**History 288 Civil War & Reconstruction**

**Discussion Transcript for March 24, 2020**

**Main Reading: Elizabeth Varon, Armies of Deliverance, chapters 4 and 5**

These two chapters cover the period roughly from the summer of 1862 until December 1862 –roughly six months. Yet they were a busy, pivotal six months for war, politics and social change. The main military battles in this period include Second Bull Run (August), Antietam (September), Fredericksburg (December) in the Eastern Theatre and Corinth (October), Perryville (October) and the beginnings of the campaign against Vicksburg (May through December) in the Western Theatre. That long, frustrating campaign on the Mississippi River involved several joint army-navy operations. Sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of the naval war in Varon’s complex narrative, but it’s also important to remember that during this period, the Union navy was working aggressively to enforce the Atlantic and Gulf Coast blockade which Confederate forces at sea were continuously trying to evade. In terms of politics and social change, the most pressing issue was the Union’s evolution toward an emancipation policy and the increasing pressure on social norms, especially concerning the role of women, from the growing occupation of the Confederacy.

**Dickinson Connection Challenge**

**Winner =** **Brendan O’Brien (1 point)** -- John C. Pemberton studying at the U.S. Army Cavalry School (present day U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA) in 1842-1843.

Other possible connections: Carlisle families affected by the Battle of Antietam (such as the Colwells), Dickinson participants in the Vicksburg campaign (such as CSA officer Flavel Barber who kept a diary that has since been published). Or you might have noted that Dickinson president Herman M. Johnson almost desperately tried to get Pennsylvania governor Andrew Curtin (a Dickinson alum) to help keep students on campus instead of joining the state militia during the 1862 invasion of Maryland. Perhaps most interesting, Minnesota governor Alexander Ramsey (unnamed here in this chapter) was the politician most adamant in pressuring Lincoln to execute the Dakota Sioux –and Ramsey was a Dickinson graduate (Class of 1840). There are many more that you might turn up by consulting the [House Divided research engine](http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/) or histories of the college (collected and [available online at this page](http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/slavery/publications/) from the Dickinson & Slavery site). There’s also a special House Divided site that everybody should eventually check out, identifying the [150 Most Notable Dickinsonians](http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/150alums/) of the era.

The following are selections from student comments & questions with some responses from Prof. Pinsker

**Hard War and Civilians**

STUDENT COMMENT: Varon's chapter 4 seems to indicate the beginning of a shift in the nature of the Civil War.  As both armies continued to grow and expand their operations, engagements became increasingly more costly affairs and hostilities between soldiers and civilians all seemed on the rise.  Varon's discussions of Pope and Butler also seems to show two different sides behind the rise of "hard war" doctrine.  On one hand, General Butler seems to have initially wanted to use limited measures to subdue the populations of New Orleans, but, due to continued resistance, he felt it necessary to crack down with harsher measures such as the infamous "woman order".  On the other hand, General Pope demonstrated a mindset that pushed hard war from the beginning, allowing soldiers to burn homes of civilians suspected of firing on federal troops and other similarly harsh measures.  Regardless, whether through preferred policy or seemingly unavoidable necessity, the war was increasing in its harshness. On a similar note, I think Varon could have added to her discussion of the hard war measures imposed on civilians by discussing the soldiers themselves. While she does well to discuss the motivations of senior leadership and show the reactions of civilians, she includes nothing on how the soldiers themselves felt about the orders and how they when on carrying them out.”

QUESTION: Were soldiers enthusiastic enforcers, unhappy participants, or even defiant objectors to their superior's orders?

*ANSWER: This is a good question but one that you can only answer with research. In theory, that’s the kind of research question that could drive a good battle narrative paper (or more likely a PhD dissertation). To write a successful short paper, you would probably have to find books or articles that included comments from published collections of letters or diaries from various soldiers and officers. One such book was by Mark Grimsley, Hard Hand of War (1997), which is partly available online from Google Books.*

STUDENT COMMENT: Varon's framing of the civil war through the lens of a northern tactic of "deliverance" for the south leads her to look at some aspects of the war in a more social framework. In the beginning of chapter four this includes the ongoing reaction of confederates to union soldiers and occupation. Through her analysis it becomes clear that there was no one way that union leadership agreed upon when it came to treating confederates. Some like McClellan were seen as more passive when compared to those like John Pope and Ben Butler who stressed the importance of union loyalty and implemented loyalty oaths. Refusing these oaths allowed union troops to invoke provisions of the the second confiscation act, which southerners saw as an excuse to plunder and desecrate southern land. Ben Butler's actions, primarily his "Woman Order", prompts Varon to look particularly at confederate women. Varon discusses the debate about female accountability, whether confederate women should be treated as innocents or political actors, however she does not expand upon the outcome of these discussions.

STUDENT COMMENT: Butler's Woman Order is what stood out to me the most about his leadership. It was shocking to see a Union general demand such an order on Southern women. It showed me as well how much resentment was built up between the North and the South. They didn't even bat an eye to the fact that many women were not supposed to be treated this way and instead enforced it solely because they were Southerners.

QUESTION: I wonder what confederates thought about the role of women within their resistance as well as how unionist portrayed southern women more broadly?

*ANSWER: In previous versions of this class, I assigned work by Drew Gilpin Faust (former president of Harvard) who has written extensively about this very question. Her book is called Mothers of Invention (2004) or the article that sparked her interest in the topic is available to anyone in JSTOR: “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and Narratives of War, Journal of American History 76 (Mar., 1990), pp. 1200-1228. What Faust shows is how white southern women changed their views about their own roles under the pressure of wartime. Ultimately, for most of them, patriotism trumped social convention. Varon will cover this subject later in her own book as well.*

**Antietam and Other Strategic Choices**

STUDENT COMMENT: I believe continuity to be the same to be true about the north, especially which Gen. McClellan. This is specifically regarding Lincoln’s questionable choices to place trust in him, and resulting in delays and uncertainty of the army he commands and the enemy. This proves true at the end of Antietam. Aside from the tactical victory from the union, the most remarkably striking aspect of this battle was the brutality of it, and although this could be due to the fact it was the bloodiest day in American history, I think some of the vast remembrance of this could be that it was the first photographed battle (similar to Vietnam and television). After reading this, it seems as if so much has happened among the various military engagement in the fall of 1862. It seems as if Antietam was a catalyst for a new mode of hard warfare. Following Antietam, the numbers of soldiers seemed (not deaths, just numbers) to skyrocket in places like Perryville, Vicksburg, and Fredericksburg. It was also interesting to see the usage joint branch tactics in Vicksburg.

QUESTION: Why does Lincoln keep entrusting McClellan after he has proved he might not be the best battlefield general?

QUESTION: How did Lincoln react to the carnage of Antietam?

*ANSWER: What everyone should appreciate by now is that the rising bloodshed of the American Civil War hardened most participants. Instead of seeking surrender or relief, most military and political leaders responded to events by escalation. The Confederates responded to the Union occupation of the Virginia peninsula and most of the Mississippi River valley by launching a three-pronged OFFENSIVE in the fall of 1862 –into Maryland, Kentucky, and Mississippi. President Lincoln responded to Pope’s devastating defeat at Second Bull Run by urging McClellan to pursue and destroy the enemy. McClellan was obviously more cautious, but even he was being aggressive by the previous standards of his military profession. The first question presumes that Lincoln was slow to realize that McClellan’s innate caution was crippling, but I consider the president’s handling of his controversial general to be far more decisive. He appointed McClellan to field command in summer of 1861, elevated him to general in chief in fall, then prodded him into action over the winter of 1862, and demoted him as general in chief in spring 1862 during the launch of the peninsula campaign. Just one year after elevating McClellan to field command he essentially sidelined him in July 1862 by bringing Pope to the Eastern Theatre and setting him loose on Lee’s army. But once Pope failed, Lincoln turned back to McClellan in fall 1862 and gave him another chance to bring the president’s aggressive strategy to life. When McClellan failed to do so (despite repeated pressure from Lincoln, including a face-to-face meeting at Antietam after the battle), the president relieved him again. That’s a total of 18 months of back and forth. That’s why I’m more impressed by Lincoln’s decisive action than by any sense of confusion or delay. Lincoln’s decisiveness also probably answers that other question. The president was not shaken by the carnage at Antietam –at least not in any outward way that affected his policy decisions. He had already planned to announce emancipation. He visited the battlefield and paid homage to the dead and wounded, but he maintained his support for aggressive strategy pressure that everyone knew would ultimately keep producing bloodshed at unprecedented rates.*

**Fredericksburg (December 1862)**

STUDENT COMMENT: The other aspect that had me curious was the decisions made by Burnside at Fredericksburg at the end of 1862. Before the reading I knew that the battle was costly and I thought, like many did, that Burnside's decision to wait to cross into the town and attack, and then to finally attack once Lee was entrenched on the high ground and supplied with reinforcements, was not very smart. However, after reading Varon's section on the battle, I started to realize that his plan of attack, even after knowing Lee had obtained reinforcements and the high ground, may not have been so dumb. His plan almost worked, and possibly would have, if orders would have been followed correctly and not been mixed up. However, I do still think Burnside could have called off the attack before he did.

QUESTION: Was Burnside bound to be criticized no matter what he did? If he had retreated would he have been criticized for retreating and being passive like McClellan?

QUESTION: On a separate note, specifically regarding to earlier class discussions we’ve had on how we should remember prominent slaveholders, or confederate generals – I couldn’t help but notice there wasn’t one, or two, or even three, but four generals from these chapters (Bragg, Hood, Polk, and Lee) who have military instillations named after them – two of them being some largest army bases in the country nonetheless. A little puzzling to me, but I thought this was worth pointing out.

*ANSWER: What I admire about that first question regarding Burnside is how it respects that uncertainty facing the participants. We know today that McClellan was too slow and over-cautious, but they didn’t (at least not all of them). Burnside was the opposite and yet his rashness led to a horrific defeat that almost destabilized the entire Lincoln Administration. When you write your battle narratives, try as best you can to respect the contingency and uncertainty of evens as they were happening and thus to demonstrate empathy for the sometimes poor choices and panicked reactions of the participants. It’s also true, as the second question seems to suggest, that sometimes people just accept things by being passive or willfully indifferent. Several of the Confederate generals who were treated as dangerous traitors during the Civil War are now namesakes for federal military installations. Is that right? You will have to decide for yourself. It is a topic that we will address directly at the end of the semester.*

**Native Americans**

There are a couple key points in the reading that kind of surprised me, and one of the main ones was the involvement of Native Americans in the summer of 1862 in the West. I knew Native Americans had been removed to those territories because of Jackson's Indian Removal Act before the war, but I feel like sometimes they can be forgotten after that, or at least during the war. Varon makes a brief mention of them in Chapter 4, but I still wasn't entirely sure what their role was other than causing disturbances or trouble for both armies. She mentions that they chose sides for multiple different reasons, but she never really goes into what they did when they chose sides. It almost seemed like a completely separate war that was between whites, whether Union or Confederate, and Native Americans. This little section really has me curious about Native American's role in the war in the West, because I'm sure their role was more than just a page's worth.

Varon continues to look at unique perspectives within the civil war by discussing the western theater and it's impacts with Native Americans. I found it surprising that some natives supported the confederacy, due to "resentment of the United States, a genuine belief in the propriety of slavery, and a stronger cultural connection with the American South", given the racialized element of slavery and the racism felt by native americans from white western settlers. Varon mentions that Lincoln was pressured by some westerners who felt that natives posed a threat to white.

QUESTION: I wonder given the larger context of the war if Lincoln took this issue seriously or if the role of Native Americans in the war conflict was small and insignificant compared to his management of the larger war effort?

*ANSWER: I was surprised and pleased that some of you were intrigued by the role of Native Americans in the American Civil War. Varon discusses this topic only briefly and yet it attracted your attention. As mentioned above, Minnesota governor Alexander Ramsey (Class of 1840) pressed Lincoln to execute Indians after the 1862 Dakota uprising. Lincoln responded to him by personally reviewing hundreds of cases, before ultimately agreeing to the execution of 38 men (still the largest mass execution in US history). According to Ramsey’s diary, he later confronted Lincoln and said if he had only agreed to kill more of the Dakota, then they would have done better in the 1864 elections, to which the president said to him: “I couldn’t afford to hang men for votes.” Anybody who’s really interested in this subject, should consult a web project (like the one you’re going to do) by former Dickinson student Alexia Orengo Green:* <http://usdakotawar-alexanderramsey.weebly.com/>

**Emancipation**

STUDENT COMMENT: After Antietam, Lincoln had the victory he needed to pass the act and free the slaves. Varon highlights the affect this had on the war. The two Confiscations Acts attacked the individual in the Confederacy, however the Emancipation Proclamation attacked the rebellion as an entirety. We talked before break about people's motivation for the war. In the north it was split between Unionists and abolitionists. In my opinion, with the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln made this an undisputed war on slavery. Prior, Unionists argued that basing the war around slavery fractured the north, however after the passing of the act, Lincoln made it so anyone in the north against abolition was dividing the Union.

STUDENT COMMENT: The thing I liked about Chapter 5 is how it showcased the reaction to the emancipation proclamation after Antietam and then how public opinion shifted after Fredericksburg. The way Lincoln defended the proclamation after Antietam was: it took any measure to secure the enemy, it would help the US in Europe and a little in the North, it would weaken the rebels by taking their laborers, and it would not alienate the border states because it was the perfect timing. The way Varon highlighted these 4 aspects made me rethink everything I've been taught about Abraham Lincoln which is that he wanted to free the slaves. But it’s not that simple. The way attitude shifted after Fredericksburg was interesting to see because the border states viewed what Lincoln was doing as a dangerous misuse of power, the Confederates said it would lead to a race war, and it was also called a desperate move which was exactly what it was not supposed to look like.

QUESTION: I am a bit confused on the exemption from confiscation given to loyal Union masters and Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation. Is this how Lincoln was able to enforce his emancipation act without backlash from loyal Unionists who owned slaves?

QUESTION: What was the reaction of black Americans free and enslaved to the Emancipation Proclamation? Was it largely supported or was there some controversy?

*ANSWER: The question about confiscation and emancipation is a critical one. Everybody needs to make sure that they understand the progression of the policy. First, runaway enslaved people confronted Union army officials (like Benjamin Butler, who worked at Fort Monroe on the Virginia peninsula before he got transferred over to Louisiana and the controversy over his “Woman Order”). The decision by the Lincoln Administration not to return these “contrabands” pressured Republicans in Congress to create legislation (First Confiscation Act, August 1861 and then Second Confiscation Act, July 1862) that effectively “liberated” slaves, first those employed by the Confederate military and then eventually any slaves owned by rebels. Lincoln’s emancipation policy came out of the Second Confiscation Act but it was different in its scope because as the first student comment astutely observed, confiscation policy attacked individual confederates while emancipation went after the entire rebellion. Emancipation applied to regions as a war measure and was not designed as punishment for treason. That was a more sweeping way to effect liberation than either contraband or confiscation policy (and that’s also the reason why it became so memorable). But while all of that was developing, Lincoln was also working behind the scenes and then in public (in his 1862 annual message, issued in December 1862) to get loyal slave states to agree to abolish slavery voluntarily and gradually with some form of federal compensation as an incentive to action. All of these policies worked together simultaneously (along with various other antislavery measures) to represent a comprehensive and multi-level attack against the institution of slavery. You can read more about all of that at our* [*Emancipation Digital Classroom*](http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/emancipation/) *site, but the key point is to remember (as I tried to emphasize in that close reading video about the proclamation) is that emancipation was not a single moment. It was a complex process that involved many “emancipators” with Lincoln’s proclamation as a critical but not isolated moment. In terms of reactions to the proclamation, especially from African Americans, Varon begins to signal their overwhelming support at the end of chapter 5 with the quotation from Frederick Douglass, but she will cover more of that response (and how complicated it got as people sometimes doubted the commitment of the Union and the Lincoln Administration) to the reality of freedom during the years between 1863 and 1865.*