

CARROLL COLLEGE

EXEMPLIFYING MYTH:
J.E.B. SUTART AND THE CONFEDERATE ARISTOCRACY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
THOMAS ARTAIZ

HELENA, MONTANA

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Signature Page

This thesis for honors recognition has been approved by the History Department

Robert Swartzout April 12, 2012

Director

Date

[Signature]

Reader

4/10/12

Date

Gillian Jones 4/12/12

Reader

Date

Abstract

This paper is divided up into three areas of study. Chapter one is dedicated to a cursory overview to antebellum Southern culture, highlighting major themes such as militarism, hospitality, and chivalry. These cultural tenets inform on Southern values and social expectations. This opening section provides a lens through which the reader may understand the cultural climate into which James Ewel Brown Stuart was born in 1833. The next two chapters are dedicated to a brief sketch of Stuart's early life, and then an examination of the impact of these themes, with special emphasis on his actions in the Civil War. Chapter two follows a narrative structure, covering Stuart's life from his childhood in Patrick County, Virginia, his time at the U.S. Military Academy, his service on the frontier, marriage to Flora Cooke, and the outbreak of war between North and South. Chapter three transitions to a thematic approach and an analysis of Stuart's actions and character during the war in relation to his adherence (or departure from) these Southern ideals. The final chapter is dedicated to an analysis of the subsequent literature pertaining to Stuart's legacy and the growth of J.E.B. Stuart as a paragon of antebellum Southern culture.

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Introduction

Few American myths are as potent as that of the Confederate aristocrat. Urbane, sophisticated, cool under fire, obsessed with notions of honor and duty, the leaders of the rebellion continue to capture the imaginations of historians and laypeople alike. Even in the ante-bellum era, Southerners cherished and perpetuated traditions reminiscent of the European landed aristocracies. These themes included male and female gender roles, courtesies, rules on personal honor, chivalry, and a strong militaristic tradition. Many ante-bellum Southern aristocrats would claim these ideals connected them and their class to a romantic age, giving them a cultural edge over their northern countrymen. As tensions between North and South increased, Southern principles added to a sense of uniqueness, superiority, and inflamed personal senses of honor. Ultimately, they would be a driving force behind both secession and the conduct of many battlefield commanders in the Confederate Army.

Perhaps one of the most famous and intriguing figures to emerge from this period is General James Ewell Brown Stuart, or “Jeb” Stuart to friends and admirers. A young and talented Confederate Cavalry commander, Stuart came from a prominent albeit remote upper class family in Virginia. His daring battlefield exploits and colorful personality won him fame and reputation among Northerners and Southerners alike.

Stuart’s flamboyant behavior, conspicuous bravery, chivalrous conduct, and untimely death contributed to the legends of the South and the culture around the “Lost Cause”. While Stuart’s early life evinced many of the themes of knightly chivalry,

violence and honor, it was his experiences in the American Civil War enshrined him as an American legend and shaped myths about Southern culture.

Chapter One

Aristocracy, Honor, and Violence in the Antebellum South

Antebellum Southern culture was a blue-blooded landscape, and had ties to aristocratic traditions dating back to the 17th century. British authorities in the North American colonies had attempted to transplant traditions of gentry into the Carolinas, prompting what historian Arthur M. Schlesinger called a “quasi-feudal order.” In another effort, the crown afforded Lord Baltimore, the first governor of Maryland, the power to give distribute titles and distinctions to the colonists.¹ While both attempts at creating a formal system of titles failed, the colonists created their own culture surrounding their elite different socio-economic groups. In the North, the most respected and richest members of society were the merchants, manufacturers and religious leaders. South of the Mason-Dixon line, a different class emerged. Good soil, wide flood planes and amiable weather meant large-scale agriculture, ineffective in the North, was not only possible, but extremely lucrative. This gave give rise to massive plantations. These large-scale agricultural centers were largely self-sufficient and employed large numbers of slaves. The isolation and independence enjoyed on these estates gave rise to a feelings of “lordliness and enchantment” among the wealthy men who owned them and their guests who visited.²

This planter class remained at the center of the Southern aristocracy far beyond the colonial period. Their land became a symbol of wealth, power, and status. Places such as the South Carolina lowlands became one nuclei of this culture. Planters like Wade Hampton and Nathaniel Heyward grew wealthy and owned thousands of slaves. Historian Clifford Dowdey writes, “These were isolated and slumberous domains, where the

planter was the only law.”³ Though these families constituted less than one percent of the population, their lifestyle became the focus of a romanticized ideal. While not all Southern aristocrats were planters, they all looked with respect and affection upon the agrarian lifestyle. Successful doctors and lawyers would even reinvest their capital in plantations, often times at a loss, to become part of the planter culture.⁴ Being a plantation owner represented more than material wealth, but a philosophy and level of achievement. As America expanded south and west, so too did plantation culture, taking root in the fertile Deep South.

These families hired tutors for their children instead of attending the almost non-existent public education system and sent their adolescents away to study at universities. The men considered themselves “gentlemen” and their great estates their nearly feudal holdings. Rich and well-connected families encouraged marriages between their families, creating a veritable social network that coincided with the avenues of power. Marriages to the lower classes were deplored. When one well-born Virginian woman married the overseer of her uncle’s plantation, her family decried the “tragical story” of her union with this “dirty plebian.”⁵ This quote reflects that, while there was no legal structure to the Southern understanding of class, cultural norms of wealth and bloodlines translated into very real attitudes toward class separation and elitism.

This exclusive socio-economic class fostered a culture obsessed with its own self-stylized notions of honor and chivalry. Myths grew around the origins of the Southern colonies, which claimed that the Southern gentlemen were in fact descendants of English knights, contrasting themselves with the Puritan colonists of the North. They embraced writers like Sir Walter Scott, whose tales of gallant and chivalrous knights in novels like

Ivanhoe captured the imaginations of his readers.⁶ Some Southern communities even went so far as to hold jousting tournaments. This social understanding fostered and encouraged violent undertones as well. In May of 1856, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner verbally attacked the institution of slavery, lambasting Southern slaveholders in general and Senator Andrew Butler in particular.

“The Senator from South Carolina has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight, with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress . . . who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him – though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight: I mean the harlot Slavery.”⁷

Sumner not only attacked Butler’s stance on slavery, but also mocked his manner of speech. Butler’s cousin, Preston Brooks, also a Congressman, took Sumner’s speech as a slight to not only Butler’s honor, but also to the honor of his family, South Carolina, and the South as a whole. Brooks confronted Sumner on the floor of the Senate and savagely beat him into unconsciousness with a cane.⁸ Brooks’s actions were applauded by Southerners, who sent him new canes to replace the one he had broken over the head of the unfortunate Butler. Indeed, the reaction of the South was elated. One Virginia congressman wrote, “A broken head will still pay the penalty for a foul tongue.”⁹ Brooks resigned his seat in congress, only to be re-elected by the South Carolinians. This episode demonstrates not only the fanatical dedication to honor and family, but the willingness to employ violence in its defense.

Southern historian R. M. Weaver wrote, “The gentleman’s word . . . could not be questioned. The highly touchy sense of honor built up . . . often called for the ritual of duel.”¹⁰ Dueling was a common phenomenon throughout the South. When one’s chivalry

was called into question, or some offense taken against one's family, honor demanded satisfaction. This ritualized combat was considered an accepted way for the upper classes to solve their differences. However, it was to be done only among true aristocrats. Weaver wrote, "A gentleman might chastise a low fellow with whip . . . for offering him an insult, but he could not meet him on the field of honor."¹¹ The defining characteristic of the duel is honor, which was tied inexorably to wealth, and therefore was only to be found among the upper classes. This practice illustrates the critical importance of honor within the culture. Indeed, dueling was such an imbedded institution that Governor John Lyde Wilson of South Carolina published a book, *The Code of Honor; or Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Dueling*, in 1858. This manual described the guidelines for the "proper" way to duel, including the etiquette for an invitation to a duel or the proper conduct of a witness.¹² This readiness to engage in violence for the sake of one's personal reputation and beliefs would influence Southern attitudes towards secession and war.

Violence was not confined to the upper classes, however. Fighting was as integral to the lower classes as honor was to the elites. The Southern frontier remained notoriously dangerous, and militia units were often engaged in actions against American Indian tribes. Homicide and assault were common in more populated areas due to the close proximity of populations and presence of bars. Fighting was a necessary means to gain the respect of peer groups in some circles and Southerners were accustomed to brawling with fists and weapons alike.¹³ Widespread use of firearms for practical hunting and for self-defense meant that a large portion of the Southern citizenry was well versed in marksmanship. Horsemanship was also highly prized among Southerners, due to the

rural and agricultural nature of the region. When war did come to the South, these skills would benefit the Confederate army.

Military institutions became integral parts of Southern culture. Military schools such as the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute drew men from the upper strata of society and were considered an honorable vocation. Even though West Point was located in New York, it still drew many Southerners. Many of the Southern graduates would comprise the officer corps of the extensive southern militia system and, eventually, the Confederate Army.¹⁴ These militias varied greatly in size and organization, but all kept the purpose of defending the peace and preserving the existing social and political order, whether it be from slave insurrection or Indian incursion. Militia musters and demonstrations became major social events, in which the Southern gentlemen displayed their martial skill and magnanimous generosity to the masses, providing food and drink for the rank and file. Shooting and riding, as mentioned, were already tenants of Southern culture. One of Stuart's aides would remind his son when he went off to fight to "attend well to his drilling."¹⁵ This attention to military training would instill a strong martial spirit in the Southern psyche.

Women were exempt from this martial obsession. Their sphere of influence was restricted to the household. In centuries past, women were decried as immoral temptresses, responsible for the Fall of Man. but as the Enlightenment continued, so did western culture's understanding of women. Instead of being innately morally flawed, women were endowed with a graceful piety and these developments worked in tandem with the masculine ideals of chivalry. While Southern culture was martial, it also placed a high premium on manners, especially to women.¹⁶ Just as men studied manuscripts to

understand the tenets of aristocracy, women read books like William Kenrick's *The Whole Duty of Women* to learn the tenets of womanhood such as child-rearing and hospitality.¹⁷

Hospitality remained a cornerstone of Southern aristocratic culture. With fewer inns, railroads, and urban centers than the North, the proverbial Southern hospitality was a practical as well as a cultural ideal. Because the American aristocracy lacked the history and traditions of Europe, the Southerners were forced to learn for themselves the airs and courtesies of high society. Books such as Henry Pecham's *The Complete Gentlemen*, published in 1662, were popular among the rich for just this reason.¹⁸ For widows, hospitality was a chance to reaffirm their own independence and power. Balls and formal dinners were an opportunity to strengthen ties among the upper classes, while conspicuously displaying their wealth and fashion. The latest styles, foods, and dances were imported from Europe to entertain the guests. Members of the Southern aristocracy enjoyed their status not because of any inherited title, but rather because of their wealth, manifested in the physical grounds and products of plantations. By exercising this wealth in a public fashion, Southern elites reaffirmed their position in society to their peers as well as the lower classes.¹⁹

Mary Chesnut, a South Carolinian, was an upper class woman in addition to being a dedicated diarist. Her husband was a prominent lawyer, senator, and eventually an officer in the Confederate army. An examination of her writings reveals the close personal ties that prevailed throughout circles of power. She describes dinner parties and social gatherings with powerful political and military men, including the president of the confederacy himself, Jefferson Davis.²⁰ The diary of Mary Chesnut illustrates the close

ties between the governing elites. These ties went far beyond political and military structure, permeating the social structure. The culture of hospitality among the elites created strong social as well as political ties. These traditions also allowed the gentry to endear themselves to the lower classes. As mentioned, militia demonstrations provided an opportunity to display wealth and military prowess.

Religion, too, became an outlet. Traveling preachers of the Second Great Awakening (a period of religious revival in America) often found refuge at the homes of Southern aristocrats. The Calvinist preacher, George Whitefield, was received well by Southern households. His hosts also provided ample space in barns and other structures in which he could preach.²¹

But the bedrock upon which the aristocrats built their society was slavery. Without plantation-based slavery, the plantation life and thus their own power would fall apart. Some religious figures in the South held reservations about the moral implications of slavery, but these individuals were a small minority. Most Southern philosophers cited scripture, claiming that God clearly sanctioned slavery in the Bible. It appeared to most that it was, as one Southern historian articulated, “honorable, God sanctioned and stable.”²² This is a marked departure from the founding of the United States, when many of the founding fathers believed slavery to be a necessary evil, one that would eventually be solved. Thomas Jefferson famously likened slavery to holding a wolf by the ears – it was a terrible position, but one dare not let go. With the rise of cotton as the major crop and source of income for Southern plantations, plantation owners began defending the institution as a necessary good.²³

Another social characteristic that abounded among the upper classes was the extension of paternalism to slaves. Paternalism was the assertion that the male was the head of the household and all those in the house were under his protection. Southern thinkers extended this to slavery. This rationalization claimed that blacks, as an inferior race, benefitted from bondage. Without the guidance of whites, the race would be without structure or civilization. The relationship between master and slave from the aristocracy's perspective was analogous to that of parent and child. These defensive rationalizations sought to assuage any guilt or blemish on the honor of the Southern elites who enjoyed slavery's benefits. Southern novelist John Pendelton Kennedy wrote, "no tribe of people have ever passed from barbarism to civilization whose middle stage of progress has been more secure from harm, more genial to their character or better supplied with . . . guardianship."²⁴ The work carried out by chattel slavery provided white elites leisure, wealth, and status. Only twenty-five percent of Southern families owned slaves, and less than one percent had more than one hundred. Clearly the social elites benefited disproportionately from the system than the poor. Yet the lower classes accepted this labor system in the hope that one day they might buy their way by the purchase of slaves into the social elite.

When the conflict between North and South came to a head in 1861, Southern leaders framed the conflict not in terms of the existence of slavery, but rather as a vindication of their own rights and honor. As discussed, the upper class's way of life, perceptions, and ideals were all predicated on plantation life, and slavery remained the cornerstone. So engrained was this understanding of what it meant to be a *Southerner* that even the vast multitudes who did not enjoy the lifestyle were willing to fight and die for

it. Thus, the same impulses that caused Preston Brooks to beat Charles Sumner again make an appearance as an article in one Mississippi newspaper, the *Eastern Clarion*, explained, “Our people . . . have resolved to endure with composure and fortitude the evils and sufferings the way may entail, in order to vindicate their rights and maintain their honor.”²⁵ The rabid defense of honor ensured conflict. As American historian Edward Ayers wrote, “Honor was the catalyst necessary to ignite the South’s volatile mixture of slavery, scattered settlement, heavy drinking, and ubiquitous weaponry.”²⁶

Southern notions of honor bled into the philosophy of the conflict as well. Many Southern generals refused to allow their troops to ravage the countryside, as General John B. Gordon vowed to deliver “the head of any soldier under my command who destroyed private property, disturbed the repose of a single home, or insulted a woman.”²⁷ One can compare the relatively respectful conduct of Confederate soldiers to the havoc visited upon Southern cities by General William T. Sherman’s troops in his “March to the Sea.” Sometimes, however, these ideals impeded the war effort. Jefferson Davis rejected a plan to sabotage Federal naval stations as “unjustifiable.”²⁸ The philosophy also lent itself to an outright rejection of reality, as Gordon brushed off superior numbers and firepower in lieu of his belief in “providence.”²⁹ Steven Elliot would deem it “dishonorable” and “shameful” to request the foreign aid the Confederacy needed so badly.³⁰ Elliot’s opinion is by no means the norm, but the fact that it exists underlines the radical nature of Southern honor. This evidence suggests that Southern adherence to codes of honor were not flippant ideologies, but rather deep-seeded class-wide morays that dictated many Southerner’s entire paradigm.

Chapter Two

Young Stuart

This was the culture into which James Ewel Brown Stuart was born in Laurel Hill, Virginia in early February 1833. Over the course of his life, he would internalize this culture, and in time, come to epitomize the values of his land and class. For Stuart was certainly an aristocrat, though with some qualifiers. His family lineage in America can be traced back to 1726, when his great-great-grandfather, Archibald Stuart, emigrated from Londonderry, Ireland to Pennsylvania. Archibald resettled to Virginia in 1738. Archibald's son, Alexander Stuart, fought as a major in a militia regiment in the Revolutionary War, during which time he served with distinction, was wounded, captured, and eventually released by the British. Alexander's son and namesake Alexander the second, led a legal and political career of some note. Alexander the younger's first wife, Nancy Anne Dabney, was a part of the cultural elite in Virginia; she was related to such notable families as the Lees and the Jeffersons. Archibald Stuart, Jeb's father, born in 1795, followed his father into the legal profession and politics, working as a lawyer and as a state and federal legislator, but not before serving in the War of 1812 as an artillery officer. Jeb Stuart's mother, Elizabeth Letcher Pannill Stuart, also came from a family of some repute. The Letchers hailed from southern Virginia and northern North Carolina, owning large tracts of land and slaves. Her grandfather, William Letcher, had been an active proponent of revolution, that is, until a Loyalist killed him in his Virginia home. Among her cousins were two state governors. ¹

While Stuart's lineage seems prestigious enough, his family did not rank among the true elites of Virginia society. Though his mother brought with the marriage 1,500

acres of land and slaves – the Stuarts would own twenty to twenty-eight – his father was fond of material comforts, gambling, and drinking. As a result, the family fell into debt.² In addition, Stuart hailed from Patrick County. Situated in southwestern Virginia on the edge of the Piedmont, Patrick County was considered a backwater area. It lacked the climate and soil to make it truly profitable as an agricultural region. Though the Stuarts raised livestock, tobacco and corn, most of the activities consisted of subsistence farming. Far from the population and cultural centers in the east, Patrick County had little in the way of wealth or prestige.³

Despite the relative isolation of Patrick County, Stuart still grew up with the culture of the Southern elites. His mother Elizabeth was a stern and pious woman, who demanded that he and his brothers adhere to all the rules and courtesies of his class. She made him swear never to touch alcohol or gamble. She also imbued Jeb with a strong religious faith.⁴ Yet, by his own account, his childhood was a happy one. He spent his days riding, shooting, and playing sports, and fell in love with the pastoral setting of the Virginia Piedmont. Tall and athletic for his age, Jeb was a true competitor. David French Boyd, a friend and schoolmate, recalled, “Stuart never liked to be checked or contradicted, never liked to be thwarted or opposed; it excited him, it made him stronger.” One story from Stuart’s childhood demonstrates his hardheaded determination. One day while playing outside with his older brother Alex, the boys came across a wasp’s nest in the branches of a tree. Resolving to destroy the nest, the boys knocked the hive to the ground. Upon seeing the swarm of wasps, Alex turned and fled while Jeb attacked his fallen target, sustaining stings until the nest was destroyed.⁵

From his earliest years, he evinced sensitivity to insults, and was willing to fight to defend his honor. Boyd said that his companion was “quixotic,” willing to “take offense at real or supposed injustice or slight.”⁶ When Stuart left home at thirteen for boarding school, he wrote to a cousin that he had, “contrary to the expectations of all,” resisted the temptation to fight any of his classmates.⁷

Stuart would attend several boarding schools, and at the age of fifteen attempt to enlist in the military, but was rejected because of his age. Instead, he attended Emory and Henry College in Virginia in 1848. In his years away from home, he wrote his parents often, expressing a longing for Laurel Hill. He visited Monticello, the historic home of fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson, and took a chip from his tombstone as a souvenir. In addition, he would spend this time developing relationships with his extended family in different parts of the state. The Haristons, cousins on his mother’s side, were a particular favorite, as Jeb became enamored with one of the daughters, Bettie.⁸

In 1850, at the age of seventeen, Stuart received a recommendation from Representative Thomas Hamlet Averett to attend West Point Military Academy in New York. Stuart enjoyed the rigors and structure of the Academy and it was here that he began to cultivate his own self-understanding. He read Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Lord Byron and other romantic authors in his spare time. He spoke longingly of Virginia, and became what one biographer described as a “Vigriniaphile.”⁹ He was proud of his horsemanship, and was counted among the best in his class upon his mount, Don Quixote. As for the “Yankees,” Stuart was unimpressed with their skills on horseback. He studied hard, keeping a bible on his desk to ward off evil spirits, and graduated thirteenth in a class of forty-six. By his own admission, he purposefully neglected his math studies

so as to be placed in the cavalry rather than the engineers. If Stuart pursued a military career, it would be one fraught with adventure; he rejected the notion of becoming a “petty-fogger lawyer.”¹⁰ Stuart would get his wish and receive a commission to the cavalry when he graduated, based mostly upon his skill on horseback.¹¹

Jeb fostered a number of close relationships. Many of Stuart’s classmates would serve with him in the Confederate Army, such as John Pegram and Fitzhugh Lee, or across the field with the Union, such as Oliver Otis Howard. Among these friends was Custis Lee. Both hailing from Virginia, the young men became extremely close. Even amidst the chaos of the Civil War, his classmates would continue to call him by his West Point nickname, “Beauty.”¹² When Robert E. Lee, Custis’s father, became superintendent of West Point in 1852, Stuart became a frequent visitor to the Lee household, developing a close relationship with the entire family. Stuart wrote that Mary Custis Lee, Robert’s wife, treated him “as if I were her own son.”¹³ Stuart also maintained a vibrant correspondence with Bettie Hariston, in whom he confided and to whom he wrote poetry.

Continuing his childhood habits in Virginia, Jeb maintained his penchant for danger and combativeness. He displayed a “thankful acceptance of a challenge to fight from any cadet.”¹⁴ This readiness to fight stemmed from the same inflated sense of personal honor which led other members of the antebellum aristocracy to engage in duels. Indeed, as Fitz Lee remembered from their days at West Point together, Stuart was “always ready to defend his own rights and honor,” even though he was often badly beaten by his opponents.¹⁵

In one instance, Stuart had an altercation with another cadet, one William P. Sanders, a “strapping big Mississippian,” over a minor issue at role call. The two cadets resolved to settle the issue by fighting, though the event was structured like a duel, with each young man having a second. While Stuart was relatively tall and strong, he had few illusions about how the fight would go. Custis Lee (Stuart’s second) advised him to bring a club to the fight to even the odds. Stuart refused, reflecting, “It was not a matter of consequence whether I whipped or was whipped, and I would not have the appearance of seeking an advantage for the sake of victory.”¹⁶ Stuart would be sent to the infirmary with a battered face. These fights were not seen as youthful transgressions, or even as deviant behavior, but rather applauded by his peers and superiors alike. Jeb’s father, Archibald Stuart, applauded his son’s actions, saying, “You maintained your character as a man of honor.”¹⁷

Stuart was conflicted about what to do upon graduation. In letters to his father, he struggled with his options, whether to pursue law or a military career. Stuart was the youngest of Archibald’s sons, and thus according to Southern inheritance traditions, would inherit little from his father. Thomas Jefferson wrote about the plight of “the younger sons and daughters of the aristocrats who inherited the pride of their ancestors without their wealth.”¹⁸ Even if he wasn’t the youngest male, Stuart’s family had little inheritance to speak of, so circumstances forced Jeb to choose among the “hireling professions” – that is, medicine, engineering, law or arms. In the end, Stuart concluded that the military life was his calling, believing he would be “miserably unhappy” outside the armed forces.¹⁹

Upon accepting his commission to the cavalry, Stuart's assignment sent him 450 miles across the country to Laredo, Texas. Stuart said that the placement was the "consummation of my wishes."²⁰ Stuart's duties primarily involved tracking hostile Comanche raiding parties across the rugged and desolate terrain. From Texas, he was transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. It was here that he met Flora Cooke, the daughter of Lieutenant Colonel Philip St. George Cooke.

Cooke came to Fort Leavenworth to visit her father. The first time Stuart saw her, he fantasized that her horse would start bucking, and that he would coolly save her from danger. Regardless, Stuart began taking rides with Ms. Cooke. Flora Cooke was a tall and athletic young woman who enjoyed horseback riding, music, and shooting. Moreover, she was a Virginian. Stuart was instantly in love. Over the course of the next two months, Jeb and Flora courted, until their marriage in 1855. As he wrote, "Veni, vidi victus sum," or, "I came, I saw, I was conquered."²¹ His letters to his "darling wife" reveal a tender, loving relationship in which he continually begs her to visit and speaks of his longing for his beloved.²² He was a lover of music and ballad poetry, and even wrote some himself. He yearned for the day when he and his wife could settle down "with birds and flowers and books and the very best society in the world."²³

Upon his return to service after a brief hiatus for his marriage, Stuart yet again demonstrated his stubborn and defensive nature when a disagreement arose with Colonel Edwin Sumner. The spat cost Stuart his position as quartermaster, and he wrote a nine-page appeal letter to an adjunct general in Washington, D.C.²⁴ Though he was no longer coming to blows with his opponents, Jeb Stuart did not take insults lightly. In another instance while serving in Kansas, Stuart and his men got into a skirmish with a band of

Cheyenne warriors. The natives retreated, but Stuart gave pursuit, trading horses with a private for a less exhausted mount. Riding down one warrior, Stuart shot his foe in the leg and hit him in the head with his saber, only to have the Cheyenne return fire, hitting Stuart squarely in his chest. The bullet glanced off his sternum and imbedded behind his chest, missing any vital organs.²⁵ Fortunately, the wound would heal quickly. On another campaign, Stuart and his men were abandoned by their Pawnee guides in a dense fog, lost and without ample rations. Leaving some men behind, Stuart set out on a difficult journey to seek assistance. After several days and torrential downpours, he came across a mail train.²⁶

All the while that Stuart served in Kansas, the dark portents of war loomed on the horizon. In Kansas had exploded into violence between pro-slavery and antislavery forces, and sectional rhetoric became even more caustic. Neither Flora nor Jeb were sympathetic to the abolitionist cause. Though the couple owned two slaves, they had little personal investment in the institution. However, their families and countrymen did and this placed them securely on the side of the South. Stuart blamed abolitionists for “lighting the torch of civil war in our midst.”²⁷ However, he was not a secessionist. In a speech at Emory and Henry College in 1859, he said, “I love the union. I love Virginia more, and if one attachment ever becomes incompatible with the other I scruple not to say Virginia shall command my poor services.”²⁸ Like his friend and mentor Robert E. Lee, Stuart’s strong attachment to his home state would be the defining factor in his decision when war did come.

Upon his return to the East, Stuart invented a device to attach to a cavalryman’s saber that would allow him to easily take it on and off while dismounting his steed. He

made some modest income off the invention, though not enough to make him wealthy.²⁹ While in Virginia in October 1859, he delivered a message to Robert E. Lee saying that a group of men had taken hold of Harper's Ferry. He accompanied Lee to the arsenal, where Lee was to take command of the marines there. In one of the strange coincidences of history, Stuart had met John Brown during the upheaval in Kansas, and recognized him now a thousand miles away. After Brown refused the demands made by the Federal troops, Lee ordered an attack and captured or killed Brown's men. Stuart took John Brown's bowie knife as a souvenir.³⁰ The incident only served to harden Stuart's notion that abolitionists were determined to undermine Southern sovereignty by violence.

Jeb Stuart's early life imbued him with all the romances and culture of the antebellum South. Though born the youngest son of a vaguely distinguished aristocratic family in the backwater of Virginia, he internalized the values of his caste. His ancestors brought a tradition of military service. His father taught him the importance of defending one's honor, which he did with vigor throughout his youth. From his mother came a strict moral code, respect for women, and a powerful faith life. He was a military man, demonstrating unquestioned dedication and bravery to whatever cause he took up. From hornet's nests to insulting classmates to the bullets of native warriors, Stuart was willing to pay whatever price for victory. His friendships connected him to many of the prominent families of Virginia and allowed him to brush shoulders with many powerful aristocrats. Yet Stuart was a true romantic. He loved poetry and song and adventure. He read the romantic novels about chivalry and knights. Even his horse's name at West Point, Don Quixote, spoke of his love for antiquity and romance. He enjoyed the company of women, and writing long and emotional letters to those who won his love.

He gathered souvenirs from places and events of import to him, a chip of Jefferson's tomb and John Brown's bowie knife. In his faith life he remained dedicated, praising God, composing prayers, and resigning himself to divine providence, "His will not mine be done."

So when his home state seceded from the Union in 1861, Stuart's choice was clear: "I go with Virginia."

Chapter 3

The Interwar Years

The cavalry was a prestigious placement for the young general. At the outbreak of the war, the Confederate army was woefully under supplied, and relied upon cavalymen to supply their own mounts, with a 40 cent per diem for their use.¹ These costs meant that only the upper classes could even afford to ride in Stuart's ranks. One of Stuart's staff officers, H. B. McClellan wrote, "Virginia was full of horses of noble blood....Gentlemen fond of following the hounds raised these horses for their own sake." These mounts were often of high quality, bred for speed and beauty.² Their riders, raised in a strong equestrian tradition, excelled on horseback. Even Heros von Borcke, a veteran of the vaunted Prussian Hussars and no stranger to war horses, had this to say about Stuart's cavalry: "The men were all Virginians whose easy and graceful seat betrayed the constant habit of horseback exercise, and they were mounted mostly on blooded animals, some of which the most ambitious guardsman . . . in London would have been glad to show off in Hyde Park."³ So impressed was Borcke that he mentioned the quality of horses three times within the first twenty-one pages of his memoirs.⁴

In addition, letters from Stuart's subordinates show men asking their wives and families to go to the stables to make use of saddles and other riding gear.⁵ Often times, the lower classes were not able to supply their horses, and units originally recruited for the cavalry were transitioned to the infantry.⁶ Volunteers had to provide their own weapons as well and only the richest of the men could provide their own pistols.⁷ In medieval times, feudal knights enjoyed the privilege of being able to afford expensive

steel weapons, armor and war horses, giving them the edge in hand to hand combat. Likewise, those unable to purchase horses, saddles, bridles, and other necessities could not serve in the cavalry, and were thus forced into the infantry. In this sense, these cavalrymen were indeed the aristocratic cavaliers they modeled themselves after.

Their social standing would influence their conduct in the field. One Union colonel noted, “The ranks of Stuart’s regiments were largely filled by men from the highest class of southern society.”⁸ In a raid on a northern town, he later observed, “most of them were men of above ordinary intelligence and culture, and their demeanor was in all respects eminently courteous.”⁹ These men subscribed to the demands of their class, behaving immaculately where so many men would take what they wanted. Following their commander’s lead, Stuart’s scouting and foraging parties were courteous and honorable when dealing with civilians. Stuart explicitly ordered his men that “individual plundering” was prohibited, and any materials requisitioned for the war effort would be compensated by the Confederate government.¹⁰

Stuart’s troops treated homes with respect, offering protection to women whose husbands and sons were away at war or arrested.¹¹ The courteous conduct of Stuart’s cavalry was not necessarily the norm within either army; the high standards they held for themselves demonstrate the pride and sense of honor these men felt. Their actions contrast with other leaders such as Union General Benjamin “Beast” Butler, the commanding officer in New Orleans. Butler, fed up with the disrespect shown to his men, declared that women who slandered Union troops “shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.”¹² Another cavalryman abhorred the conduct of Union cavalry: “they even robbed and insulted the ladies, deprived them

of their watches and jewelry.”¹³ Southern newspapers such as the *Richmond Dispatch* denounced General William T. Sherman’s troops as well: “The most dreadful thing was their violence towards the ladies. At least six or seven suffered the last extremity. One girl became crazed in consequence and has been sent to the asylum.”¹⁴ Stuart and his cavalymen would never consider such disrespect. These men learned from a young age from their families and culture the importance of honor in their actions, especially where duty was concerned.

Stuart was a military man. In his years before becoming a professional soldier, letters to his father illustrate an internal battle in which Stuart considers careers in politics and law, or the military. In the end, however, his adventurous and romantic nature proved too strong, and the allure of the military life too great. In 1850, Stuart entered West Point, where he proved himself a capable cadet. His classmates and professors remembered him as a “soldier and gentleman.”¹⁵ He graduated in the top quarter of his class, doing especially well in artillery exercises. In the following years he would prove himself fearless in the face of danger. West Point trained him well, and he demonstrated the virtues of a natural leader. Before the Civil War, his career took him to Texas, where he was engaged against hostile native tribes. In one confrontation, as noted in chapter 2, he was nearly killed when he saved the life of a fellow soldier from an Indian attack. Stuart was always in the thick of the action, preferring the front lines and pickets to the monotony of camp. “It’s stupid at camp,” he wrote, “all the fun is out here.”¹⁶ Stuart would have multiple mounts shot out from beneath him, lose a piece of his mustache to a minnie ball, and stand coolly in the open field as Union artillery bombarded the

Confederate lines at Fredericksburg.¹⁷ This apparent imperviousness to the stresses of battle endeared Stuart to his men, and perpetuated his heroic myth.

But more importantly than his brazen courage, Stuart understood the changing nature of cavalry warfare. For all his allusions to cavalry charges and the glory of sword fighting, Stuart recognized that massed cavalry charges were an outmoded strategy. In this new era of industrial warfare, the cavalry must act as a screening, reconnaissance, and raiding force. While the general armies often were dormant between campaigns, Stuart was constantly leading sorties, raids, and scouting missions, rather than conducting grandiose charges in pitched battles.¹⁸ He also understood the value of horse-drawn artillery, and would use his West Point training and horse-drawn guns to his benefit.

His dogged determination to repudiate slights to his honor, even in the face of defeat, illustrates a larger theme of Stuart's life. In the aftermath of great such losses, such as Gettysburg, Stuart would never give up his cause. Like many soldiers in bloody conflicts, Stuart never truly expected to survive the war, and hoped for an honorable death on the battlefield, if death was to come. "All I ask of fate is that I be killed leading a cavalry charge," he admitted.¹⁹ In an age when the firepower of massed infantry and artillery rendered most cavalry charges suicide, Stuart's comments illustrate a yearning for a more "honorable" form of battle in which he could fully embrace his cavalier image. Indeed, Confederate officers, who mostly came from the upper strata of society, died at a much higher rate than their Yankee counterparts, due to their tendency to personally lead their men into battle.

Even though married, Stuart remained extremely popular with women, especially as his fame grew during the war years. Dashing and flamboyant, Stuart relished the attention he received from the opposite sex. By all accounts, his gracious manners, quick smile, and natural charisma endeared him to all he encountered. He would often call upon the young women of the towns they passed through, socializing over tea.²⁰ On one occasion, as the cavalry stayed the night in a Virginia town, Stuart organized a ball in which all the women of the town were invited. In the midst of the merriment and dancing, news arrived that Federal troops were close by. Stuart and his men immediately vacated the gala and rode off to battle, only to return after combat to continue the party. However, the laughter and chatter quickly turned to gasps of horror as the wounded began streaming into the town, bloodied and screaming.²¹ This incident shows the dichotomy in Stuart's character. On the one hand, his love of women and fine company demanded his attention. Neither inconvenience nor mortal peril could keep Stuart away. Yet he also showed a distinct insensitivity and obtuseness to the dead and dying by continuing his party. He was a warrior – used to the sights and horrors of war. While one might conclude that he was some sort of womanizer, there is no evidence that suggests he was unfaithful to his wife. On the contrary, many of his peers expressly pointed out that Stuart remained fully devoted to Flora his entire life. Any breach of their marriage would be completely dishonorable and out of the question. Stuart took his oaths seriously, to his wife, to his state, and to his mother. As a young boy, Stuart promised his mother he would abstain from alcohol, a promise he kept until his deathbed.²²

Stuart also evinced a strong dedication to his faith, another trait inherited from his mother. He carried her bible into battle on his person.²³ He recognized the “guiding hand

of providence in all things” and believed God aided him in all his victories.²⁴ During his time at West Point, he kept a bible on his desk in order to ward off evil spirits.²⁵ Once he graduated, he attempted to raise money to open a “free church” in his hometown of Laurel Hill.²⁶ Stuart’s devotion was a part of his adherence to Southern Protestant culture. His mother, an Episcopalian, raised him with strict attention to his spiritual development. After Stuart met Flora, he converted to Presbyterianism, but this had little effect on his active faith. He read frequently from his prayer book, and even wrote some of his own.²⁷

His troops were equally intriguing. On his staff were Robert E. Lee’s son and nephew, both capable commanders in their own right. There was Heros von Borcke, the Prussian hussar who stood six feet four inches tall and weighed over two hundred and forty pounds. In charge of the horse artillery was John Pelham, who dropped out of West Point to fight for the Confederacy and distinguished himself by his brilliant command at Fredericksburg. Stuart’s personal staff contained one Corporal Hagan who was called a “giant” with an enormous beard and a voice “as hoarse as distant thunder.”²⁸ He also liked his aides to be singers and musicians. One aide, Sampson D. Sweeney, was a talented banjo player who accompanied him all round camp and to social gatherings.²⁹ In addition, his troupe included several African American singers, who combined to form a veritable band of minstrels, reminiscent of the mythical court of King Arthur.³⁰ His men wrote poetry about their leader as well. William M. Blackford penned the poem “The Cavalier’s Glee”

Spur on! Spur On! We love the bounding
Of barbs that bear us to the fray;
“The Charge!” our bugles are sounding,

And our bold Stuart leads the way³¹

It is worth noting that the poem speaks about a bold cavalry charge, an event rare in the Civil War. The poem highlights the popular obsession with the romantic ideal of the cavalry, not the realities of nineteenth century combat. These men became legendary, accomplishing great feats of horsemanship and chivalry. H. B. McClellan wrote, “certainly no similar organization in the Army of Northern Virginia counted more officers who were distinguished by excessive daring than . . . the cavalry.”³² Men came from far and wide to join the ranks, including many men of distinction, such as Maryland Congressman George Freaner.³³

As the war went on, Stuart’s reputation grew. Not only did he evince the qualities of honor and nobility so dear to the hearts of Southern aristocrats, but he was a skilled military leader as well. His peers in the Confederate army applauded his daring, initiative, and charismatic leadership. General Joseph E. Johnston once remarked that Stuart was “a rare man with qualities necessary for an officer of light cavalry.” Furthermore, he displayed a brilliant and “bold use of [horse] artillery.”³⁴ His achievements are famous, such as his daring ride 150 miles around the entire union army during the Peninsula Campaign.

Before long, Stuart’s popular reputation turned him into a living legend. He had become the perfect hero for the Confederate cause. Not only was he a talented military leader, but he possessed qualities that created a powerful persona that outshined the man himself. Poets such as Paul Hamilton Hayne wrote ballads about his achievements and newspapers wrote (and embellished) stories about him. Stuart’s brother-in-law, John

Esten Cooke, was a writer and aide in the camps. His stories were highly romanticized and possibly did more than those of any other single writer in building the myth of Stuart. To his credit, however, Stuart did distrust the man and thought his writings “dishonorable,” though Stuart never said this to Cooke’s face. Crowds gathered wherever he went. Heros von Borcke wrote about one such incident, when a mob of women mistook him for Stuart, because of the plume in his hat. Borcke was mobbed by the crowd, and had some difficulty escaping.³⁵

This certainly had an effect upon Stuart’s already inflated ego. Even before he ever became a military man, he complained that a life in the legal profession had much less potential for fame than a career in the army.³⁶ He wanted to make a name for himself, to achieve some level of fame and accomplishment in whatever vocation he undertook. While serving on the frontier and in the early years of the war, Stuart did not participate in the self-aggrandizement he evinced later in the conflict. In General Jubal A. Early’s unpublished memoirs, Early wrote that “Stuart did as much towards saving the battle of 1st Manassas as any subordinate . . . and yet he has never received any credit for it. . . . His own report is brief and inadequate.”³⁷ However, after a few years of fame, while he often deferred credit for victories to his subordinates, or to providence, he more often than not relished in his victories. He wrote of his accomplishments and sent his stories and poems into newspapers. Some decried him as a “buffoon trying to attract attention,” reprimanding him for focusing upon his own celebrity status rather than ultimate victory.³⁸ After receiving a pair golden spurs from a female admirer, he began signing his letters K.G.S. (Knight of the Golden Spurs). To understand this transformation, one must understand that Stuart was hardly thirty years old. Only several

years before, he had been serving in the remote frontier of the American West, tracking and only occasionally coming into contact with native forces. By the early 1860s, Stuart was a general in the Army of Northern Virginia, commanding thousands of troops in grand campaigns. Such a meteoric rise to fame and affluence imbued Stuart with a sense of enormous self-worth and destiny.

Though the Army of Northern Virginia continued to win stunning triumphs against superior numbers of Northerners, the Union army was improving. While the South may have possessed superior horsemen, and perhaps even better bred horses, they were underequipped compared to their Yankee counterparts. The North was able to field more troops, breed more horses, and supply better firearms. Stuart's victories ceased to be so decisive, and the Federal cavalry began to prove itself. After an unclear encounter with Union forces near the Virginia border, the *Richmond Examiner* reprimanded Stuart's actions. At Gettysburg, Stuart disappeared from the main army, and went on yet another long raid across the Pennsylvania countryside, depriving Robert E. Lee of his scouts. While one cannot know how the battle would have gone had Stuart stayed close to Lee, military historians agree that his absence served as a detriment to the Confederates in early July of 1863.³⁹ Even after he returned from his raid, he failed to win his objective in a bloody encounter with Federal cavalry. Rather than accept the criticism and continue on his way, Stuart fiercely defended his decision, writing a 14,300-word document which attempted to validate his decisions.⁴⁰ Stuart's stubbornness stemmed from his obsession over his own celebrity status and his need to be adored by the public. In another instance, Stuart told a subordinate his entire rationale for a difficult choice he had to make, lest he

be killed in battle and posterity misunderstand his decision.⁴¹ Stuart's legacy and reputation was clearly tremendously important to him.

At the Battle of Yellow Tavern in May 1864, a federal bullet pierced Stuart's side, mortally wounding him. Though Stuart had said, "all I ask of fate that I be killed during a cavalry charge,"⁴² a bullet to the abdomen ultimately killed him after hours of excruciating pain. At this moment the portrait of Stuart transforms from a gallant hero to a very human figure, dying "from internal hemorrhaging and peritonitis; he died by his own blood and feces."⁴³ This description of Stuart's death reflects the stark and brutal nature of warfare in the mid-19th century. This was not the glorious, quick, clean death on the battlefield Stuart had dreamed of. On his deathbed, Stuart requested that his sword be given to one Lilly Lee of Virginia, and asked that several other personal items be distributed to his friends and admirers. Perhaps Stuart wanted to fulfill the promises he made in life, or perhaps he sought to secure his position in the history books. One of his men, Alexander Robinson Boteler, wrote in his diary on the 13th of May, that the memory of Stuart

will be cherished in the south as long as the Blue Mountains of Virginia look down upon fields consecrated by [Stuart's] blood and made immortal by [his] bravery. They tell me Stuart went into battle, his last battle singing,

Soon with angels I'll be marching

With bright laurels on my brow⁴⁴

Civilians and soldiers alike lamented his passing. The couriers who carried the news "wept like children."⁴⁵ Even his rivals, such as General William "Grumble" Jones, said that Stuart's death was "the greatest loss that army has ever sustained except the death of Jackson."⁴⁶ As a martyr of the war, Stuart's legend would grow. If Stuart was

celebrated in life, he was fully enshrined in death. Robert E. Lee was “greatly affected,” reminiscing that Stuart “never brought me a false piece of information. . . . To the noble virtues of the soldier he added the brighter graces of a pure life, guided and sustained by the Christian’s faith and hope.”⁴⁷

Chapter Four

Legacy

As the war came to a close, Southerners sought to contextualize their suffering and devastation. The “Lost Cause” movement sought to assuage the loss many Southerners felt. Writers focused upon Southern honor and states’ rights rather than the legacy of slavery and rebellion. John Esten Cooke would refer to the Civil War as a “revolution,” reflecting his own attitude of defiance and illustrating the context in which Southerners chose to view the war.¹ This was not a senseless, bloody conflict for the preservation of an outmoded and immoral labor system, but rather a glorious, albeit doomed, attempt at throwing off the shackles of Northern oppression. In the North, there was a sort of fascination with the culture of the defeated South. Historian Mary Jo Bratton wrote: “The South required some assurance that theirs had been a noble cause, while in the victorious North there was apparently some need to be assured that theirs had been a valiant foe.”² The bloodied and eroded South now looked into the past for its identity. The image of Southern planter society, now devastated by war, recalled a time when chivalrous gentlemen defended the honor of their land and the virtues of their class. This shift in focus required heroes; Stuart filled that need. A martyr to the cause, he evinced those values and attitudes that men of the Confederacy cherished above all else. Historian Paul D. Escott wrote, “J.E.B. Stuart served the need to declare, against the fact of defeat, that the Southerners were ‘the better men.’”³ Stuart had become a martyr to the glorious end of a golden age of Southern culture.

In the early years following Stuart’s death come two sets of memoirs, written by Stuart’s fellow cavalrymen and subordinate officers. The first, produced even before the

end of the war, was Heros von Borcke's *Memoirs of the Confederate War of Independence*. Borcke was a Prussian hussar who originally came to the continent as a military observer, but quickly became involved in the conflict, volunteered for the cavalry, and would serve as an aide to Stuart. After being injured in 1863, he returned to his homeland and began writing his memoirs, which were published in installments beginning in 1865.

The second was John Esten Cooke's *Wearing of the Gray*, published in 1867. Cooke worked as a romantic Southern writer and brother-in-law to Stuart. Cooke produced magazine and freelance newspaper articles during the war while serving as an adjunct and member of Stuart's personal staff. Cooke would become one of the most productive Southern novelists, authoring a large body of work composed primarily of romantic works on the Civil War and the antebellum South such as his novel *Mohun*, published in 1869.

These first two sources represent the first generation of scholarship on J.E.B. Stuart. In order to understand the growth and perpetuation of Stuart's myth, one must first understand these writings and the men who wrote them. Their writings informed the public, in the United States and abroad, about life in the shadow of Stuart. Cooke and Borcke both lived and fought with the general, had intimate relationships with him, and underwent all manner of hardship by his side. Their perspectives are unique in understanding the true nature of Stuart's character and reveal just how the post-war South understood its fallen hero.

Borke's memoirs began in late May of 1862, when he arrived in Charleston, North Carolina harbor after running federal blockades off the coast. In an entertaining, narrative style, Borcke wrote about his impressions of the "strange land" in which he found himself.⁴ He commented on the charms of Richmond, the quality of Southern horses, and the "unmilitary-looking" Confederate Army.⁵ In some ways, Borcke's work was a travel narrative, the story of a stranger in a foreign land.

Most important to this study, Borcke's version of Stuart was also unique. His version was not of the mythic figure of later decades, but rather of a dedicated and brave soldier and comrade in arms. Borcke admired Stuart's élan and bravery, giving credence to his physical prowess – though Borcke himself was six foot four, two hundred and forty pounds – and "fearless and dexterous horsemanship."⁶ Yet Stuart remained human, as Borcke described his flamboyant dress with thinly-veiled mockery and depicted him at times in foul moods.⁷

Yet Borcke's intimate relationship with Stuart was revealed in his Memoirs. Borcke reveals Stuart's last coherent words in the following passage: "Drawing me towards him, and grasping my hand firmly, he said, 'My dear Von, I am sinking fast now, but before die I want you to know that I never loved a man as much as yourself. I pray your life may be long and happy...'"⁸ These were the last connected words he spoke.⁸ This passage reveals the strong emotional connection he had to the Confederate general.

The memoirs of Heroes von Borcke, were unique in other ways. First, Borcke wrote his memoirs of the conflict before the war was over. Published in two installments in early 1865, Borcke's writings lacked the historical scope and understanding that later

works enjoy. He hardly touched on the legacy of the war. That being said, his work also presented a picture of the conflict untainted by later events. In this sense, *Memoirs of the Confederate War of Independence* existed in a sort of historical limbo, unaffected by later analysis.

Another uniqueness had to do with Borcke's nationality, though in the 1860s Germany was not yet a unified country. As a Prussian, Borcke benefited from a European perspective, without the sectional biases that plagued Americans. He did not see the conflict in terms of a moral struggle. As historian Paul D. Escott wrote, "Borcke recounted stirring events but said almost nothing about the South's grievances or righteousness of cause."⁹ Borcke owned no slaves, had no home in the South, and wrote his narrative for a broad, multinational, audience. Because he was not a part of the planter class, he also omitted many of the themes of honor and chivalry which were so present and obvious in the Southern writings. He omitted any mention of the "Lost Cause". There was a certain detachment in the prose, as evinced when he dedicated his work to the "unfortunate people of the late Confederacy."¹⁰

The next work to be published was John Esten Cooke's memoirs, *Wearing of the Grey*. Before the war, Cooke had been a romantic writer, producing novels that focused on the colonial South. In this respect, Cooke had an agenda. As a romantic novelist, he had a rather liberal relationship with facts, and was more focused on telling the *story* than the history. His characters are often one-dimensional archetypes rather than complex human beings. Central are the themes of honor and virtue, with a heavy dose of cavalier chivalry.

Cooke's Stuart seemed more like a novel's description of a hero rather than a biographer's sketch of a man. Cooke described his flowing beard, gold braid, scarlet cloak, French saber and ostrich plume in his hat.¹¹ His entourage included a banjo player and singer, who would follow him around for impromptu parties with local women. Cooke wrote, "never have I seen a purer, more knightly, or more charming gallantry."¹²

Cooke also emphasized Stuart's religious side, saying that his devotion to God stemmed from his mother, who was a devout believer herself. He would carry her bible into battle.¹³ On another occasion, Cooke quoted Stuart, "I regard the calling of a clergyman as the noblest in which any human being can engage."¹⁴ Cooke's emphasis on Stuart's piety juxtaposes his warrior spirit with his religious devotion.

Cooke idolized Stuart, creating a figure seemingly free from fault or flaw, "I never knew him to blunder"¹⁵ he wrote. No true historian would support this statement, least of all one who rode with Stuart's cavalry and experienced his mistakes firsthand. Yet Cooke remained more interested in the myth than the man. He compared Stuart to Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I and cavalry commander. "The darling of love and war, who was never so well satisfied as when dashing against the roundhead pikes and running down foes."¹⁶ Because Cooke was also a novelist, he created literary heroes based upon Stuart, such as his historical novel *Mohun*. This served to further embellish the growing myths surrounding Stuart and blur the lines between fact and fiction.

In this sense Cooke did more to perpetuate Stuart's Southern legacy than Borcke. By writing so early and with so much alacrity about Stuart's achievements, his writings would form the American foundation for biographical literature about Stuart, and would

inform popular opinion for decades to come. Borcke's work did not connect with American readers like Cooke. He was an outsider looking in, without the insight into Southern culture and values that Cooke provided. Cooke wrote about what was important to Southerners – that is, chivalry, glory, and honor.

Indeed, Cooke became one of the most prolific proponents of the Lost Cause movement. His writings, other than his memoirs, also reflect a romanticized paradigm of the South. Between the end of the war and his death in 1886, Cooke wrote 30 full-length books, and an equal amount of articles and short stories.

Thus ended the first generation of literature of Jeb Stuart. While these men were indispensable for their memories and unique personal encounters with the general, their emotional involvement and attachment muddied the waters of history. Through their wartime experiences and writings, Borcke and Cooke demonstrated their continuing loyalty to the memory of Stuart.

Why, then, did Stuart become such a monolithic figure in Southern history when so many served with distinction and honor in the Confederate army? There are several reasons. First, Stuart could capture the imagination of the public like few other Confederate leaders. Robert E. Lee was surely loved by Southerners and respected by his enemies, but he remained aloof, unknowable, the “marble man.” Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson's brilliance on the battlefield was offset by certain eccentricities that often alienated and baffled his admirers. Stuart was dashing. Stuart was handsome. Stuart was charismatic. Upon his head he wore a great hat with an enormous plume. His eyes sparkled when he laughed and his smile was quick underneath an enormous beard. He

paid close attention to his looks, wearing a scarlet cloak with gold braid, and golden sash. He carried a French saber and would almost never take off his spurs, even when dancing.¹⁷ At West Point, his fellow cadets nicknamed him “Beauty.”¹⁸ He carried favors such as flowers from women into battle with him, published accounts of his exploits, wrote poetry, all the while fighting against a force with vastly superior numbers.¹⁹ He remained calm and collected in the midst of battle, but would sob uncontrollably at the death or injury of his comrades. At one point he cut a lock of hair from the corpse of a friend.²⁰ These traits evinced many of the martial and domestic values central to Southern culture, and lauded by the growing Lost Cause movement. Furthermore, after the war, Stuart stands in close proximity to many of the most intriguing events and people of the war. Not only is he a hero, but he would also fight alongside heroes such as Lee and Jackson in famous battles. The Army of Northern Virginia and the military campaigns in the East always received more attention than the battles in the West, and Stuart was in the midst of it all. This endeared him to the public and enthralled readers after his death.

His death itself remains significant. Like Jackson, Stuart was killed in battle, at the height of his fame and at the age of 31. Though not the glorious death he had envisioned for himself, one cannot ever accuse him of disloyalty to his cause or say that he balked his duty. He died for the South, for Virginia. In death he was unquestionable, a martyr who had died for the cause.

Furthermore, his life distanced himself from the troubling issue of slavery. When Americans reflected on the horrors of the Civil War, the great sin of the South remained human chattel, slavery, and racism. While Stuart was by no means an abolitionist, or even

sympathetic to its cause, and he was never a vocal supporter of the institution. For a time he and Flora owned two slaves, but only briefly. He never pursued plantation culture in his life, and rarely evinced overt racist attitudes towards blacks. This is not to suggest that Stuart had moral reservations about slavery. He was still a product of Southern slaveholding culture, and certainly held racist attitudes, but history has muted these opinions, giving Stuart a sort of free pass where this evil is concerned.

Compare the life of J.E.B. Stuart to another Confederate cavalryman, Nathan Bedford Forrest. Like Stuart, Forrest was a brave and successful cavalry commander, with a brilliant record in several battles in the West. At the end of the war, Forrest enjoyed some measure of celebrity among Southerners, with statues erected to him in towns such as Memphis.²¹ Like Stuart, Forrest had a reputation as fearless in the face of danger, daring in his ambitious rides, and evinced strong connection with the common Southerner. Yet where Stuart is still remembered and celebrated, Forrest's reputation has diminished severely.

Forrest did not come from the Southern aristocracy. In some ways this was part of his allure, a Jacksonian figure of the self-made man, "rough-hewn" from the wilderness.²² Yet this was not a part of the Lost Cause myth. There was no place for the backwater country bumpkin in the myth's perception of the aristocratic, sophisticated, and well cultured South. While his rural roots may have endeared him in his own time, it did not fit the revised history's depiction of Southern commanders. Stuart, on the other hand, was the perfect image of a Southern gentleman, and fought in the much more publicized Eastern theater of war.

Also unlike Stuart, Forrest was an unabashed racist. In the years before the war, he made his fortune as a slave trader in Tennessee.²³ During the war, he became notorious for the “slaughter” of African American troops at Fort Pillow in 1864.²⁴ After the war, he would be one of the first leaders of the now-infamous Ku Klux Klan.²⁵ In the late 1800s, these events in his career did little to affect his hero status. However, as race relations began to change, so did the public’s perception of the man, and thus he began to fall out of favor. The fact that Forrest outlived the Confederacy meant that his legacy was still being written after the fighting had finished. There was no room for men like Forrest in the legacy of the war, despite his contributions to Southern victories. The post-war years had a terrible effect on his reputation, unlike Stuart, whose story ended with that of his cause.

J.E.B. Stuart became an immutable symbol of the “Lost Cause”, Southern chivalry, and the ante-bellum South. To the Confederacy, he was larger than life, a symbol of all the best qualities of his time and class. He hailed from an area and culture that romanticized its past, styling itself after bygone values and faraway lands. In Southern minds, he became indicative of the Southern aristocrat as a whole – morally upright, brave, courteous and honorable. The fallen Confederacy redefined its own history with Stuart as a model. He represented an image of the romanticized past through which they could define the tenants of their own culture.

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² Clifford Dowdey, *The Land They Fought For* (New York: The Country Life Press, 1955), 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵ Schlesinger, 7.

⁶ R. M. Weaver, "Southern Chivalry and Total War," *The Sewanee Review*, no. 2 (Spring 1945): 269, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27537582> (accessed September 6, 2011).

⁷ Michael Perman, ed., *Major Problems in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Lexington D.C. Heath and Company, 1991), 81.

⁸ James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 103-104.

⁹ Perman, 83.

¹⁰ Weaver, 269.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 270.

¹² John Lyde Wilson, *The Code of Honor: Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Dueling* (Charleston: James Phinney, 1858), 19-20.

¹³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 43.

¹⁴ McPherson, 56.

¹⁵ Robert J. Trout, ed., *With Pen and Saber* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1995), 5.

¹⁶ Cynthia A. Kierner, "Hospitality, Sociability, and Gender in the Southern Colonies," *The Journal of Southern History*, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 460, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2211499> (accessed January 10, 2012).

¹⁷ Schlesinger, 9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kierner, 449.

²⁰ Mary Chesnut, *The Private Mary Chesnut : The Unpublished Civil War Diaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

²¹ Kierner, 456.

²² Wyatt-Brown, 138.

²³ McPherson, 44.

²⁴ Robert D. Marcus and David Burner, eds., *America Firsthand: Volume I*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 209.

²⁵ Andrew S. Coppersmith, ed., *Fighting Words* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 24.

²⁶ Wyatt-Brown, 88.

²⁷ Weaver, 273-274.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Wyatt-Brown, 84.

Chapter 2

¹ Emory M. Thomas, *Bold Dragoon: The Life of J.E.B. Stuart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 5; Jeffrey D. Wert, *Cavalryman of the Lost Cause: A Biography of J.E.B. Stuart* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 3-5.

² Wert, 6.

³ Thomas, 7.

⁴ Ibid., 5.

- ⁵ Wert, 7; Thomas, 9.
- ⁶ Wert, 7.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Thomas, 27.
- ⁹ Ibid., 24.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 31.
- ¹¹ Wert, 18.
- ¹² Ibid., 13.
- ¹³ Ibid., 18.
- ¹⁴ H. B. McClellan, *I Rode with Jeb Stuart: The Life and Campaigns of Major General J.E.B. Stuart* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1958), 7.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 8.
- ¹⁶ Wert, 19.
- ¹⁷ McClellan, 8.
- ¹⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Aristocracy in Colonial America," *The Massachusetts Historical Society*, no. 3 (1962): 6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25080556> (accessed February 5, 2012).
- ¹⁹ Thomas, 32.
- ²⁰ Wert, 21.
- ²¹ Wert, 26; Thomas, 41-42.
- ²² J.E.B. Stuart, *Letters of J.E.B. Stuart to His Wife: 1861*, ed. Bringham Duncan (Atlanta: Emory University Press, 1943), 13.
- ²³ Ibid., 20.
- ²⁴ Wert, 32-33.

²⁵ Wert, 3; Thomas 48.

²⁶ Wert, 34.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰ Ibid., 39.

Chaper 3

¹ Emory M. Thomas, *Bold Dragoon: The Life of J.E.B. Stuart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 257.

² H. B. McClellan, *I Rode with Jeb Stuart: The Life and Campaigns of Major General J.E.B. Stuart* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958), 145.

³ Heros Von Borcke, *Memoirs of the Confederate War of Independence* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1867), 21.

⁴ Ibid., 13, 18, 21.

⁵ Robert J. Trout, ed., *With Pen and Saber* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1995), 2-3.

⁶ McClellan, 258.

⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁸ Thomas, 146.

⁹ McClellan., 145.

¹⁰ Ibid., 137.

¹¹ Trout, 31.

¹² James M. McPherson and James K. Hogue, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 414.

¹³ Trout, 10.

¹⁴ Andrew S. Coopersmith, *Fighting Words : An Illustrated History of Newspaper Accounts of the Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2004), 215.

¹⁵ McClellan, 10-11.

¹⁶ Thomas, 83.

¹⁷ McClellan, 93.

¹⁸ Thomas, 84

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁰ John Esten Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray; Being Personal Portraits, Scenes, and Adventures of the War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 16.

²¹ Thomas, 217.

²² *Ibid.*, 293.

²³ Cooke, 7.

²⁴ McClellan, 163.

²⁵ Wert, 9.

²⁶ McClellan, 6.

²⁷ Thomas, 21; Cooke, 19.

²⁸ Thomas., 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

³¹ Trout, 258.

³² McClellan, 186.

- ³³ Trout, 41
- ³⁴ McClellan, 132.
- ³⁵ Borcke, 190.
- ³⁶ Thomas, 31,35.
- ³⁷ McClellan, 39.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 203.
- ³⁹ McPherson, 351.
- ⁴⁰ Thomas, 253-254.
- ⁴¹ McClellan, 148.
- ⁴² Thomas, 73.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 300.
- ⁴⁴ Trout, 40.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 41.
- ⁴⁶ McClellan, 321.
- ⁴⁷ Robert E. Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1904), 125.

Chapter 4

¹ John Esten Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray: Being Personal Portraits, Scenes, and Adventures of the War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 7.

² Mary Jo Bratton, "John Esten Cooke and His "Confederate Lies",," *Southern Literary Journal*, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 80. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20077665> (accessed March 12, 2012).

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⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17, 166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 434.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁰ Heros Von Borcke, *Memoirs of the Confederate War of Independence* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1867), 378.

¹¹ Cooke, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸ Emory M. Thomas, *Bold Dragoon: The Life of J.E.B. Stuart* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 18.

¹⁹ Cooke, 16.

²⁰ Thomas, 206.

²¹ Bratton, 602.

²² *Ibid.*, 601.

²³ Ibid., 605.

²⁴ Ibid., 602.

²⁵ Ibid., 601.

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