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The Civil War Centennial and Public Memory in Virginia

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On December 31, 1961, Harry Monroe, a Richmond area radio host for WRVA, described the tendency to look back on past events during his “Virginia 1961” broadcast: “One of man’s inherent characteristics is a tendency to look back. He embraces this tendency because its alternative is a natural reluctance to look forward. Man, for the most part, would prefer to remember what he has experienced, rather than to open a Pandora’s box of things he has yet to undergo.”¹ In the same broadcast, Monroe and his partner Lon Backman described the commemorations and parades that took place on the streets of Richmond that year as part of the state’s official “look back” at the Civil War one hundred years later. The Civil War Centennial took place from 1961-1965 as the nation was beset with both international and domestic struggles, the most immediate of which for Virginians was the Civil Rights Movement, which challenged centuries of white supremacy and institutionalized segregation that had remained the social and cultural status quo since Reconstruction. Ironically, because of the challenge of the concurrent Civil Rights Movement and several public relations failures, the Civil War Centennial seemed to be over before it had really begun. Only months into 1961, the Centennial lost momentum and struggled to hold the attention of the nation, which was more concerned with the black freedom struggle and the communist threat than the events of one hundred years earlier.

Looking back on the past was a long established tradition in Virginia, where the public memory of the Civil War era and the Lost Cause remained strong long after the conclusion of that tragic conflict. Perhaps it was because sixty per cent of Civil War battles were fought on Virginia soil; perhaps it was because defeat had been so

¹ Harry Monroe, commentary from "Virginia 1961," n.d. (WRVA - 232), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond. (Note: the file says no date, but in the broadcast, Monroe says, “In these final hours of 1961...” revealing that the show aired on December 31, 1961).

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impossible to accept that Virginians set out to establish sentimental, emotionalized memories of antebellum period, which survived long after the last veterans passed away. In any case, Virginia's attachment to this public memory was so fervent that the state rushed to prepare its celebration of the Civil War Centennial in the late 1950s.

In Virginia, romantic views of the Confederacy, which ignored the importance of the slavery issue in the Civil War, continued to cloud white perceptions of race relations throughout the twentieth century as black Virginians sought civil rights. Just as the black freedom struggle gained momentum in the late 1950s and early 1960s, white Richmonders set out to plan the Civil War Centennial celebrations from 1961 to 1965. The Civil War Centennial planning and proceedings in Richmond reveal the final attempts of white Virginians to preserve their romanticized public memory, which was then at odds with the black counter memory during the Civil Rights Movement. These grandiose celebrations occurred at the same time as Civil Rights activities, which ultimately challenged the long established memories of the Lost Cause promoted in the Centennial proceedings and made it impossible for white Richmonders to continue ignoring the plight of their black neighbors. This intersection of divergent public memories led to the erosion of the white public memory, an acknowledgement of the truths of the black public memory, and a final reckoning of the dishonorable realities of the Civil War era and contemporary society.

Public memory has played an important role in America's remembrance of its past. Often the historical facts and public memory of events diverge, revealing a desire of Americans to warp the true events of the past into a sentimentalized and idealistic version of the past. American public memories of the first Thanksgiving and George

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Washington and the cherry tree, for example, demonstrate this propensity to combine history and moralized folklore when looking back to our collective past. This American selective memory is particularly apparent in the public memory of the Civil War. The evolution of the romanticized public memory of the Lost Cause forced the subjugation of the black memory of the war and bolstered efforts to maintain the inferior status of blacks in the South.²

In the years following the Civil War in Virginia, public memory about the Lost Cause developed, the public support of which led to commemorations and celebrations in the years immediately following the war. Such celebrations served to cement that revisionist history into the public memory. Confederate Memorial Day celebrations took place annually, both to venerate the contributions of Civil War veterans and to preserve and beautify the graves of the dead.³ Perhaps a more significant consequence of these commemorations was, however, the construction of the glorified myth of the Lost Cause that grew stronger in the 1880s and 1890s as accurate remembrances of the Confederacy gave way to a romanticized public memory of the gentility and honor of the South.

Martha Kinney notes, “The Confederacy existed as a concrete political reality from 1861

² David Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1. Civil War historian David Blight writes of the lessons that the nation learned from the war as a whole. He claims, “Exactly what those lessons should be, and who should determine them, has been the most contested question in American historical memory since 1863.” Blight writes that though defeated in the actual war, there had been a kind of “Southern victory in the long struggle over the Civil War memory,” which resulted in the glorification of Confederate heroes and the Lost Cause. Honor and glory came to symbolize the fight on both sides and such idealized memories left the grim realities of racial injustice and slavery little room to exist in the developing public memory of the war. The Lost Cause mythology and the moralized stories of heroism both North and South recognized only white-washed memories of a period that was far from ideal. For more information on American public memory, see Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 1-5, 300-397; David Thelen, ed, *Memory and American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, eds, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

³ Martha E. Kinney, “‘If Vanquished I Am Still Victorious’: Religious and Cultural Symbolism in Virginia’s Confederate Memorial Day Celebrations, 1866-1930,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106 (Summer 1998): 238.

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to 1865, but by the late 1870s, the real South of wartime was fading fast from the cultural memory...[and] being replaced by a land of dreams, dreams that supported the idea of a pleasant, bygone era.”⁴ This “land of dreams” eliminated from public memory many aspects of the true history of the Civil War, particularly those, such as the immorality of slavery, which denigrated the highly esteemed and euphemized memory of the Confederacy. Memories of this Confederate utopia were particularly strong in Virginia, where monuments to the Lost Cause punctuated the landscape of many of its towns and cities.⁵

In Richmond, the former Confederate capital, statues to Confederate military heroes on Monument Avenue, the White House of the Confederacy, and other such monuments served as permanent reminders of the Lost Cause.⁶ In 1958 Clifford Dowdey, a Richmond Civil War historian and Civil War Centennial Commission member, wrote to his editors, “I have no memory of life without an awareness of the Confederacy, and I remember distinctly the exact moment...when I was shocked to learn that ‘we’ had not won the war—a traumatic experience common to all Southerners.”⁷ The pervasiveness of the myth of the Lost Cause knew few boundaries. It seemed to deny not only the true outcome of the war, but other realities of the Civil War era, like the

⁴ Martha E. Kinney, “‘If Vanquished I Am Still Victorious,’” 237.

⁵ For more information on the development of the Lost Cause, see Gaines Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 89-103. For information on Confederate celebrations after the war see Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy, 37-46.

⁶ For information about monuments to the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia, see Ann Hunter McLean, “Unveiling the Lost Cause: A study of Monuments to the Civil War Memory in Richmond, Virginia and Vicinity,” (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1998); Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds., Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); and Sarah Shields Driggs, et al, Richmond’s Monument Avenue. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁷ Clifford Dowdey to Mrs. Traugott, n.d., box 6, file: Biographical data and his thoughts about his writing, “Clifford Dowdey Papers,” Special Collections Department, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

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existence of slavery and the racial prejudice that resulted from the peculiar institution.

White public memory of the Civil War era claimed that the war was fought over the national government's attempts to curtail states' rights, not because of slavery.

The Lost Cause mythology laid the foundation for white supremacy and the poor race relations that dominated much of twentieth century Virginia.⁸ This nostalgia for the antebellum period that took hold of Americans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon “reinforced Southern pride...and racialized Civil War memory for the postwar generations.”⁹ Peter Applebome writes that the “tenets of the Lost Cause were familiar and inviolate” and included “the nobility of the Southern planter and the romantic picture of the old plantation.”¹⁰ Such views of the Lost Cause, which emphasize the noble character of the planter and plantation life, denied the contradictory nature of such noble men owning slaves and depriving them of the human dignity of personal freedom. This ability of the Southerner to deny the wrongs of slavery paralleled the willingness of the Southerner to accept segregation. In both cases, slavery and segregation, these systems were enforced without regard to the way blacks felt and were deemed acceptable because they pleased the white elite. David Blight argues that the Lost Cause “was *not* lost [and] reverberated as part of the very heartbeat of the Jim Crow South,” signifying the close ties between the nostalgia for the antebellum South and the development of white supremacist attitudes that gave way to legally-sponsored racial discrimination.¹¹ The 1896 Supreme Court Case *Plessy v. Ferguson* reinforced the white Southern view that separate was equal and institutionalized Jim Crow in the South. In law, segregation was

⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 274.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1997), 126.

¹¹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 258.

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not overturned until the 1954 *Brown* decision, which overruled *Plessy*'s application to school segregation, proclaiming that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."¹² In the years following the *Brown* decision, the planning of the Civil War Centennial got under way, presenting an opportunity for white Virginians to bask in their memories of the Lost Cause and revive their allegiance to states' rights to resist the Supreme Court's decision.

The Lost Cause public memory denied all black history, save memories of idealized icons of the "faithful slave," such as Mammy and Uncle Tom.¹³ In opposition to the white public memory, a black counter memory did exist, which emphasized emancipation and the Reconstruction-era legislation that advanced the position of the former slaves. Robert Cook writes, "One of the many problems confronting African Americans in the 1950s was that reconciliation between whites on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line had done much to purge this [black counter memory] from the popular consciousness." Both the pervasiveness of the Lost Cause Myth in the South and romantic views about the post-war North-South reunion subjugated the black perspective of the Civil War era and reinforced the white public memory. Cook continues, "When northern and southern whites thought about the Civil War in the mid-twentieth century, they participated unwittingly in a mutual act of historical amnesia."¹⁴ This "historical amnesia" was particularly active in Virginia where the public memory of the Civil War insisted that slavery was not an issue in that conflict and in effect denied its existence.

¹² U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

¹³ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 274.

¹⁴ Robert Cook, "(Un)furl that Banner: the Response of White Southerners to the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965," *The Journal of Southern History* vol. 63, no. 4 (2002): 882.

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The black public memory of the Civil War was quite different from the white memory and focused on black involvement in the war. During the Centennial, *The Richmond Afro-American* included articles about black soldiers and noted, “While Memorial...exercises are being held...let us not forget that the Union might not have been saved but for the sacrifices made by colored soldiers.”¹⁵ The white public memory, on which the Centennial was based, denied the contributions of black soldiers, which undoubtedly aided the North in its victory over the South. The black public memory, which remembered black soldiers and praised emancipation, played no part in the official commemoration of the Civil War in Virginia.

While Southern blacks remembered the Civil War as the conflict that brought forth their freedom and began the long and tedious struggle for civil rights, white Southerners remembered the war as a time when Southern character shone and Southerners stood up to the federal government to protect their way of life, which was intertwined with slavery. In the 1960s, a century after the emancipation of the slaves, white Virginians continued to deny the importance of slavery and race in the Civil War. The Commission’s ability to deny the black memory of the war stemmed from its effectiveness in conjuring up positive images and figures from the Lost Cause mythology.

Superficially, the Civil War Centennial served to honor heroes like Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, who possessed qualities, such as honor and bravery that the Commission thought should serve as examples on which contemporary Virginians should model their behavior. The Commission stressed that it did not want to “open old wounds” of sectional divisions, but look back to reinforce the unity of the nation one

¹⁵ “Tan troops played vital role in both armies of Civil War,” *Richmond Afro-American*, February 4, 1961.

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hundred years later.¹⁶ Celebrations in Virginia served to reinforce the notions of states' rights and white supremacy, both of which were being challenged by blacks and "outside agitators," who were urging the Federal government to impose its authority through civil rights legislation and action at the national level. Such threats to violate Southern states' rights in the 1960s paralleled, according to the Commission, the states' rights violations that led up to the Civil War of the 1860s. Civil War Centennial leaders such as Congressman William M. Tuck, Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr. and others invoked the same states' rights rhetoric that had been used in the lead up to the Civil War in their speeches and comments about the Civil War Centennial in Virginia. While they claimed not to be refighting the Civil War, these men clearly looked back to the Southern rebellion against federal imposition in the Civil War era with great pride and hoped that they too could stave off federal action this time in the Civil Rights era to preserve the cultural and social norms in race relations.

Following Congress' establishment of the National Civil War Centennial Commission in 1957, the Virginia General Assembly approved the creation of a state Centennial Commission on March 29, 1958, claiming, "It is just and right that the people of the Commonwealth . . . remembering the valor and sacrifice of its sons, who fought for principles they believed eternal . . . should commemorate the 100th anniversary of the War Between the States."¹⁷ The newly established Virginia Civil War Commission laid out a comprehensive list of aims for the upcoming Centennial, including honoring those

¹⁶ "Virginia's Opportunity," pamphlet published by the Virginia Civil War Commission, box 158, file: Legislature, Civil War Centennial Commission (CWCC), 1959, "Gov. Almond Executive Papers," The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

¹⁷ Act to create the Virginia Civil War Commission from the Virginia State Legislature, approved March 29, 1958, box 158, file: Legislature, CWCC, 1959, "Gov. Almond Executive Papers," The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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who died in the war, stimulating interest and educating the public about the war, preserving monuments and graves, and “proclaim[ing] Virginia’s true role in the historic struggle.”¹⁸ The Commission specified that “Virginia, through its call for a Peace Convention in early 1861 and through other efforts at reconciliation, stood for peace,” and that “Virginians believed they fought for freedom,” implying that Virginia, unlike the warhawks in the lower South, tried to avoid open conflict, and that her citizens entered the war to protect their freedom, which was threatened by the Federal government. From its inception, the Virginia Civil War Commission made it clear that Virginia fought to preserve states’ rights, not slavery, and more than any other state worked in vain to prevent open hostilities.

In 1959 the Commission published a pamphlet entitled “Virginia’s Opportunity,” which articulated to the public its aspirations for the Centennial and its commitment that “the Centennial is no time for finding fault or placing blame or fighting the issues all over again [because] Americans from every section produced the divisions that led to war...[which] grew out of hate, greed and fear, ignorance and apathy, selfishness and emotionalism—evils from which this generation is not free.”¹⁹ The Commission stressed that it wanted to avoid revisiting the divisive sectional issues, which led to war in the 1860s. The ban on certain subjects included the one issue that divided the nation at the time of war—extending slavery into the western territories and the changing the balance of slave and free states in the union. The issues related to slavery were taken up by the Confederates under the banner of states’ rights to prevent the imposition of the will of the

¹⁸ Resolution adopted by the Executive Committee of the Virginia Civil War Commission, Nov 11, 1959, box 157, file: Legislature, CWCC, 1959, “Gov. Almond Executive Papers,” Library of Virginia, Richmond.

¹⁹ “Virginia’s Opportunity,” pamphlet published by the Virginia Civil War Commission, box 158, file: Legislature, CWCC, 1959, “Gov. Almond Executive Papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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Federal government. In the era of the Centennial, the states' rights issue was again taken up by Southern states, particularly Virginia, to defend segregated race relations, which the Supreme Court threatened to overturn. Historian James Ely noted, "Alone among the southern states Virginia enjoyed stable and respected local leadership...and possessed the requisite national prestige to make a commanding stand for state rights and against integration."²⁰ The Commission members, many of whom were appointed by the anti-desegregation governor J. Lindsay Almond, agreed not to refight the issues from the Civil War in the Centennial, but they realized the parallels between the Civil War states' rights battle and the contemporary one.

Members of the Commission also saw the necessity to capitalize on Virginia's devotion to the Lost Cause and sought to emphasize the "glory days" in its observances of the Centennial. When, at the March 17, 1959 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Commission, Robert Porterfield, director of the Barter Theater in Richmond, suggested creating a Southern Symphony Orchestra, Commission members agreed with his argument that "we have got to sell romance and not defeat," though the orchestra was never established.²¹ The Virginia Civil War Commission clearly realized the necessity of promoting the romance of the Lost Cause and repressing defeat and slavery. Therefore, its activities focused solely on moments of Virginia glory, such as battle victories and heroic figures. Among the goals of the Commission was to highlight the virtuous and dignified behavior of individuals in the Civil War, particularly military heroes such as Robert E. Lee. "In the Centennial, the spotlight will be on character in men—for war is

²⁰ James W. Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), v.

²¹ Robert Porterfield from "Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Virginia CWCC," March 17, 1959, box 158, file: legislature CWCC, 1959, "Gov. Almond Executive papers," The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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the ultimate test of character. The stories of the Civil War are full of lessons for present day living. By these examples, we can teach children and adults the morals so needed in America today.”²² One of the earliest projects of the Commission was the Lee Papers Project, which culminated in the publication of a comprehensive collection of Robert E. Lee’s wartime papers and correspondence. Lee was the personification of all that was good about the Confederacy and he was praised as “the knightliest knight who ever wore the gray” by Governor J. Lindsay Almond.²³

Centennial leaders continuously mentioned Lee’s heroism and lauded him as the ideal Confederate man because, they argued, he fought for the principles of states rights, not slavery, and proved his loyalty to Virginia when he chose to defend his home state, rather than the union. The Commission’s early emphasis on the Lee Papers Project, led by Clifford Dowdey, reveals its dedication to the memory of General Lee and its desire to emphasize this noble figure in its celebration of the Lost Cause during the Centennial. The accepted view of Lee in the white South was promoted by twentieth century biographers such as Douglas Southall Freeman, who wrote of him as a reluctant slaveholder who led the Confederate army to protect the states’ rights of his beloved Virginia, not to advance a labor system that he found repugnant.²⁴ To white Virginians in the era of the Centennial, Lee remained a hero of divine proportions, and the mere mention of his name signaled only positive aspects of the Confederacy and the Lost Cause. After their defeat in the Civil War, Southerners questioned, “how could a cause

²² “Virginia’s Opportunity,” pamphlet published by the Virginia Civil War Commission, box 158, file: Legislature, CWCC, 1959, “Gov. Almond Executive Papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

²³ Governor J. Lindsay Almond. Address at the 1861 Civil War Peace Convention Centennial Ceremonies, 4 February 1961 (WRVA - 228). WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

²⁴ Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee: An abridgement in one volume by Richard Harwell of the four-volume R.E. Lee (New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 92-93.

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which had produced such a man [Lee] be wrong?” and it seemed that this belief survived into the 1960s.²⁵ The Virginia Civil War Commission’s attention to Robert E. Lee and the states’ rights issue further denied slavery as a cause of the war and the black counter memory of that era, which, unlike the white public memory, emphasized the negative aspects of the Confederacy.

One of the first actions of the Virginia Civil War Commission (VaCWC) was to commemorate the Peace Conference of 1861, highlighting Virginia’s valiant attempts to avoid a war between the North and the South. The Peace Conference was to have two official ceremonies: one at the Virginia state Capitol, organized by the Virginia Commission, and one in Washington DC at the National Cathedral and the Willard Hotel, the site of the 1861 conference. Gov. Almond delivered a speech at the proceedings in Richmond on February 4, 1961, speaking about the unfortunate failure of the Peace Convention, which was “sabotaged by radicals on both sides of the issue.”²⁶ Almond continued, “It could not succeed when Henry Ward Beecher was sowing the seeds of hate throughout the North, when Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the book of the years falsely depicting conditions in the South through Uncle Tom’s Cabin.”²⁷ Almond alluded to radical abolitionists in the North, who inflamed the desire to go to war. In this speech defending states’ rights then and now, Almond invoked Robert E. Lee calling him “the greatest soldier in American history” and “an immaculate Christian gentleman.”²⁸

Almond was careful to point out that Virginia avoided war until she was threatened with

²⁵ Thomas L. Connelly, The Marble Man (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 70.

²⁶ Governor J. Lindsay Almond. Address at the 1861 Civil War Peace Convention Centennial Ceremonies, 4 February 1961 (WRVA - 228). WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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invasion and only then did she “draw her sword in defense of the principle, not of slavery, in defense of the state’s right of self determination under the Constitution.”²⁹

Almond, speaking on behalf of the state and the Commission, hardly attempted to mask his sectional bias in his discussion of the coming of the Civil War. In his powerfully delivered remarks, he stressed the states’ rights issue from the 1860s and in closing he says, “And today [Virginia is] making her contribution for the strength of the nation, for the preservation of the rights of the states under and through the Constitution of the United States.”³⁰ Gov. Almond, in one of the opening observances of the Civil War Centennial in Virginia, made a calculated move to connect the Confederate struggle for states’ rights and the states’ rights debate over segregation.

Response to Almond’s address was positive in the white press. James J. Geary, Executive director of the VaCWC wrote Almond that the speech “got praise...on all sides and I feel it was the best address I have ever heard you make.”³¹ Geary also noted that the speech received favorable reviews from *The New York Times* and the *Associated Press*. John Warren Cooke, chairman of the Executive Committee of the VaCWC wrote Almond that a tape of the speech was sent to Radio Free Europe to be broadcast overseas.³² Almond bolstered his segregationist stance in his allusions to the importance of states rights then and now. Just as slavery was not the cause of the Civil War to white Virginians, the cloistering of the races was not the issue in the current debate with the federal government.

²⁹ Governor J. Lindsay Almond. Address at the 1861 Civil War Peace Convention Centennial Ceremonies, 4 February 1961 (WRVA - 228). WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ James J. Geary to Gov. Almond, February 7, 1961, box 158, file: CWC, Jan-Mar 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

³² John Warren Cooke to Gov. Almond, February 7, 1961, box 158, file: CWC, Jan-Mar 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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Fighting for states' rights was a euphemism for the white supremacists' fight to maintain their racial superiority in the Civil War era and in the 1960s. Almond and others clearly used the Centennial as an opportunity to maintain the subjugated status of blacks by reintroducing the states' rights issue into the political debate. In an earlier news conference over the Prince Edward County school closings, Almond made clear his opposition to school integration: "No decision of the Supreme Court of the United States...requires or can require this state or any of its political subdivisions to operate any public school whether integrated or not...Irrefutable evidence abundantly abounds that the mixing of the races in our public schools will isolate them from the support of our people, produce strife, bitterness, chaos, and confusion to the utter destruction of any rational concept of a worthwhile public school system."³³ In his speech at the Centennial of the Peace Convention, Almond reaffirmed his position on integration. He proclaimed that Virginia had been and would continue to be a defender of states' rights and that Virginians would learn from the principled stands of their ancestors to invigorate their resistance to federal power in the 1960s Civil Rights era.

Similarly, at the January 8, 1961 Virginia Civil War Centennial opening ceremonies at Washington and Lee University's Lee Chapel, former Virginia governor Congressman William M. Tuck alluded to states' rights in his comment that "many of the issues then raised still abide with us and are yet unsolved."³⁴ He then continued by saying "Nevertheless we are a united nation and we are glad that most all...of the

³³ Almond - School Board, [1958 or 1959] (WRVA - 528). WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

³⁴ Address by Rep. William M. Tuck, Civil War Centennial Opening Ceremonies, Washington and Lee University Chapel, 8 January 1961 (WRVA - 225), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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bitterness of that conflict is subsided.”³⁵ In this speech, Tuck alluded to the current states’ rights challenge, but he emphasized the unity of the nation. W&L Chancellor Francis Pendleton Gaines delivered the keynote address at the opening ceremonies and further emphasized the Centennial theme of unity. “In this Centennial year, nobody wants to open up the old divisive issues...One hundred years later...we know that even a bitter war sustained and enforced the American tradition of freedom...” He continued, “We shall endeavor to make this freedom triumph over tyranny and in our deep devotion to that noble cause [freedom], we shall find our final and complete joy of unity.”³⁶ The emphasis on unity reflected the Cold War era nationalism that unified the country against the communist threat, and Tuck and Gaines’ subtle intention in their speeches was to claim that national unity resulting from the Civil War was more needed in the current international situation than a divided nation resulting from potential integration.³⁷

Tuck, Almond, and other Virginia politicians used the Civil War Centennial to underscore the post-Civil War unity of the nation and the necessity of that unity in staving off communism. This emphasis on national unity was meant to divert attention away from the integration debate and convince the government that forcing integration would inevitably lead to some of the same sectional divisions that led to conflict one hundred years before. Such a divided nation would never be able to withstand the Cold

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Address by Francis Pendleton Gaines , Civil War Centennial Opening Ceremonies, Washington and Lee University Chapel, 8 January 1961 (WRVA - 225), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

³⁷ On the national level, segregation was an issue that deserved closer attention because of the negative way it was viewed in the Cold War context. For Americans to practice racial discrimination at home was contradictory to their vision of promoting democracy and freedom to the Third World. For more information about American race relations in the Cold War context see Thomas Borstelmann, [The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena](#) (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 85-173.

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War; therefore the nation must avoid divisive issues like integration, which, Almond and Tuck hoped, would help preserve segregation. As the spring of 1961 approached, historian Robert Cook noted, “the capacity of the centennial to reflect and generate a distinctly southern ‘memory’ somewhat at odds with the...nationalistic aims of the [national] CWCC was evident throughout the South...as die-hard segregationists strove to draw parallels between past and present struggles.”³⁸ Southern Centennial advocates increased their emphasis on the states’ rights issue and began to erode the unity that was initially emphasized and revealed divisions. After these early ceremonies in Virginia, it became more and more difficult to preach states’ rights without eliciting criticism that the Centennial was promoting massive resistance.

As a result, criticism of the Centennial’s motives and its stance on segregation caused it to lose momentum. In Virginia, the Opening Ceremonies in Lexington and the Peace Convention Ceremony in Richmond clearly reflected the connection between past and present states’ rights battles. Robert Cook notes, “The outpouring of southern white enthusiasm for...Confederate heritage...threatened to expose the racial fault line within the superficially consensual interpretation of the Civil War espoused by the [national] commission.”³⁹ This enthusiasm, including allusions to states’ rights, threatened to expose the sectional and racial divisions, which had survived since the Civil War and were now being challenged by the changing national opinion of the black freedom struggle. The Virginia Commission was more dedicated to Confederate heritage and the idealized version of Civil War gallantry than the National Commission; Virginia, unlike states in the North and many in the South had a great degree of public enthusiasm about

³⁸ Cook, “(Un)furl that Banner,” 893.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 894.

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the centennial with each event drawing in large crowds. For example, the Civil War

Centennial visitor's center in Richmond drew in more than 600,000 people from 1961 to 1965.⁴⁰

After the initial positive response to Centennial ceremonies, public opinion on the Civil Rights Movement began to change, causing an adverse effect on the popularity of the Centennial. As the Civil Rights movement gained momentum, blacks were encouraged to speak out against segregation and white supremacy. This increased mobilization of the black community not only elicited white sympathy but also demobilized die-hard segregationists; their frustration over black successes led to apathy over the Centennial. The mobilization of the black community and the resulting demobilization of the white community unraveled the strength and initial successes of the Centennial.

Governor Almond received several letters in the early years of the Centennial that suggested a degree of public disappointment that the Virginia Commission was ignoring the subject of race altogether in its commemorations. On December 9, 1959, Thomas H. Todd, a black Richmonder, wrote in hopes of getting "the Negro" involved in the Centennial. Todd wrote, "It struck me that an unusual bit of cooperation by the [sic] Commonwealth of Virginia, the [sic] Civil War Commission could give Virginia excellent publicity in the spreading of goodwill. Since the Civil War many things have helped the Negro to progress in many ways." He continued, "Briefly, with the thought of aiding the 1961 Civil War Centennial, this letter is being written. Although I am a Negro, I am interested in the progress of the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as better

⁴⁰ John Bodnar, Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 221.

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race relations.”⁴¹ Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Almond responded to Todd, but this letter demonstrates that there was a black awareness of the Civil War Centennial and hope that the Centennial could involve the black counter memory of the civil war and the theme of progress in race relations. As one can see from the speeches by Almond and others emphasizing both states’ rights and an unwillingness to accept the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown*, the white elites who controlled the CWC in Virginia had no intention of mentioning the black contributions to the Civil War, much less involving blacks in the commemorations. In the purposes laid out by the Commission, there is no mention of commemorating the contributions of the former slaves or the racial progress that had taken place in Virginia since 1865. The Commission’s idea of commemorating Virginia’s “sons” excluded any acknowledgement of black Virginians. The actions of the Commission and the states’ rights rhetoric used in Almond’s speeches seemed to subliminally reinforce the memory of a time in Virginia when whites could entirely control its black inhabitants under the slavery system.

In the spring of 1961, with CWC observances underway, Pauline Miller, Conference Secretary to the Women’s Society of Christian Service, implored the governor to “use the influence of [his] office to emphasize the unity that was achieved rather than the divisions of those tragic years.”⁴² Miller expressed “deep regret that the Congress of the United States authorized a five year Centennial...of the Civil War throughout the nation [as] such an observance at this time in our national history may well provide the means for stimulating the divisive elements, stirring up slumbering

⁴¹ Thomas H. Todd to Gov. Almond, December 9, 1959, box 158, file: legislature, CWCC 1959, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁴² Miss Pauline Miller to Gov. Almond, May 15, 1961, box 159, file: CWC, April-June 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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sectionalism, and generating strife that can result in untold damage.”⁴³ Clearly, Miller and the Women’s Society feared that the Centennial would drum up the divisive sectional issue of integration and reinvigorate opposition to *Brown* in the South. Like the Todd letter, there was no response to Miller’s letter from Almond, but one can imagine that Almond, a dedicated segregationist, would not have actively changed the course of the Centennial to include greater involvement of the black community and quell divisions over integration.

Almond acted only when a public relations disaster over the segregation of the Centennial forced him to take a stand on racial issues. The event that once and for all “expos[ed] the racial fault line” in the Centennial occurred when a Charleston hotel refused lodging to a black delegate of the New Jersey Civil War Commission weeks before the Fourth National Assembly of state civil war commissions was to meet there in April 1961. The controversy ignited when black delegate Madaline Williams, who was planning to attend the National Assembly meeting with the rest of the New Jersey Civil War Commission, tried to reserve a room at the hotel where all of the delegates were staying. This hotel, however, was located in downtown Charleston, where segregation was still alive and well seven years after the *Brown* decision. The New Jersey delegation expressed its revulsion over the hotel’s refusal to grant Williams a room, and the scandal hit the front pages of newspapers across the country.

The New York Times and *The Washington Post* as well as local Virginia newspapers reported the scandal, including coverage of President Kennedy’s letter that the National Civil War Commission “as a body created by Congress, had an obligation to

⁴³ Ibid.

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avoid racial discrimination in its activities.”⁴⁴ The National Commission responded to Kennedy, claiming that it had “no authority or jurisdiction by which it can dictate to the hotel owners [in Charleston] to accommodate any Negro delegates to the session”⁴⁵ Rep. William M. Tuck, chairman of the executive committee of the National Commission, reported that the hotel would allow blacks to attend the business session of the meeting but that “there was no word from the hotel on whether any Negroes would be permitted to attend the luncheon and dinner,”⁴⁶ which were also associated with the National Assembly meeting. Tuck even asserted, “It has been informed...that the New Jersey commission member involved in this instance has never applied for, or been denied, accommodations at the Francis Marion Hotel.”⁴⁷

As a result of the National Commission’s response and Tuck’s denial, the New Jersey commission issued its own statement. “The National Civil War Centennial Commission’s disillusioning stand is typical of its dogged refusal to face facts,” the New Jersey delegates explained, “The commission has said in effect: ‘We welcome all delegates from all states to attend the fourth national assembly as long as they are white.’”⁴⁸ In the following days, a series of state commissions, including New Jersey, California, Illinois, and New York, decided to boycott the Charleston meeting. The New York commission adopted a resolution justifying their boycott of the meeting: “This commission refuses to take part in...any ceremony, wherever it may be held, in the North or in the South, unless equal rights and equal treatment can be assured for all citizens

⁴⁴ “Kennedy’s Centennial Plea Brushed Aside,” *Richmond News Leader*, March 22, 1961.

⁴⁵ “Civil War Centennial Rebuffs Kennedy’s Desegregation Plea,” *The New York Times*, March 22, 1961.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Civil War Group Refuses To Alter Meeting Plans,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 22, 1961.

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regardless of color or creed”⁴⁹ This statement, rife with civil rights rhetoric of “equal rights and...treatment” reflects the intersection of the now pervasive Civil Rights Movement and the Centennial. Until the Madaline Williams scandal, the Centennial both nationally and in Virginia, had not been confronted with contemporary racial segregation. After this event and the National Commission’s reluctance to accommodate blacks, the Virginia Commission was forced to respond to the criticism that the Centennial was a backward segregationist celebration of the Lost Cause.

It seemed that all organizations associated to the Centennial were scrambling after the criticism over the Charleston incident filled the newspapers. William S. Stuhr, National Chairman of the Civil War Hall of Fame in New York, wrote to Gov. Almond in the aftermath of the Madaline Williams scandal. Stuhr wrote, “You may possibly be aware that some critical comment of certain events [of] the Civil War Centennial have been expressed...I wanted to go on the record with you and other members of the Committee regarding our point of view.”⁵⁰ Stuhr’s concern stemmed from Almond’s membership on the Civil War Hall of Fame’s Sponsorship committee and he wanted to ensure the non-prejudiced views of all those members. He continued, “THE CIVIL WAR HALL OF FAME IS NON-PARTISAN, NON-RELIGIOUS, NON-RACIAL.”⁵¹ Almond’s response to Stuhr reflected a changed position from his earlier massive resistance, segregationist stance, which had eroded by 1961. Almond wrote, “I subscribe to and concur in the point of view stated in your letter [and] I would like it to be so

⁴⁹ “Civil War Meeting Boycott Grows as Kennedy Plans to Act,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 24, 1961.

⁵⁰ William S. Stuhr to Gov. Almond, March 20, 1961, box 158, file: CWC, Jan-Mar 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁵¹ William S. Stuhr to Gov. Almond, March 20, 1961, box 158, file: CWC, Jan-Mar 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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recorded.”⁵² Almond’s unequivocal stance in this response demonstrated his realization that discriminatory behavior did nothing but garner bad public relations for politicians and other leaders involved in the Centennial.

Black newspapers joined in the criticism of the Charleston meeting segregation. A *Richmond Afro-American* editorial page read, “the atmosphere in Charleston became so ‘reb-ish’ that the local NAACP had to set the record straight with a separate meeting [at which] the NAACP drafted a statement reminding all that the Civil War was fought to preserve the union and end slavery.”⁵³ The editorial continues to quote the NAACP, “no attempt to glorify the Confederacy can be valid for it was founded upon...slavery...the most immoral of all human relations.”⁵⁴ The NAACP offered a new purpose of the Centennial, “[to erase] the barriers and [establish] the justice and equality which were the dream of the founding fathers and...the inalienable rights of every American citizen.”⁵⁵ The *Afro-American* editor claimed that, “This statement should be required reading for any individual who intends to celebrate the Civil War Centennial in any way.” He concluded by saying, “it might also be remembered that Russia successfully put a man in outer space at the same time that America unsuccessfully tried to get a colored woman in a South Carolina hotel”⁵⁶ condemning the nation’s inability to solve the race problems domestically when it should be working to keep up with its Cold War enemies.

⁵² Gov. Almond to William S. Stuhr, March 22, 1961, box 158, file: CWC, Jan-Mar 1961, “Gov. Almond Executive papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁵³ “What it’s all about,” *Richmond Afro-American*, May 6, 1961.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* For more information on the black reaction to the Civil War Centennial and the Madalene Williams incident, see Robert Cook, “From Shiloh to Selma: The Impact of the Civil War Centennial on the Black Freedom Struggle in the United States, 1961-65” from *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement*. Tony Badger and Brian Ward, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 131-146.

⁵⁶ “What it’s all about,” *Richmond Afro-American*, May 6, 1961.

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The national press also noted the mounting criticism of the Centennial. *The New York Times* reported on a speech by a black critic of the Civil War Centennial, Dr. Edwin Hoffman. Hoffman, dean of West Virginia State College, delivered a speech May 1, 1961 in which he said, “As cheers at Bull Run ring out again at the sight of the Yankee debacle, we may anticipate still further arrests of Negro sit-ins and a renewed determination of the Old Dominion to keep the public schools of Prince Edward County closed.”⁵⁷ The black community as well as the white community was now well aware of the racial tensions embedded in the Civil War Centennial and the confluence of the Centennial and Civil Rights Activities. Criticisms following the Madaline Williams incident continuously linked the Centennial with racial discrimination and activism of the day. At this point, segregationists, such as Almond and Tuck, could no longer affirm their commitment to states’ rights and segregation for fear of the media blitz that would ensue. After the Charleston incident, Almond relaxed his massive resistance stance and avoided making any anti-integration statements that would garner him negative press.

The momentum of the Centennial continued to slow after the Charleston segregation scandal. The First Manassas reenactment took place on July 22, 1961 and turned out 35,000 onlookers to watch the spectacle of battle, however it immediately came under fire for being an overly commercialized disgrace to the thousands of men who fell there one hundred years before. *The New York Times* reported that the “solemn authenticity” of the battle reenactment did not carry over to the entire event.⁵⁸ “Behind the grandstand, a sort of carnival stand of tents offered literature, exhibits, souvenirs, ice cream” the mood of which was quite in contrast to the attempted dignity on the

⁵⁷ “War Centennial Critic,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 1961.

⁵⁸ “Confederates Carry Day Again at Bull Run,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1961.

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battlefield.⁵⁹ John Bodnar writes, “Officials condemned the event only when they were stung by criticism that reenactments dishonored the men who fought and turned serious commemorations into carnivals.”⁶⁰ The Commission again was forced to acknowledge a failed attempt to commemorate the War. One of the intentions of the Virginia Commission from the start had been to reap the commercial benefits of the Centennial and to encourage tourism to the state. The disaster at Manassas as well as a letter to Almond advertising the Petersburg “Rebeland, the South’s ONLY Civil War Theme Land” signaled that the commercialization of the Centennial had perhaps violated one of the Commissions other goals, “that whatever is done officially in Virginia for the Centennial is done on the highest level of dignity.”⁶¹ After Manassas, there were fewer and fewer Confederate victories to commemorate in the Commonwealth. More importantly, the negative response in the national press to the Madaline Williams controversy and the Manassas reenactment turned public support of the Centennial into apathy and criticism.

Just as in the Civil War, as the years of the Centennial passed, the fervor to commemorate the past diminished and the Southern states’ rights battle lost its impetus as a result of Civil Rights advances and the fact that after 1963, there were few moments of Southern valor and glory from the war to commemorate.⁶² Just as the Confederate cause lost momentum after Manassas, the Civil War Centennial began to falter as criticism mounted from the Manassas reenactment debacle and the Centennial’s apparent attempts

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 219.

⁶¹ James J. Geary address before the Second National Assembly of the CWC held April 17, 1959 at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, box 158, file: Legislature, CWCC 1959, “Gov. Almond Executive Papers,” The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁶² Cook, “(Un)furl that Banner,” 902.

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to segregate the commemorations and the public memory of the Civil War. Black

Virginians expressed desires to become involved in the Centennial commemorations and wanted to focus on the progress in race relations since the Civil War. After the initial Centennial ceremonies in Virginia, the black and white press mobilized against the Centennial's denial of racial problems and its ignorance of the black contributions in the Civil War. Such criticism derailed the success of the Centennial and contributed to the waning commitment of white segregationists to massive resistance in Virginia, which the Commission had hoped to reinforce through the Centennial.

Attendance at the Civil War Centennial Visitor's center in Richmond had a 13.8 per cent drop in August 1963 compared to August 1962, reflecting the waning enthusiasm for the Centennial in Virginia.⁶³ James Ely noted, "Growing impatient with the pace of change in Virginia and encouraged by the sympathetic climate of the Kennedy administration, Virginia Negroes began to push more aggressively for integration in 1963 [and in] the summer of that year Virginia underwent a season of heightened racial tensions."⁶⁴ As the pace of the Civil Rights movement quickened in Virginia, Centennial activities all but ceased.

By 1963, Centennial events in Richmond were replaced by Civil Rights activities, as the city hosted a meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) at the end of September. At this SCLC meeting, Martin Luther King, Adam Clayton Powell and others discussed the integration of the buses, schools, and cities of the South to a black delegation of 1000. Black comedian Dick Gregory made a surprise appearance and cracked jokes about the ratification the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty: "That one...kind of

⁶³ Letter to members of the VaCWC from Gov. Harrison, September 5, 1963, box 68, file: CWC, 1963, "Gov. Harrison Executive papers," The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁶⁴ Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 172-73.

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scares me, they say they're not gonna test in the water, in the air, and in outer space, the most important places they left off—cities—that's what's gonna affect you and me. I went to Congress and told 'em 'Don't pass that one, put on there cities and be sure to specify colored neighborhoods.'"⁶⁵ Gregory's joke reveals the heightened racial tensions that had been escalating in Virginia since 1961.⁶⁶ Civil Rights activities and racial tensions in Richmond increased in this period, as enthusiasm for the Centennial subsided. King spoke about the appalling deaths of six children in Birmingham and advocated staging "a massive Birmingham-style direct action protest in Danville," where the situation had worsened in past months.⁶⁷ Black leaders encouraging blacks to rebel against segregation had replaced Centennial leaders' talk of the Southern rebellion in the Civil War. When speaking about the black fight against segregation, Adam Clayton Powell proclaimed, "I'm not in any way disparaging the assistance of whites...in the black revolution, but this is our revolution and my general is Martin Luther King and I will follow only black generals!"⁶⁸ Centennial speeches about General Lee had all but vanished from Virginia, and now, with the empowerment of the Civil Rights movement, Powell spoke to cheering crowds about his general, Martin Luther King.

The reopening of the Prince Edward County schools added to the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement in Virginia, at the expense of the Centennial. In the fall of 1963 the process of reopening Prince Edward County schools began after years of

⁶⁵ Dick Gregory, comedy act at the 1963 SCLC meeting in Richmond, Yearender 1963 (WRVA - 391), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁶⁶ Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 174.

⁶⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr at the 1963 SCLC meeting in Richmond, Yearender 1963 (WRVA - 391), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁶⁸ Adam Clayton Powell at the 1963 SCLC meeting in Richmond, Yearender 1963 (WRVA - 391), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

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stalling by Gov. Almond and his successor, Gov. Albertis Harrison.⁶⁹ Harrison, like Almond, was “anxious to minimize hostile news coverage” and he wrote in a letter from August 1963 “the quicker we can get [the Prince Edward situation] out of the headlines, the better.”⁷⁰ After the capitulation of massive resistance in Virginia, the Rev. L. Francis Griffin, president of the state NAACP chapter reported, “I think that any number of children are really happy today to have the opportunity to attend school once again in Prince Edward County after having been closed for four years.”⁷¹ The final reopening of these schools in 1964, which had been closed since 1959, marked a major Civil Rights’ victory in Virginia. This major success, coupled with violence in Danville and the negative press reactions to all attempts to stall integration, caused Virginia segregationists to be “increasingly on the defensive.”⁷²

Only three years earlier, Virginia politicians had blatantly declared their dedication to states’ rights, signifying their opposition to integration. By 1964, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the events within the state, Virginia politicians could scarcely defend their anti-integration stances. “White opinion in Virginia was more antagonized than convinced”⁷³ by growing criticism of segregation in the North and in the press, which led to white apathy about the Civil War Centennial. Reveling in dreams of the Lost Cause seemed irrelevant to segregationists as even their political leaders were rendered impotent to combat the integrationist forces. As a result, Centennial activities decreased and the final years of the commemoration were marked by a few, simple

⁶⁹ Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 174.

⁷⁰ Harrison quoted in Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 174.

⁷¹ Rev. L. Francis Griffin statement about Prince Edward school reopening, Yearender 1963 (WRVA - 391), WRVA Radio Collection, Accession 38210, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁷² Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia*, 175.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 173.

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ceremonies lacking the celebratory mood of those that had come before the Charleston episode.

The final activity of the Virginia Civil War Commission was the commemoration of Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox on April 9, 1965. Gov. Harrison told the crowd that "Virginians could recall the surrender of 1865 without bitterness not only because of the passage of time, but also because 'the beliefs and principles for which the Confederate forces fought are still with us.'" ⁷⁴ Harrison's claim that the same principles, namely states' rights, were still alive in Virginia, now seemed empty as he and other states' rights advocates had been forced to retreat by Civil Rights successes and the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' increased advocacy of integration. Massive resistance to integration was unraveling at the outset of the Centennial and was all but dead in 1965.

Though the Centennial had suffered from much criticism in the past four years, the Appomattox commemoration demonstrated that, "Apparently deep interest in purely regional symbols remained despite the official rhetoric of national unity." ⁷⁵ The crowd's interest in such regional symbols seemed to be all it had left of the memory of this Lost Cause, as the power of its states' rights rhetoric had been tarnished by the failure of massive resistance. The relatively small crowd of 5,000 (there had been 35,000 at Manassas) cheered vibrantly first when the Marine band played "Dixie" and again when General Lee's grandson was introduced, despite the relatively somber mood of the ceremony. ⁷⁶ This mood emanated from the recognition that observers were not only

⁷⁴ Bodnar and Harrison quoted in Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 221.

⁷⁵ Bodnar, *Remaking America*, 222.

⁷⁶ Cook, "(Un)furl that Banner," 910.

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commemorating the defeat of the Confederacy, but also the defeat of their memory of the Lost Cause.⁷⁷

The Appomattox reenactment occurred only months before President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. The Voting Rights Act was enacted nearly one hundred years after the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, which this new legislation sought to enforce once and for all.⁷⁸ Ironically, legislation that symbolically marked the centennial of the Civil War amendments drove the final nail in the coffin of the Civil War Centennial and its commemoration of the Lost Cause. In a speech to Congress urging the passage of this act, President Johnson declared, “it is really all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we *shall* overcome.”⁷⁹ With this statement, Johnson not only aligned himself with the Civil Rights Movement, but also spoke of the need to end the legacy of white supremacy rooted in the Lost Cause.

The Voting Rights Act was the culmination of one hundred years of determined fighting for civil rights for blacks, finally guaranteeing black across the South the right to vote. This act vanquished Southern state power in its move to send federal examiners throughout the South to register voters and ensure fair voting practices. It did away with any requirements, such as literacy and good-character tests, that were intended to prevent blacks from voting and prohibited Southern state governments from altering their electoral rules and regulations without the Justice Department’s approval.⁸⁰ The Voting Rights Act not only ensured blacks of their political rights, which they had long been

⁷⁷ Ibid., 911.

⁷⁸ Alexander Keyssar, The Right to Vote: the Contested History of Democracy in the United States (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 264.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 263.

⁸⁰ Keyssar, The Right to Vote, 264.

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violently denied in the South, but also symbolized the end of Southern state hegemony in oppressing blacks, as the Federal government became intimately involved in barring any discriminatory practices in the South.

The changed political climate in Virginia revealed the desire to focus more on future progress than maintaining the archaic racial order. The arch-conservative Byrd organization, headed by Senator Harry Byrd, had controlled the Virginia Democratic Party for decades and had contributed to the stand-by-segregation political stance on racial issues throughout the 1940s and '50s.⁸¹ One the eve of the Centennial, the integration issue became so hot that Governor Almond began to retreat from the hard-line massive resistance stance of the Byrd Organization, arousing indignation from Byrd himself. The early 1960s in Virginia saw a substantial shift in the Democratic Party, changing from a conservative segregationist party to a more forward-looking, moderate segregationist party. Both Governor Harrison and Lieutenant Governor Mills Godwin gave their enthusiastic support to the Johnson candidacy in the 1964 presidential campaign by making an appearance with Lady Bird Johnson as she campaigned through the state.⁸² This support for Johnson is not indicative of a pro-integration stance, but it does show that Harrison and Godwin were cognizant of the need to associate with forward-moving racial progress on the national level in order to maintain the support of voters in Virginia. Now that blacks were enfranchised with federal enforcement of the

⁸¹ J. Harvie Wilkinson, Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics 1945-1966 (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1968), 114.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 256-257.

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Voting Rights Act, Virginia politicians, such as Harrison and Godwin, had to appeal to blacks as well as conservative whites to win elections at the state level.⁸³

Following the assault of white public memory by the Civil Rights Movement and the black counter memory, the Virginians present at the Appomattox ceremony struggled to keep alive their memories of the Lost Cause. In contrast with the Peace Convention ceremonies and the Manassas reenactment, the mood was somber and lacking much of the early enthusiasm for the Centennial. The past four years had taken nearly all of the pomp and circumstance out of the Centennial, as the Civil Rights movement and press criticism rendered many of its early supporters apathetic. Segregationists in Virginia realized that they had lost the battle against the Federal government. The Centennial rhetoric seemed out of place in Virginia by 1965, as state's rights opposition to integration had clearly failed.

White Virginians' decreasing interest in the Centennial suggests their acceptance of defeat. Once they realized that massive resistance was finished and that the strength of the Civil Rights movement ensured integration, they lost all interest in commemorating the Civil War. By 1965, having endured the demise of massive resistance, White Virginians could identify much more with the realities of the Civil War, most importantly the Confederate defeat, than they could with the idealized myth of the Lost Cause. A *Richmond Afro-American* editorial summarized the view of the Centennial that took hold after its challenge by the Civil Rights Movement: "The sitdown, kneel-ins and jail-ins

⁸³ Ultimately, conservative Virginia voters shifted their alliance to the Republican Party, which became the party of many right-leaning politicians who had represented the Democratic Party before the late '60s. Mills Godwin, for example, continued his career in Virginia politics as a Republican after he served as governor of the state from 1966-71 as a Democrat. For more information on the changed landscape of Virginia politics, see James W. Ely, *The Crisis of Conservative Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1976), and J. Harvie Wilkinson, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics 1945-1966* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1968).

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prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the cause of the Confederacy, indeed, [was] a lost cause. The sitdowners look[ed] into the future, proponents of the ‘lost cause’ stubbornly to a dead past.”⁸⁴ White Virginians who had hoped to avoid the “Pandora’s box” of the push for integration through their celebration of the Civil War Centennial had failed. Looking into the past during the Centennial could do nothing to stop the social changes brought by the Civil Rights Movement and eventually segregationists grew to accept integration as part of the “price of progress,”⁸⁵ as moving into the future was ultimately more important than reveling in the past.

⁸⁴ “Sitdowners And The Confederacy,” *The Richmond Afro-American*, February 25, 1961.

⁸⁵ Cook, “(Un)furl that Banner,” 879.

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