the care of the dead, has been their responsibility throughout time. And they will be the leaders in this effort to, as a private matter, find and rebury the dead.

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**Narrator:** On May 3rd, 1866, a group of Richmond women responded to the Examiner's call and gathered to found the Hollywood Memorial Association of the Ladies of Richmond. Thousands of men lay in neglected graves in Hollywood Cemetery -- and in its counterpart on the eastern edge of the city, Oakwood. Tens of thousands more lay scattered on the many battlefields that surrounded the former Confederate capital.

Raising money through private donations, the women of the Hollywood Memorial Association set to work -- organizing the repair, remounding and returfing of 11,000 graves dug at Hollywood during the war -- and, with the help of farmers from battle sites on the outskirts of the city, arranged for the transfer of hundreds of bodies to new graves in Richmond.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** Organizations, Ladies' Associations, emerge in cities and towns across the southern countryside, to raise funds and to establish movements to do, essentially, what Whitman and others were doing in the North -- which is scour the countryside and try to identify where the dead are located, and then bury them in decent graves. They had a hard time identifying the dead, because they didn't have as widespread a communication function as the Northern government did. But they reburied tens of thousands of dead across the South, in installations large and small. It's quite extraordinary to think about what they were able to do just as a private effort.

**Narrator:** In the 1870's, a coalition of Ladies' Associations across the south set out to bring home the thousands of dead southern soldiers that lay neglected in Northern soil -- especially those left behind at Gettysburg following Lee's retreat. Far beyond the secure confines of the federal cemetery Abraham Lincoln had dedicated during the war, the rebel corpses had been rudely thrown into shallow mass graves -- many to be later plundered and desecrated by northerners filled with hatred for the south.

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Between 1872 and 1873, the Ladies' Hollywood Memorial Association of Richmond arranged to have 2,935 Confederate remains from Gettysburg exhumed and shipped south for proper burial in Richmond.

**Civil War Soldier (Actor, audio):** They will no longer sleep alone. Their isolated repose has been interrupted by the gentle hands of their countrywomen who have tenderly removed them from alien graves, and brought them hither for admission to the communion of kindred dead. They have come home at last; and we, their brethren, their comrades, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, are met with one accord to welcome them to their native soil. Shoulder to shoulder they stood; now let them lie side by side. Confederates in life, confederates let them be in death.

**David Blight, Historian:** This was bitter stuff, trying to return the dead to the South. I'm not sure anyone even knows the exact numbers of Confederate dead re-interred back in Southern soil. But it no doubt left one layer of the bitterness in Southern memory -- in particular for women.

**Drew Faust, Author, *This Republic of Suffering*:** The speeches make it explicit that this is about more than just mourning. It's about sustaining the ideals for which the Confederacy fought -- about bringing people together to lament the loss of the war, but not the loss of the cause. And so it is an engine for moving forward a kind of neo-Confederate sentiment, that thrives on the resentment of being excluded from the Northern support for reburial, and on the community that grows up around the Confederate dead.

**Vincent Brown, Historian:** It's worth going back and remembering the South didn't fight a war over the respectful treatment of the dead. They fought a war to create a Confederate States of America that would be a slave society in perpetuity. That was their war aim. Would that have gone away if the defeated South had been treated differently by the Union? I don't know. I know that's not why they went into the war, and that's not the cause that was lost.

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The cause that was lost was slavery in perpetuity. And I go back to Frederick Douglass's 1883 speech, where he says, "A lot of things have been forgotten. But what I can never forget is the difference between those who fought a war for slavery and those who fought a war for liberty."

**Slate:** Remembering

**Narrator:** Because the end had come in the spring, as the first buds began to swell, it was natural from the start that the honoring of the dead involved decorating graves with fresh spring flowers. In the years following the war, decoration day rituals sprang up across the South -- on different days in different places -- on May 10th, the anniversary of Stonewall Jackson's death -- on April 26th, the day of the final Confederate surrender -- on June 3rd, Jefferson Davis's birthday.

Northerners chose a spring day, too, for formal commemoration of the dead; an observance made official in the spring of 1868, when General John Logan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, officially set aside the 30th of May "for decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country." Decoration Day -- or Memorial Day as it is now called -- is still observed in many places in the south on a different day than the official national holiday established in 1868.

**David W. Blight, Historian:** Memorial Day was really founded at the end of the Civil War around the problem of what to emotionally and logistically with the masses of dead. But the first major formal practice of what we've come to call Memorial Day was in Charleston, South Carolina on May 1st, 1865. Charleston, of course, seedbed of secession, held out to the bitter end; it wasn't evacuated by Confederate forces until February 1865. But when the Confederates evacuated and the Union Army moved in, pretty much the white population of Charleston left and the people who were left were the freed people. In the midst of these

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ruins the black folks of Charleston got themselves organized. They planned various little commemorations and events and parades and sort of celebrations.

The biggest celebration though that they planned was at the Planters' Race Course, the horse track. In the last year of the war the Confederates converted this racecourse into a prison for Union soldiers. And about 260 Union soldiers died of disease and exposure in the infield, in this open-air prison and were buried in a mass grave behind the grandstand of the racetrack. And the black folks re-interred all the dead in proper graves -- they named nearly none of them because there were no dog tags. And they built around it a huge fence, white-washed it, and they built an archway into the compound and over the archway they painted the inscription "Martyrs of the Racecourse."

And then on May 1st when they had this completed they held a parade on the racetrack -- estimated at about 10,000 people by newspaper correspondents who witnessed it and covered it. It was led off by about 3,000 black children carrying arm-loads of flowers and, we're told, singing "John Brown's Body." Then followed by black women and black men in this kind of order and then by contingents of Union infantry, black and white, they all paraded around the race track and they gathered as many as would fit into the cemetery compound. Five black preachers read from scripture, a children's choir sang "America the Beautiful," "The Star-Spangled Banner," and quote-unquote "several spirituals" -- and they dedicated the cemetery of these Union dead.

And then they broke up and went into the infield of the racetrack and did what most of us do on Memorial Day -- they held picnics. And that is one of if not the most important origin of what we have come to know as Memorial Day.

**Walt Whitman (Actor, audio):** Pensive, on her dead gazing, I heard the Mother of All -- Desperate, on the torn bodies, on the forms covering the battle-fields gazing; As the last gun ceased, but the scent of the powder-smoke linger'd, As she call'd to her earth with mournful

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voice while she stalk'd: Absorb them well, O my earth, she cried -- I charge you lose not my sons! Lose not an atom. All you essences of soil and growth. My dead absorb -- my young men's beautiful bodies absorb -- and their precious, precious, precious blood; Which holding in trust for me, faithfully back again give me, many a year hence; In unseen essence and odor of surface and grass. Exhale me them centuries hence -- breathe me their breath. O years and graves! O air and soil! O my dead, an aroma sweet! Exhale them perennial, sweet death, years, centuries hence. Walt Whitman, 1865

**Narrator:** The generation of Americans that survived the Civil War lived the rest of their lives haunted by its terrible toll.

Henry Bowditch would spend the rest of his life trying to hold on to his dead son, Nathaniel. To console himself, he compiled four large memorial volumes and scrapbooks -- a "collation," he said, "of the letters, journals etc illustrative of his dear young life." "The labor," he said, "was a sweet one. -- It took me out of myself." From a ring given Nat by his fiancée, together with a "cavalry button cut from his son's blood-stained vest," he fashioned an amulet that he attached to his watch. "There," he said, "I trust they will remain until I die."

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