"A Nice, Beautiful, Active, & Faithful Friend": Horses & Emotion in the Civil War Letters of Two Union Officers

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“A NICE, BEAUTIFUL, ACTIVE, & FAITHFUL FRIEND”: HORSES & EMOTION IN
THE CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF TWO UNION OFFICERS

By

Allen F. Horn IV

B.A., Eastern Connecticut State University, 2021

A THESIS
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Requirements for the Degree of
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Horses are the unsung heroes of the American Civil War. Both armies relied heavily on equines for a variety of tasks. They carried cavalry soldiers on the battlefield and pulled wagons for artillery and military supply chains. Horses could also serve as companion animals. Soldiers formed friendships with their horses as a way to heal from the trauma of combat and stave off the monotony of camp life. Writing about animals in letters to their families enabled soldiers to explain their experiences in more palatable terms to their families. As over 1.2 million horses and mules died in the conflict, they are worthy of commemoration and historical study.

Many authors have written about the practical uses for equines in the Civil War, but relatively few have researched horses and soldiers’ emotions. This thesis examines the topics of Civil War horses and emotions through the wartime letters of two Union officers, Oliver Otis Howard and Charles Francis Adams, Jr. Both men came from affluent Northern society in the antebellum era, a time when many people were reevaluating the relationship between humans and animals. The anticruelty movement, which emerged from similar roots as antislavery, prompted changes to how people viewed and treated animals. Animal cruelty became socially unacceptable and eventually criminalized, while a new generation of equestrian trainers sought
to train horses with kindness and bonding instead of brute force. These new ideas also existed uneasily alongside older traditions that equated enslaved African Americans and animals.

Though Howard and Adams entered the war from similar backgrounds, they had divergent responses to animals and the war. Howard formed close attachments with the animals he met on the frontlines. One such friendship with a horse named Charlie helped him heal physically and psychologically after losing his right arm in combat. Writing about animals in letters to his family helped him explain his wartime experiences in a language that his children could understand and allowed him to remain involved in domestic life from afar. Adams, however, was constantly cynical and pessimistic about his Civil War service. His letters were full of complaints about army life and the perceived incompetence of the Union’s leadership. He also wrote extensively about his cavalry regiment’s horses, documenting the daily equine death and suffering that he witnessed in the conflict. When Adams was given command of a Black cavalry regiment late in the war, he often denigrated his soldiers and invoked the racist comparison between Black people and animals. Howard and Adams both survived the war and left their own legacies on postbellum America. Civil War horses continue to be relevant today through our conversations on memory and commemoration of the Civil War.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..............................................................................................................ii

INTRODUCTION..........................................................................................................................vi

Chapter

1. AMERICANS AND HORSES IN THE ANETEBELLUM ERA.................................1

   Horses as Working Animals.................................................................................................2

   Horses in Slavery and Antislavery......................................................................................6

   Horses as Cavalry...............................................................................................................8

   Conclusion..........................................................................................................................10

2. “YOU MENTIONED YOUR OLD BRIGADE, BUT NOT THE HORSE”:

   ANIMALS AND FAMILY IN THE LETTERS OF OLIVER OTIS HOWARD...........11

   Connecting from Afar.......................................................................................................12

   Castor..................................................................................................................................14

   Charlie...............................................................................................................................16

   Conclusion..........................................................................................................................20

3. “SO I HAVE ONE RULE”: HORSES, RACE, AND CRUELTY IN THE

   LETTERS OF CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS JR.........................................................22

   The Problem of Equine Logistics and Tactics.................................................................23

   Starvation, Overwork, and Disease...................................................................................26

   Mixed Feelings....................................................................................................................28

   Animals and Race..............................................................................................................30

   Conclusion..........................................................................................................................32

CONCLUSION: EQUESTRIAN LEGACIES..............................................................................34
Introduction

Oliver Otis Howard wrote a mournful letter to his wife, Lizzie, on June 6, 1863. He had just lost a “nice, beautiful, active, and faithful friend,” a fellow soldier who had, “served his country long enough and he died.” He was not writing about another person, but instead his horse, Charlie. Howard owned Charlie for less than two years, but he quickly formed an intimate bond with his warhorse. The horse and rider were so close that the formerly mischievous Charlie behaved well for Howard when the latter lost his right arm as a result of a battlefield injury. Howard’s time with Charlie was brief but intense, and he described the horse as an equine veteran and wartime friend. Like many soldiers in the American Civil War, Howard had a close relationship with his horse, who served not only as a mount, but a comfort animal for healing the traumas of war and a way to connect with his family thousands of miles away.

Why Civil War Horses?

In the mid-2010s, scholars took note of what historian Dan Vandersommers termed the “animal turn” in history. Now referred to as animal history, this relatively new subfield of scholarship combines several perspectives on the past, including environmental, cultural, and technological histories. Looking at history through an animal lens offers many new insights into the past. Though most Americans now rarely interact with non-pet animals, even the cities of the nineteenth century United States were full of animal life. Horses worked in a wide variety of draft occupations during the 1800s, even after the invention of the steam train. Indeed, the
hallmark of a “civilized” 1850s American city was to have a good horse-drawn bus system.\(^1\) Neglecting the animal side of the past misses the perspective of beings who were a vital part of daily life for most of human history.

What are the benefits of looking at the American Civil War from an animal perspective? Animals served many roles during the conflict, from combat and logistics functions to emotional support for soldiers. Horses carried officers and cavalrymen, pulled artillery on the battlefield and wagons on the supply chain, and helped with reconnaissance and communications. The widespread use of horses in the war is not in conflict with recent reassessments of the Civil War as the “first modern war,” in terms of scale and technology. On the contrary, horses actively aided in the massive scale of destruction, while helping cover the gaps of new technologies like the railroad and the telegraph. Dogs, cats, and a wide variety of other animals became regimental mascots, helping boost soldiers’ morale in camp. Soldiers became deeply attached to both working and comfort animals and used their companionship to help heal the traumas of the conflict.\(^2\)

The war also came at a great cost to equine life. Approximately 1.2 million horses and mules perished in the conflict, almost double the number of humans who died in the war. The Union army had an equine casualty rate of over sixty-percent, most of them due to starvation, overwork, or disease. Though a wide variety of animals were present in army camps during the Civil War, this thesis focuses primarily on horses because of their unique experience in the conflict. Since horses served as both working and comfort animals during the war, soldiers

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formed emotional bonds with them, but they also contended with the omnipresent specter of equine death from exhaustion and sickness. Horses were integral to the American Civil War and deserve more attention, not least because many made the ultimate sacrifice in the conflict.  

**Introducing Oliver O. Howard and Charles Francis Adams, Jr.**

This project examines the topics of horses and emotion in the letters of two Union Civil War officers, Oliver Otis Howard and Charles Francis Adams, Jr. Howard grew up in the agricultural town of Leeds, Maine, graduated from Bowdoin College in 1850, and then from West Point in 1854. He served as the commandant of Kennebec Arsenal in Augusta, Maine, in the mid-1850s and briefly led soldiers in the 1857 Second Seminole War in Florida. Adams, on the other hand, was a scion of the esteemed Adams family of Massachusetts, and the grandson of former President John Quincy Adams. He graduated from Harvard University in 1856, became a lawyer in 1858, and had no military aspirations until Southern secession.  

Howard and Adams share key similarities. Both came from antebellum upper-class Northern society and received educations at elite colleges. Both also had connections to the anti-slavery movement. Howard became an evangelical Christian while in Florida, and his faith brought him to abolitionism. Adams’s family, especially his grandfather, had long been

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3 Gervase Phillips, “Writing Horses into American Civil War History,” *War in History* 20, no. 2 (April 2013): 160-181. Here, 170. McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City*, 156, 159-60. The exact number of equines killed in the American Civil War remains unknown and estimates can vary wildly. I use the Gervase Phillips estimate, widely cited in other sources, that about 1.2 million horses and mules perished in the war, though some figures claim up to 3 million equines died.

enmeshed in anti-slavery politics. Both men came from a similar background and likely shared many of the same cultural assumptions and expectations.

Despite their affluent backgrounds, neither man is especially well-known in the United States today. Howard’s Civil War career is outshone by that of a fellow Mainer, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. Meanwhile, Adams’s legacy is overshadowed by his ancestors, probably because he never held political office or accomplished major public service deeds. Far from being a disadvantage, the two men’s relative obscurity presents an opportunity to understand them through their personal records, instead of the distorted recollections and myths that now surround figures like Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant. Howard and Adams both left large written records of letters to their families during the Civil War, which frequently mention the horses and animals that they worked with and encountered in their service. Given the culture of letter-writing in the mid-nineteenth century, their Civil War correspondence provides valuable insights into their personal lives. By the time of the conflict, increasing literacy rates, westward migration, and more reliable postal service made letter-writing a dependable method for staying in touch with family from afar. Many soldiers spent time writing letters to their family as a way to unwind from battle and dull camp life, as well as to remain involved in family life despite being thousands of miles from home. Since the federal government did not censor soldiers’ letters at that time, they also wrote candidly about the problems of army life and their feelings on the war, though many did not wish to describe what they had witnessed in combat.  

Howard and Adams’s different correspondence styles also help us understand the contrast between the two men’s experiences of the war. Howard used letter writing, and especially writing

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about animals, as a bridge to his family. Discussing the horses and dogs that he encountered allowed him to explain his experiences to his children on a level that they could understand. Even in letters to his wife, he glossed over or only briefly mentioned the most traumatic parts of the war and preferred to focus on the positive aspects of daily life. Howard did not see the war as a romantic affair but deemphasized the problems of army life in order to remain motivated. Adams, however, wrote long and meandering letters full of complaints, usually about camp life, his fellow soldiers, and his commanding officers. He seemed to treat his correspondence less as a connection to his family and more as a repository for his thoughts and frustrations. Adams did not censor his opinions or experiences when writing to his family and, as such, his assessments of the cavalry’s problems and ruminations on the equine suffering he witnessed on a daily basis are clearly preserved. Though both men had individual idiosyncrasies, they are representative of broad trends in their era. Howard believed that humans and animals could share emotions and empathy between species. These relationships helped him remain hopeful during the war, which in turn supported his work for Black rights during Reconstruction. Adams, on the other hand, could never get close to animals and quickly became disillusioned with the Union army. His disdain for African Americans, who he often compared to animals, furthered his negative outlook on the war and led to him defending the rebellion and slavery later in life. Their similar backgrounds, but divergent reactions to the Civil War and horses make Howard and Adams an excellent historical comparison.

**Literature Review**

Many scholars have examined horses in the nineteenth century United States and the American Civil War, but few have focused directly on emotion and human-animal relationships.
Ann Norton Greene’s 2008 monograph *Horses at Work* dedicates an entire chapter to Civil War horses and touches on almost every aspect of this topic. However, she does not dive into any area particularly deeply. Gervase Phillips’s 2013 journal article “Writing Horses into American Civil War History” similarly provides a wide, but shallow overview of horses in the conflict and functions more as a call to action for scholars, one that I have responded to with my work. Phillips’s work was especially influential on this thesis as it introduced me to the letters of Charles Francis Adams Jr. and opened up an excellent source base for this project. Clay McShane and Joel Tarr’s 2007 book *The Horse in the City* mainly deals with horses’ roles in urban environments and mostly focuses on laws, public health, and the logistical problems of using equines in cities, though it provides good information on the problems of veterinary care in the Civil War era, as well as equine vital statistics in the conflict.\(^6\)

Other studies including Diane L. Beers’s *For the Prevention of Cruelty*, published in 2006, and Janet M. Davis’s 2016 book *The Gospel of Kindness* explore the history of animal welfare activism in the United States. Both authors devote much of their books to the origins of the movement in the mid-nineteenth century. They discuss how many people, particularly in the North, came to view horses and other working animals as creatures with emotions and the capacity to feel pain, factors that led to the founding of anti-cruelty organizations across the nation. However, neither author explicitly covers animals in the Civil War. Diane Beers portrays the Civil War as an event that delayed and then invigorated the American animal welfare

\(^6\) For the especially relevant pages in each work, see Greene, *Horses at Work*, 119-63, McShane and Tarr, *The Horse in the City*, 156, 159-60, Phillips, “Writing Horses into American Civil War History,” 166-7, 176-8
movement only because it increased Northerners’ awareness of slavery, while Janet Davis does not comment on the conflict at all.⁷

Marcy S. Sacks’s 2021 article “‘They Truly are Marvelous Cats:’ The Importance of Companion Animals to US Soldiers during the Civil War” is one of the first academic works to deeply explore the emotions and human-animal bonds during the American Civil War. She discusses how soldiers used animals to cope with the trauma of war and frequently wrote letters to their families containing humorous stories about their horses. Dr. Sacks’s work served as a major inspiration for this project, as many of her observations echo findings in Oliver Otis Howard’s papers. Yet she does not discuss some soldiers, like Charles Francis Adams Jr., who took a more pragmatic view of animal life during the war. I aim to build on Dr. Sacks’s work by comparing Howard and Adams’s relationships with horses in the conflict and thus exploring a wider range of perspectives on animals in the war.⁸

Goals and Thesis

The equine-human bond is a beautiful partnership between species and one that I have had the pleasure of experiencing many times. Before coming to the University of Maine, I rode horses for six years and volunteered at an equine-assisted therapy center for three. In the autumn of 2022, I took the Introduction to Equine Management Cooperative class, which allowed me to work at Witter Farm and learn the basics of modern stable management. I care deeply about horses and wish to emphasize their importance in human history. As such, my goal is to bring the topic of human-animal relationships further into Civil War history. The use of equines in combat

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⁸ Sacks, “‘They Are Truly Marvelous Cats,’” 243-9.
and logistics are well-trodden ground, as are the challenging aspects of caring for horses in wartime. The American Civil War, building on developments in antebellum society, created intense bonds between soldiers and their horses, as equines became friends on the frontlines, a comfort animals to aid in healing the traumas of war, and bridges to families back home. Yet, these emotional bonds were tempered by the pragmatic demands of the conflict, which required soldiers to treat horses as a war resource to use up instead of as living creatures.

This thesis unfolds in three parts, beginning with a chapter on the emotional and intellectual place of horses in antebellum Northern society, before exploring the two case studies of Howard and Adams’s wartime experiences. Chapter One examines Northerners’ views on horses before the Civil War through horse care manuals and laws. These sources show that antebellum Northern society was moving away from older ideas conceptualizing animals as purely the property of their owner and towards new visions of anticruelty and kindness. These emerging views also uneasily coexisted with persistent intellectual traditions equating African Americans and horses. Chapter Two looks at the links between animals and family in Oliver Otis Howard’s papers. Howard formed fast, but sadly brief, friendships with the horses and dogs he met during the war, which helped him deal with the stress of army life and remain involved with his family from the frontlines. Chapter Three analyzes the letters of Charles Francis Adams, Jr., focusing on how soldiers mentally justified sacrificing horses to the Union war effort. Adams, like many people in the war, was sympathetic to the animals’ plight but learned to put aside his emotions to prosecute the war. His pragmatism, however, did not remain confined to horses, as he frequently looked down on the Black soldiers he commanded later in the conflict and often compared them animals. The conclusion discusses the post-war legacies of Howard and Adams, as well as why Civil War horses remain relevant today. Horses were an essential part of the
American Civil War, both for practical military purposes and as comfort animals for healing the traumas of war. Their importance in the war, as well as their sacrifices in a human conflict, are worth remembering.
Chapter 1: Americans and Horses in the Antebellum Era

Introduction

Oliver Otis Howard and Charles Francis Adams’s views on horses did not emerge from a vacuum. Contrary to hackneyed sectional stereotypes, which contrast the bucolic and horse-powered South with an industrial and steam-powered North, many people in the northeastern United States lived in rural towns, worked in agriculture, and still relied on equine power in daily life. Those in the North’s growing cities were themselves from rural areas or descended from former farmers. Additionally, cities contained far more animal life in the antebellum period than today. The arrival of steamboats and later, railroads, in the early to mid-nineteenth century made horses and stagecoaches unnecessary for long distance transportation in much of the North, but urban residents still interacted with horses in their day-to-day lives, as equines pulled private coaches, passenger omnibuses, and cargo wagons across cities. Far more Northerners worked alongside and depended on horses in regular life than many people assume.

Evidence from this period shows that Northerners saw horses as animals who deserved good treatment from humans, for the sake of both the horse and the person. While these views did not go as far as contemporary notions of animal welfare, most people genuinely loved their horses and rejected the idea that domestic animals were their owner’s personal property, to be handled however they wished. Multiple equestrian training manuals from the antebellum North, which likely targeted an audience of middle-class and elite horse owners, explicitly discouraged cruelty, framing it as a barbaric method that only resulted in a misbehaving horse. Additionally, several northern states adopted anti-animal cruelty laws during the nineteenth century. Many states updated these laws throughout the antebellum era, demonstrating a gradual evolution from
views of animal cruelty as a property crime to a moral offense. The nascent American anti-cruelty movement also included many antislavery activists, though this emerging commitment coexisted with older ideas that equated Black people with horses. Pre-Civil War cavalry manuals provide further insights on soldiers’ relationship to their steeds. The United States Army largely did not use cavalry prior to the Civil War, given the short length of previous wars and the high costs associated with maintaining a mounted force. As such, tacticians did not anticipate many of the challenges associated with deploying a large cavalry force, setting up many problems for the Union cavalry during the war. Overall, these sources outline the emerging debates around the place of horses in a changing northern society. Though they are disparate in nature, they provide insight into prewar views on both emotional connections to horses and practical uses for equines, a tension that characterizes Howard and Adams’s wartime correspondence.

Before the Civil War, American society was moving towards a new vision of animal kindness. This created the potential for close bonds with horses during the conflict, as we will see in the letters of Oliver Otis Howard. Yet, as shown by the experiences of Charles Francis Adams Jr., poor cavalry preparations led to the mass slaughter of equines in the war, while racist comparisons of horses and enslaved people persisted in the minds of many Americans.

Horses as Working Animals

Equine training and care manuals provide key insights on how a certain subset of Americans viewed horses in the antebellum era. Most of these instructional books and pamphlets seem to have been aimed at middle- and upper-class Northern farmers and horsemen, particularly those interested in scientific or innovative methods for husbandry. Though the bulk of these documents contain now-outdated intricate instructions on horse training and identifying diseases,
many also included statements on the philosophy of horse handling. Most manuals advised patience and kindness in horse training and actively discouraged cruel behavior, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that horses were naturally subservient to humans. Americans’ dependence on equine labor for daily life meant that even the kindest trainers were still concerned with a horse’s capability as draft and riding animals.

For instance, *The Domestic Animals* manual, written in 1860, advised on breaking young horses, “Every thing should be done… by the man who feeds the colt, and whose management of him should be always kind and gentle.” The author stated that most horses are not naturally violent towards people but are made that way by poor obedience training based on physical abuse. Obedience should be taught, “… not by severity, but by firmness and steadiness.” While the whip and spurs were still useful tools, the author directed readers not to let firmness escalate into cruelty. Another manual, *A New System of Horse Training*, expressed similar thoughts on the qualities needed for raising horses. This tract emphasized equine intelligence and advised trainers to focus on honesty to obtain the horse’s confidence. The author criticized previous training systems as, “… founded upon the one idea of subjugation alone. Subjugation is not teaching,” and counseled aspiring trainers that they must instead spend time teaching the horse what they wish it to do. A later section of the manual discouraged readers from relying on strength alone and restated the need for honesty, kindness, and patience in horse training.¹

One of the most influential horse trainers of the antebellum era was John Solomon Rarey, an Ohio farmer who came to fame through his 1855 pamphlet *The Modern Art of Taming Wild Horses*. His work was widely reprinted, both with and without his permission, in the Northern United States and the United Kingdom. Rarey also spread his training methods through public

demonstrations, such as one in Boston in March of 1861, attended by William Lloyd Garrison. After witnessing the show, Garrison was so impressed that he wrote a column in *The Liberator* praising Rarey’s kindness and commitment to animal rights. Rarey explicitly rooted his methods in care and respect for the horse; the introduction to his book compared brutal European training systems that produced, “… a fretful, vicious, and often dangerous servant,” with those of the Bedouin Arabs, “… who governs him by the law of kindness.” His core principles were based on understanding the horse’s nature and training them in ways that worked with the equine mind, instead of forcing them to behave unnaturally. Rarey still insisted that the horse was meant to serve humans, writing, “God has wisely formed his nature so that it can be operated upon by the knowledge of men… he might well be termed an unconscious, submissive servant.” Such statements would be deeply troubling to modern horse enthusiasts, who see the equine-human bond as a partnership between equals, but Garrison’s heavy praise for Rarey indicate that his methods and attitude were a major innovation for nineteenth-century Americans.²

Overall, horse training manuals reflect a conflicted and evolving view of horses in mid-nineteenth century America. Some works, such as *A New System*, emphatically opposed the use of cruel tactics and instead encouraged careful and honest education. The Rarey system characterized the horse as a noble and intelligent creature worthy of kindness, but one still meant to serve humans. Even *The Domestic Animals*, which extolled the virtues of a kind but firm training regimen, stated, “… [the horse] must at once be taught that he is the slave of man, and that we have the power, by other means than those of kindness, to bend him to our will.” Many animal handlers recognized that training and disciplining horses solely with physical violence

was ineffective and only led to bad behaviors, but still believed that the animals should be subservient to humans. Horses were still working animals that people relied upon for transportation and labor in their daily lives. Thus, even the gentlest training manuals from the mid-nineteenth century were still primarily concerned with enhancing the horse’s value as an animal for riding or draught work. *A New System* and *The Domestic Animals* are both openly against cruel treatment, but the authors frame training based on kindness less as respect for the horse and more as a method for preventing bad behaviors that would render the horse unusable.³

State laws further demonstrate the overall shift towards anti-cruelty in the American North during the antebellum era. By the early nineteenth century, many Northern states had laws that criminalized purposefully killing or injuring another person’s horses or livestock. Notably, these early animal cruelty laws provided no protection to companion pets like cats or dogs and did not criminalize mistreating one’s own animals. States were initially more concerned with animal abuse as a destruction of someone else’s property and not with the morality of cruelty. In 1821, Maine became the first state to implement animal cruelty laws that did not discriminate based on the animal’s ownership. It was now a crime to beat your own horse or livestock, though the law did not consider neglect to fall under cruelty. Maine animal cruelty laws further evolved in 1840 when the legislature reclassified the statutes as “offences against chastity, morality, and decency,” marking the transition of cruelty from property crime to moral issue. In 1862, the Bangor Court prosecuted a man under the city’s animal cruelty statutes for having left his horse for four days with no food or water. The evolution of animal cruelty laws in Maine show that people transitioned from viewing horses as mere property in the early nineteenth century to seeing them as creatures capable of feeling pain and worthy of the law’s protection against their

owners only fifty years later. However, New York’s 1829 law against cruel treatment of livestock prompted other state governments to take action against cruelty. By 1860, several northern states, including Vermont, New Hampshire, and Connecticut, had passed laws modeled on the New York one. Though most preserved New York’s more limited scope, Pennsylvania and Michigan notably extended the government’s protection to all domestic animals.4

**Horses in Slavery and Antislavery**

Antebellum Northerners also encountered new ideas about horses in the context of the antislavery movement. Many antislavery activists were involved in the anticruelty movement and made connections between the poor treatment of enslaved people and animal cruelty. However, there was also a long history of slaveholders, in both the Northern and Southern regions, equating Black people with animals in language and philosophy. These deep-rooted racist ideas continued to circulate and were difficult for even reform-minded white Northerners to escape.

Similar to abolitionism, the movement opposing animal cruelty started in late eighteenth-century Britain. Multiple religious and philosophical authors published tracts rejecting earlier beliefs of animals as incapable of thinking or suffering and called for laws protecting them from cruel treatment. The anticruelty movement gained traction in the United States during the early nineteenth century, with significant support from famous abolitionists. For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote about the importance of kindness to animals, while William Lloyd Garrison was an admirer of humane horse trainer John Rarey. Animal rights activism suffered from some of the same issues present among antebellum white abolitionists, however. The first

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American adopters of animal welfare were often more concerned with the impact of animal cruelty on human morality and decency instead of the negative outcomes for the creature, akin to abolitionist concerns that slavery was a moral stain for white Americans.\textsuperscript{5}

Activists also tended to equate the suffering of animals with that of enslaved people, which sometimes crossed into equating slaves with non-human beings. This conception had decidedly mixed results, especially because slaveholders themselves frequently equated Black people with animals in insidious ways. Historian Charlotte Carrington-Farmer explains how newspaper advertisements for horses and slaves in eighteenth-century Rhode Island used similar language, emphasizing qualities like good breeding and obedience in both animals and humans. David Silkenat’s book \textit{Scars on the Land} also points out that some slaveholders preferred to use mules for farmwork because they believed they could better withstand hot weather and harsh treatment. Not coincidentally, they also ascribed these traits to Black people as a justification for enslaving them. Thus, scholars have varied opinions on the effectiveness of abolitionists’ use of the enslaved-animal metaphor, such as in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}. Janet M. Davis notes that Stowe’s descriptions of Black people as “creatures” could be read alternately as supporting comparisons between slaves and animals, or as a condemnation of African Americans’ literally inhuman treatment under slavery. Frederick Douglass invoked the comparison between enslaved and equine more effectively in his autobiography \textit{My Bondage and My Freedom}. For instance, in a passage about his mother’s death, Douglass wrote, “The bondswoman lives as a slave and is left to die as a beast; often with fewer attentions than are

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paid to a favorite horse.” He wielded the enslaved-animal comparison with a clear message, to characterize the treatment of enslaved women as not merely subhuman, but sub-animal.\textsuperscript{6}

**Horses as Cavalry**

Prewar teachings on cavalry provide another important source for understanding Union soldiers’ later interactions with horses. The American Civil War prompted a major evolution in the training and use of horses in cavalry. Previous American conflicts included cavalry, but only in a limited capacity. Citizen soldiers, as opposed to standing troops, did most of the fighting in earlier wars, and military commanders believed that it took too long to train both horses and riders for combat service. The publisher’s preface to George B. McClellan’s drill manual *Regulations and Instructions for the Field Service of U.S. Cavalry* described mounted soldiers as, “long undervalued in our army, because our brief war-experiences had not demonstrated its importance.” The American Civil War forced major changes in combat use of horses, but the doctrines of the Union army were initially stuck in the past.\textsuperscript{7}

One book that was highly influential on Union commanders’ understanding and use of horses during the war was Dennis Hart Mahan’s *Advance Guard, Out-post, and Detachment Service of Troops*, originally published in 1847. An instructor at West Point, Mahan had major impacts on military theory in the United States Army, but his tactics and strategy found


\textsuperscript{7} George B. McClellan, *Regulations and Instructions for the Field Service of U.S. Cavalry* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1861), 4. McClellan laid out three scenarios for the U.S. Army cavalry, such as further Indian wars, an invasion from Europe, and a war in Canada or Mexico, but made no mention of an internal conflict where the enemy would be able to raise its own cavalry without the need for long-distance transportation.
audiences beyond the academy. The majority of Union officers had no military experience or training before the war and many read *Outpost* to prepare themselves for leading troops. Largely based on French military doctrines and the writings of Napoleonic officer Antoine Jomini, Mahan took an odd view of the cavalry. He recognized that the traditional cavalry charge, already outdated by the Napoleonic era due to advances in artillery technology, was no longer an effective tactic in battle. Yet, he struggled to find a new use for cavalry. Mahan wrote that cavalry should only be used to rapidly deploy soldiers or exploit sudden weaknesses in the enemy lines and dismissed the use of firearms from horseback.⁸

Despite his confused and somewhat cynical ideas about using horses in war, Mahan also seemed to simultaneously hold a romantic view of the cavalry. *Outpost*’s introductory section, comprising military history and general thoughts on the army’s different branches, contrasts heavily with the calculated and scientific style that makes up most of the book. For instance, Mahan wrote of light cavalry soldiers, “… on the field careering with a falcon’s speed and glance upon his quarry, however it may seek to elude his blow, such should be the hussar.” He additionally stated that the use of lances could not be reliably taught to most cavalry soldiers and as such, they should only be used by certain nationalities, like the Poles, who were born into the tradition. Both statements reflect an odd romanticization of the cavalry. While other sections of *Outpost* denigrated the effectiveness of cavalry, here, a soldier’s skill in horseback riding elevated him to a bold and exotic warrior capable of tremendous feats of bravery and strength.

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Even to a scientifically minded tactician like Mahan, the horse played an important psychological role in determining the qualities of their human riders.⁹

**Conclusion**

Antebellum Northerners of all walks of life interacted with horses during their daily lives and engaged with new ideas on the proper relationship between domestic animals and humans. Laws and horse training manuals show that older conceptions of human dominion over animals were falling out of popularity, in favor of the notion that horses and other animals deserved kindness from people. While the need for equine power in antebellum life and a lack of scientific knowledge on animal intelligence meant that these new ideas were more limited than modern concepts of animal welfare, animal cruelty was increasingly unacceptable in the mid-nineteenth century. Anticruelty activists, many of whom were also part of the antislavery movement, successfully linked kindness to animals with human morality and abolitionist efforts. However, the connections between anticruelty and antislavery existed alongside slaveholders’ racist rhetoric that equated African Americans with equines.

The intellectual landscape before the American Civil War produced a wide variety of results for horses during the conflict. New ideas of kindness for animals created the potential for soldiers, like Oliver Otis Howard, to form close bonds with their horses, treating them almost like part of their extended wartime. At the other end of the spectrum, most notably in the experiences of Charles Francis Adams Jr., the United States’ lack of military experience with cavalry led to poor management of horses and the deaths of 1.5 million equines in the conflict as the demands of war temporarily trumped animal kindness.

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⁹ Mahan, *Outpost*, 44.
Introduction

Oliver Otis Howard was not a vocal proponent of the anticruelty movement. However, the prominence of animals in his family correspondence, as well as his antislavery background, show that he participated in the emerging tradition of animal kindness. Howard served in the Union Army from the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861, the beginning of the land war in the American Civil War, to the rebel surrender at Bennet Place in April 1865. Like many soldiers, he experienced trauma from battle, especially the loss of his right arm from a combat wound at the Battle of Fair Oaks in late May of 1862, as well as the boredom and monotony of camp life. His bonds with the animals he encountered in war helped him heal both physically and psychologically from these discouraging events.

Howard’s human-animal friendships also provided a way for him to remain in touch with his family. His family, composed of his wife Lizzie, six-year-old son Guy, four-year-old daughter Grace, and one-year-old son Jamie, was extremely important to him, and he struggled with the extended separation from them. Howard wrote frequently to his family about the animals he encountered during the war, as it allowed him to explain his experiences in a language that they could more easily understand. His animal friendships, in particular Castor, a dog, and Charlie, a horse, show how soldiers’ wartime bonds with horses and other pets gave them opportunities for healing and connection with their families.
Connecting from Afar

Howard started feeling anxious about the separation from his family only a few months into the war. In a July 15, 1861, letter to his wife, Lizzie, he wrote, “Does Guy continue to learn & think. Give him a sweet kiss from papa. Has Grace forgotten papa yet. Just think, daughter, how happy papa will be to clasp you in his arms & have one of those good hugs & kisses. Poor little Jamie, he don’t know me at all but you can kiss him several times for me.” He was concerned about his inability to participate in family life, especially the effects his absence would have on the younger children. Though these worries somewhat subsided later on in the war, Howard’s inquiries about his children always had an anxious tone. He constantly asked Lizzie about their health and could never shake the fear that Gracie would regard him as a stranger when he returned home.¹

Howard tried to bridge this gap by writing consistently to his two oldest children, Guy and Grace. He specifically wrote the letters in print rather than script, likely as a way to help them learn to read and thus engage in their education from afar. If he lacked the time to write directly to his children, he always made sure to include a section for them in a letter to his wife. When he had the time, Howard also made lovingly drawn, and frequently humorous, sketches of camp life, so that his children could catch a glimpse of the world he lived in. From the earliest days of the war, Howard often mentioned animals in his letters and drew them for the kids’ amusement. One of his first letters to Grace mentioned that he acquired a new horse, as the army had seized some from the rebels. He then made a small sketch of a horse with the letters “C.S.”

¹ Oliver Otis Howard (OOH) to Lizzie Howard (LH), July 15, 1861, Oliver Otis Howard Papers at Bowdoin College, Digitized, https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mss/oohg.shtml. Examples of the former request are numerous and can be found in many of the other letters cited here. For an example of Howard’s worries about Gracie, see OOH to LH, February 10, 1862.
on it to accompany the comment.\textsuperscript{2} The “written pictures,” as Howard referred to them, became such an important part of letters to the children that he was apologetic when he could not include them. Guy and Gracie loved their father’s pictures, and as Lizzie noted their disappointment at receiving a letter without them, “The pictures you cut from books or papers are not as welcome as ‘papa's written pictures.’” Howard may have taken up drawing as a distraction from the war or as a way to find comedy in the daily humiliations of camp life. One sketch from an 1862 letter to his daughter Gracie depicted his sleeping situation, a cramped tent with three other people packed into it.\textsuperscript{3} Humorously, Howard’s brother Charles had an undersized blanket and suffered from cold feet as a result. In a later letter to Lizzie, Howard expressed regret at being unable to draw that day, as he hoped to show them the aftermath of a windstorm that destroyed much of the camp. Howard’s “written pictures” added a visual aspect to his letters that allow him to connect with his children on a level they could understand, as well as to relax from the drudgery of wartime life.\textsuperscript{4}

Letters from Howard’s family back in Maine further demonstrate the role of animal stories in maintaining family connections. Howard actively encouraged his children to write to him about the animals they interacted with, as evidenced by one letter to Lizzie, “I want [Guy] to tell me all about his visit - describe uncle Rowland’s house, his horse, his dog, his cat…” For Howard, receiving animal stories from his children was just as important as telling them. Hearing his family’s superficial stories about life on the home front allowed him to recapture some of the small talk that forms an important part of daily family bonding. In September of 1862, Lizzie

\textsuperscript{2} See Figure 1 in the Appendix.  
\textsuperscript{3} See Figure 2.  
\textsuperscript{4} Howard frequently makes specific references to “printing” a letter for Guy or Gracie. For an example, see OOH to LH, September 7, 1862. OOH to Gracie Howard, July 1, 1861. OOH to LH, February 25, 1862. LH to OOH, February 10, 1862. OOH to Gracie Howard, January 10, 1862 and OOH to LH, February 25, 1862.
stayed with a friend in Augusta, near the Kennebec Arsenal where their family lived during
Howard’s brief time as the arsenal’s commander in 1855. Lizzie’s letter to her husband
reminisced about their family’s stay there, but she focused especially on her memories of the
horses, “I recall with pleasure our stay there, how we walked over the ground, and fished from
the dock, and Malloch, and the little black pony, and ‘old Ben.’ We have had many rides after
them all.” For Lizzie, horses and riding were linked to better times, when both the Union and
the Howard family were still together.

Castor

One of the most important animals that Howard bonded with was a puppy named Castor, though their friendship was unfortunately cut short. During January and February of 1862,
Howard was anxious about several problems. In a letter to Lizzie, he expressed concern over the
health of his children and feared that one of his sons had contracted scarlet fever. Multiple men
in Howard’s camp were sick as well. He was also worried about rumors that the United Kingdom
might intervene in the war on behalf of the rebels and the effects this would have on the national
economy. Faced with intense negativity, Howard turned to stories of his interactions with
animals as a way to bond with his children from afar. A letter that Howard simultaneously wrote
for his young daughter Gracie illustrates this dynamic perfectly. He opened the letter by
describing how he acquired Castor and later offered to bring the puppy home with him when he
returned from the war, “Papa had a present today of a little dog. His name is Castor… Shall I

5 OOH to LH, October 21, 1861. LH to OOH, September 21, 1862. Howard discusses his time at Kennebec Arsenal
in Oliver Otis Howard, Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard, Major General United States Army, Vol. 1 (New
York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1908), 67-71. Mallach was an Arabian horse that Howard trained himself, who
he described as, “Pure white, with a silver mane and tail, rather tall, with slender limbs and small feet, Mallach in his
best days was ideal.” “The little black pony” may refer to “Canuck,” a Canadian horse that Howard bought from one
of his subordinates.
bring Castor home when I go?” He created a detailed picture of Castor sleeping and a quick sketch of a camp donkey named Fancy.\textsuperscript{6} Animals, among other mundane and amusing aspects of camp life, were an integral part of Howard being present in his young daughter’s life from afar and maintaining good spirits for both him and his family in the face of war.\textsuperscript{7}

Other parts of his letter to Lizzie further support this narrative. Howard directed a section specifically to his sons, Guy and Jamie, that exclusively contained anecdotes about the animals he interacted with. He wrote about Castor, as well as a new horse who, “looks like a zebra, he is so stripped [sic] & spotted.” He also spoke fondly about another officer’s pet cat, “Lieut Bullock has a nice little kitten that sometimes comes in & pays us a visit. I think Jamie would like to hear him purr.” While such writings may appear saccharine and sentimental to a modern reader, anecdotes like this one show that Howard was building a deliberately more palatable narrative of his army life for his family. Amidst the boredom and dreariness of winter camp life, animals were a rare bright spot and one of the few parts of his experiences that he wished to share with his children. Lizzie’s responses to the letters on Castor show that his attempts to engage with the children through animals worked well, “[Guy] is much interested in "Castor" wonders if Papa will bring him home, thinks he might send him home by express or some way…” She then humorously added, “…but I had as lief you would keep [Castor]. I have babies enough… to take care of at present.” Though Castor was with Howard on the frontlines, the puppy seemed to already be a part of the household in the eyes of Lizzie and the children.\textsuperscript{8}

Sadly, Castor died only two months after Howard acquired him. In a March 18, 1862 letter, Howard instructed Lizzie to, “Tell Guy that poor Castor is dead. A wicked man went into

\textsuperscript{6} See figures 2 and 3 in the appendix.
\textsuperscript{7} OOH to LH, January 10, 1862. OOH to Gracie Howard, January 10, 1862. OOH to LH, January 10, 1862.
\textsuperscript{8} LH to OOH, February 10, 1862. “As lief” is an outdated expression for “gladly.”
our Camp & shot him. Papa feels very sorry for he was a nice little dog & he anticipated a great deal of pleasure in taking him home to Guy.” He does not remark any more on what happened, making it an altogether strange incident. One also wonders why Howard asked his wife to tell their seven-year-old son such sad news. Howard definitely knew the impact this would have on his son. Three weeks earlier, Castor wandered off in camp, causing Howard to fear he had permanently lost the pet, though he later found him in another soldier’s tent. Lizzie described Guy’s reaction to Castor’s first disappearance, “Guy regrets the loss of “Castor”. When I told him he came very near dropping [sic] a tear…” He may have intended to teach Guy about death, a part of any parent’s duty to their children. Lizzie either did not reply to this letter or the response has been lost, so the child’s reaction to the puppy’s death remains unknown. In a short time, Castor had become a part of the Howard household despite the great distant between them and the sadness of his death was felt all the way in Maine.  

Charlie

Oliver Otis Howard owned and rode many horses during his military career, but his love for Charlie, a small brown horse he acquired in 1861, stands out. Initially, Howard only mentioned the horse’s name to set the scene for anecdotes about other matters. However, by the spring of 1862, he began to express his love for Charlie more directly. In an April 26, 1862, letter to Lizzie, Howard stated his affection for the horse, “My little brown ‘Charlie’ is still a favorite. I can ride him for hours & he will then kick up his heels & caper like a colt. He very seldom gets tired… We want to take these horses home to shew to Guy & Grace. Perhaps Jamie would like a ride.” Howard enjoyed the horse’s youthful energy, as he was recovering from an illness and

9 OOH to LH, March 18, 1862. LH to OOH, March 2, 1862.
found solace in horseback riding. As with Castor, he then redirected his animal story to the
children to engage with his family from afar. For Howard, horses both healed his body and
provided a consistent, joyful connection to his children.¹⁰

During the summer of 1862, Howard was temporarily separated from Charlie, likely from
the chaos of battle or a disorganized march. In several letters he sent to his family that
September, he assured them that Charlie was well and repeatedly expressed his displeasure that
the horse had not been delivered to him yet. Charlie had clearly made an impression on his
owner, as Howard was very worried about the possibility of losing his favorite horse and even
his family in Maine were concerned about the missing pony. Howard’s use of animals to
emotionally engage with his family from the frontlines clearly worked again, as Lizzie asked him
in an August 31 letter, “I want to hear if you found your horse ‘Charlie’. You mentioned your old
Brigade, but not the horse.” When he finally received Charlie in late September, Howard was
clearly delighted to be reunited with his beloved horse, “Papa rides his horse “Charlie” now on
all occasions. He is as nice as ever, a little more quiet than he used to be.”¹¹

Howard had lost his right arm earlier that summer and had struggled to adjust to riding a
horse with this disability. Thankfully, Charlie readjusted to his owner quite smoothly. He noted
Charlie was easier to mount than before, as if their equine-human bond was so strong that
Charlie instinctively knew to compensate for his rider’s disability. For his part, Howard seemed
to start treating Charlie more like a pet than before, even while the horse was constantly
misbehaving for anyone besides him. Howard told Guy that, “He looks cross at strangers and I
feel afraid he dont like little boys,” but then reassured his son by telling him how to win

¹⁰ OOH to LH, April 26, 1862.
¹¹ LH to OOH, August 31, 1862. OOH to Guy Howard, September 26, 1862.
Charlie’s affection, “but when you come to feed him with something he likes to eat, he will overcome his naughty prejudices.” In another humorous incident, Howard complained about Charlie’s misbehavior and threatened to go back on his earlier promise of taking Charlie to the family, “I shall not like to take him home if he does not behave well.” Despite this, Howard still happily handfed treats to the horse, showing that he was unlikely to follow through with his threat to not bring Charlie back.12

Unfortunately, Charlie passed away less than a year after returning to Howard. The horse had survived a bullet wound at the vicious Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, and a fall during a march in Virginia in January 1863 but he could not withstand illness, the greatest killer of both horses and humans during the Civil War. A distraught Howard wrote to his wife, “I have lost my poor horse Charlie. He grew sicker & sicker with the distemper.” Yet, Howard seemed to no longer consider Charlie to be a pet. Rather, he now saw the horse as a companion in wartime, perhaps almost his equal, “He has been a nice, beautiful, active & faithful friend to me.” Furthermore, Howard’s word choices, such as, “He had served his country long enough,” convey that he saw Charlie as a fellow veteran of the war. He only characterized the horse as a wartime friend instead of an animal after Charlie’s passing. Quite possibly, this was Howard’s way of gracefully dealing with Charlie’s death. Describing the horse as a soldier serving the Union lent his death an honor that it otherwise did not have.13

Also notable is that Howard handled Castor’s death very differently from Charlie’s. Though Howard wrote relatively little about either of these events, he dealt with them in distinct

12 OOH to Guy Howard, September 26, 1862. OOH to Gracie Howard, November 19, 1862.
13 OOH to LH, December 15, 1862 and January 10, 1863. OOH to LH, June 6, 1863. “Distemper” is an outdated term for a streptococcal infection commonly referred to now as “the strangles” for its distinctive throat swelling. However, the strangles is rarely lethal in adult horses. Charlie most likely died from glanders, one of the most common and lethal equine diseases during the war, which had similar symptoms. See G. Terry Sharrer, “The Great Glanders Epizootic, 1861-1866: A Civil War Legacy,” Agricultural History 69, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 79-97. Here, 82-3.
ways. He stated that he “felt sorry” for Castor, whose death came from another man’s unnecessary act of cruelty, but expressed no such sentiment about Charlie, who had died from an equine disease that was difficult to avoid in wartime conditions. Rather, he focused on remembering his bond with the horse and giving his death a broader purpose, as part of the Union’s struggle against the rebellion. Howard also likely already viewed Castor and Charlie differently because of their species. Castor, being a puppy, would have been primarily seen as a comfort animal who fulfilled only emotional and companionship needs. Charlie, on the other hand, was a warhorse who Howard had a working relationship with. He recognized that the equine power of Charlie and other horses, for pulling wagons or cavalry mounts, was necessary to win the war even if it resulted in their deaths. The length of the relationships also played a role in Howard’s distinct treatment of them. While he clearly loved Castor, Howard only owned him for two months, while he had Charlie for over a year, during some of the toughest times of the war for the Union. Howard’s relationship with Charlie was a brief but intense one, similar to other bonds forged in wartime.

While Howard continued to ride horses during and after the Civil War, he never wrote about an individual steed as much as he did for Charlie. Knowing the fragility of equine life in the war from experience, he likely did not wish to make another such bond. In one March 1862 letter to his mother, Eliza Gilmore, Howard described the Virginia landscape as desolate and littered with animal carcasses less than a year into the war, “The two principal features here are deserted huts for soldiers and dead horses… War under the best of circumstances is an awful scourge. Everything decays before it.” He also wrote about his struggles to keep his soldiers’ horses properly fed, while also maintaining his moral compass. He feared that wartime foraging would cause problems when his troops returned to civilian life, but also knew his duty was to
keep the Union war machine moving, “I am afraid we shall steal when we get home if our neighbors have things better than we. I try as hard as I can to prevent all marauding & lawless foraging, but with all I am obliged to provide – oats & corn & hay for horses & sometimes for an unexpected number.” Howard knew firsthand that the life of a Civil War horse was a tough one.\(^{14}\)

**Conclusion**

The letters of Oliver Otis Howard present several insights into human-animal relationships in the American Civil War. His correspondence shows how the Civil War upended normal life and forced people to adapt to frightening new circumstances. Under these conditions, horses and animals played many roles beyond the battlefield, as companions to help soldiers heal from the traumas of conflict and as a way to engage with their wives and children from the frontlines. Howard used stories about his animals, especially comfort animals seen as part of the domestic space like Castor the puppy, to stay involved with his family. Despite the immense distance between them, animals allowed him to give his children a positive glimpse into his daily life. Howard’s focus on his encouraging interactions with animals was a deliberate choice to portray his wartime experiences in a more comfortable way for his family.

Howard’s friendships with Castor or Charlie were not merely sentimental stories. Individual equine-human relationships, especially those forged in the fire of war like Howard and Charlie, could be full of love and grief. Howard found comfort in the intense bond between him and Charlie, especially after the former’s injury at Fair Oaks. Ultimately, his bonds and love

\(^{14}\) OOH to Eliza Gilmore, March 23, 1862.
for the animals during the war helped him stay motivated and fend off disillusionment, even through the worst periods of the conflict.
Chapter Three: “So I Have One Rule”: Horses, Race, and Cruelty in the Letters of Charles Francis Adams Jr.

Introduction

On the surface, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., had an illustrious career in the American Civil War. Adams fought in the Union army from early 1862 to the war’s end, first as an officer in the First Massachusetts Cavalry and then as the commander of the Fifth Massachusetts Colored Cavalry Regiment. He served through Union campaigns from Hilton Head, South Carolina, to Antietam and Gettysburg, and then in the decisive Petersburg campaign that led to the fall of Richmond. Yet, he ended the war disillusioned and bitter about the conflict’s outcomes. Unlike Howard, Adams formed few attachments with animals during his service. Though he frequently wrote about his regiment’s horses, his letters functioned less as a bridge to home and more as a place to vent about the difficulties of using animals in a war. He chronicled the Union army’s poor cavalry logistics and tactics, as well as the horses’ constant sufferings from starvation, overwork, and disease. Adams struggled with his sympathy for the horses and eventually had to put his feelings aside to prosecute the war.

Adams’s letters illustrate the conflicted emotions that many soldiers experienced in their relationships with horses. Like many affluent northerners of his generation, Adams had grown up amidst changing societal understandings of humanity’s relationship to domestic animals. He not only became an adult in an era where animal cruelty was increasingly unacceptable, but he was also likely present in the same Boston social circles as many anticruelty activists. Adams did not see horses as unfeeling animals who could be treated poorly and even expressed sympathy for their plight several times in his letters. The Civil War, however, required solders to treat horses as materiel, a resource to be used up and discarded instead of an animal deserving of care and
protection. When faced with this dilemma, Adams, like many soldiers, learned to put aside his emotions and accept the poor treatment of horses as an unfortunate, but necessary consequence of the conflict. Yet, this suppression of compassion did not stay confined to animals. When Adams took command of a Black cavalry regiment in the last years of the war, he took a utilitarian attitude towards his soldiers and frequently equated them with animals in his letters.

The Problem of Equine Logistics and Tactics

Adams’s military career began when he joined the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia not long before the Battle of Fort Sumter and the official beginning of the American Civil War in April of 1861. As Massachusetts’s military regiments went to fight in the South, he was tasked with menial home front duties, such as garrisoning Fort Independence in Boston harbor and raising money for soldiers’ equipment. Adams quickly tired of these tasks and looked for a way to serve his country in a more adventurous and glamorous way. In late 1861, he received a first lieutenant’s commission in the First Massachusetts Cavalry regiment. Adams and his fellow cavalrymen had little training before their regiment set out on December 28\textsuperscript{th} for Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.\textsuperscript{1}

Adams’s letters from this period provide insight into the many problems of equine logistics early in the war. He experienced these issues to a greater extent than soldiers stationed elsewhere. As cavalrymen were expected to purchase most of their gear and mounts, men like Adams had a higher upfront responsibility and expense in equipping themselves. His regiment was stationed in the Union-occupied South Carolina Sea Islands, surrounded by rebel-held territory on the mainland and with access to supplies only via ship, making this task even harder.

In a February 2, 1862, letter to his brother John Quincy Adams Jr., Adams requested that he send a long list of equipment, including surprisingly basic items such as weapons and riding tack, as well as a horse. He had been assigned a mare by the government but found her too light for combat work and thus had to buy his own. The replacement horse became a constant topic in his letters to his brother over the next two months. Adams was especially concerned with hurt pride, as one pleading letter to John demonstrates. Adams wrote “… something [about the horse] has got to be done soon, or my first battle see me in disgrace.” He expressed great relief when the promised horse finally arrived in early May, as his superiors were threatening to take away his government-issued horse. That Adams’s horse took so long to arrive is not surprising, given the challenges involved in shipping horses. Two illustrations in the November 2, 1861, issue of Harper’s Weekly depict some of these challenges. The first engraving shows handlers struggling to lead several anxious horses onto a ship, including one particularly unhappy animal being hoisted onto the deck with pulleys, while the second shows several rows of cramped stalls in the ship itself.\footnote{Transporting warhorses was just the first of many problematic steps in the use of cavalry.}

The Union army also struggled to use cavalry effectively in battle in the early years of the US Civil War. As discussed in Chapter one, prewar American tacticians, such as the influential West Point instructor Dennis Hart Mahan, recognized that Napoleonic-era cavalry charges were now obsolete owing to advances in small arms and artillery technology, but struggled to articulate new combat uses for mounted soldiers. Adams’s experiences with the new cavalry doctrines were mixed. In a September 1862 letter to John, he claimed to enjoy his more limited

\footnote{Charles Francis Adams II (CFA II) to John Quincy Adams II (JQA II), February 2, 1862, Feb. 23, 1862, and May 2, 1862, in \textit{Adams Papers at Massachusetts Historical Society}. Harper’s Weekly, November 2, 1861, 696–7. On the proper size for a warhorse, in a January 5, 1862 letter to John, Charles stated, “1000 lbs, stocky, compact.” Color also seems to have mattered, at least to Charles, as he specifically requested a “bay or sorrel” mount.}
duties, “… we have less to do with the big battles, which, after all, are only murderous bores, but we have the advance in all campaigns, the pursuit, the picket in a fresh country, and ten times the excitement and life of infantry regiments.” By 1863, more experienced and more disillusioned, he was highly critical of his commanders’ poor cavalry tactics. In a long letter to his mother about the wide variety of problems he faced as a cavalryman, Adams expressed anger at the Union generals’ outdated military ideas and inability to learn from experience fighting the rebel cavalry, “… [the generals] quietly and as a fixed fact said: ‘Cavalry cannot be used in Virginia,’ and this too while Stuart and Lee were playing around them.”

Adams’s autobiography, published after his death in 1916, also reflects an embittered perspective. The First Massachusetts Cavalry was present at the Battle of Antietam in September of 1862, one of the most important engagements of the Civil War, but according to Adams, the cavalry contributed nothing to the fight. Despite being near rebel artillery placements, the cavalry never received orders to attack and after a long waiting period, he and the other soldiers dismounted to give the horses a break. Eventually, Adams fell asleep despite the battle raging close to his unit. In retrospect, he was clearly upset with his superiors’ failure to use cavalry effectively. He closed his memories of the battle sarcastically, “Such is my recollection of that veritable charnel-house, Antietam; - and I was a participant – indeed in the fore-front of battle.”

It is likely that Adams felt that Union commanders’ poor tactics not only reduced their

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effectiveness in battle, but also prevented him from gaining any glory from participating in one of the great battles of the war.

**Starvation, Overwork, and Disease**

As a cavalryman, Adams was in close contact with horses throughout the war. Unlike Howard, who formed close bonds with animals during the war as a way to cope with the trauma of battle or bond with their families from afar, Adams never portrayed any of his horses as a friend and appears to have not given them names either. One key difference between the two men was that Adams was unmarried and had no children until after the war. He wrote mostly to his immediate family, with the bulk of his correspondence sent to his brother, John Quincy Adams, Jr. His letters to his brother and other family members frequently depict the suffering endured by horses in the American Civil War in a matter-of-fact way. Adams did not see his correspondence as meant for a tender audience and did not censor his experiences to make them more palatable to his family. As such, he often comes across to a modern reader as cold and cruel towards animals.⁵

Starvation was a constant threat to warhorses’ health. For much of the war, Union cavalrmen carried little grain and no hay for the horses, leaving them dependent on local grasses for their mounts’ diets. In places where the army lingered for a long time or repeatedly passed through, horses quickly overgrazed natural forage and starvation set in. Adams witnessed this problem at Hilton Head Island after being stationed there for five months, “Owing to insufficient forage our horses are dying off.” By the time his unit was reassigned to Maryland for the Peninsular Campaign, less than a month later, almost none of their original horses remained

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⁵ Egerton, *Heirs of an Honored Name*, 244-5, 286. Though Adams met his future spouse, Mary Hone Ogden, while on leave during the war, he did not marry her until after the war’s end in November 1865.
alive. Keeping the horses fed under these circumstances required unscrupulous methods. In a letter to his father, Charles Francis Adams Sr., he recounted stealing corn for his mounts from a supposedly secessionist farmer in Virginia, where he, “… turned the deaf ear of duty,” in response to the farmer’s pleas.

Overwork could also be a major issue for equines in the conflict. While on campaign in 1863, Adams estimated that the horses had to carry approximately 220 pounds between their rider, equipment, and food, for at least fifteen hours every day, an intense workload that quickly wore out his regiment’s mounts. Later that year, Adams described the consequences of this unsustainable regimen, “For fourteen days we have marched and counter-marched… almost one-half of my horses have just laid down under their riders and died in the road.”

Additionally, lack of food and constant exhaustion rendered warhorses highly vulnerable to diseases. Sickness, especially the bacterial infection glanders, was the primary killer of horses during the American Civil War. In a long May, 1863 letter to his mother, Adams wrote about the health problems caused by the poor treatment horses received in the war, “Imagine a horse with his withers swollen to three times the natural size, and with a volcanic, running sore pouring matter down each side… The air of Virginia is literally burdened today with the stench of dead horses, federal and confederate.” In response to the constant specter of equine death, he adopted a cruel, but pragmatic mindset for managing horse problems, as he told his mother, “So I have but one rule, a horse must go until he can’t be spurred any further, and then the rider must get

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7 CFA II to JQA II, May 10, 1863 and October 26, 1863.
another horse as soon as he can seize on one.”8 To Adams, horses were just another resource to be used up and then discarded for the war effort.

Mixed Feelings

Counter to the ruthless attitude he expressed, Adams seemed to sympathize with the animals he encountered during the war on many occasions. In the same letter where he claimed to treat horses as war materiel, he also expressed sorrow for this state of affairs. Adams saw his “one rule” as a harsh reality forced upon him by the conflict, “I do my best for my horses and am sorry for them; but all war is cruel and it is my business to bring every many I can into the presence of the enemy, and so make war short.” His comments on another animal he owned during the war, an English bulldog named Mac, shed more light on this matter. Adams received Mac as a gift from his brother, John, in February of 1863. Initially, he was ambivalent about keeping the dog; Adams referred to Mac as a “magnificent beast,” but worried about him getting stolen or fighting with other soldiers’ dogs in camp. Adams learned to love Mac fairly quickly, as by May, he described frantically looking for Mac when the dog wandered off and feeling relieved when he found his pet soon after.9

Sadly, his relationship with Mac did not last much longer. A month later, Mac became sick and struggled to keep up with his owner during the cavalry regiment’s marches. Adams handed Mac off to a military ambulance in hopes of finding a veterinarian in a nearby town, but he failed to find anyone capable of treating him, and the dog disappeared for good. As in many soldiers’ letters, Adams’s most emotional expression of his love for his animal companion only

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came after Mac died, “Poor Mac… He was very fond of me and I of him and it made me feel blue to reflect that all his friskings [sic] of delight when I came round were over and that he would sleep under my blanket no more.” He then added, “However, in campaigning we risk and lose more than the company of animals and I could not less this loss weigh on me too heavily.” Even in the midst of mourning his lost pet, Adams still downplayed his grief by comparing it to the broader consequences of the war.¹⁰

What are we to make of the dichotomy between Adams’s grotesque descriptions of equine suffering and his compassion for the animals? Like many northern people of his era, Adams likely did not hold notions that animals were personal property that could be treated in any way their owner desired or that they were incapable of feeling pain. Starting in the late eighteenth-century, the anti-cruelty movement had successfully broken these concepts by the Civil War era. Upper-class Boston society, where Adams had spent much of his time before the war, produced many passionate animal welfare activists such as the lawyer George Angell. While elite antebellum northerners did not believe that horses had rights equal to those of humans, they abhorred abuse as a moral failing and an act that led to bad behavior from the animal.¹¹

The demands of the Civil War temporarily overturned these morals. Adams framed his mistreatment of the warhorses not as sadism or intentional neglect, but as an unfortunate necessity occasioned by the conflict. Many others recognized this reality as well. John Rarey, the famously compassionate equestrian trainer, made similar statements after a disheartening inspection of the Union army’s mounts in late 1862, “As one who loves the horse, who

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appreciates his intelligence and keen sensibilities… I do most deeply deplore the dejection of spirit, suffering, and loss of life contingent upon the exigencies of war; but while war rages, this law must continue.” While others came to the same conclusions about the war and animals as Adams, he is notable because he did not try to make his experiences of the war more palatable to his family, or even find humor in the small problems of army life, as soldiers like Howard did. He was extremely open about the disturbing events he witnessed, as well as his anger towards his superiors. For Adams, letters were less of a bridge to home and more of an outlet for his daily frustrations. Perhaps it was also a way to subtly confess guilt for the war, including his treatment of animals. Adams may not have been intentionally cruel, but he was bitter and able to suppress empathy when he felt the situation required it.12

Animals and Race

Adams’s limited compassion was not limited to animals. Despite coming from an antislavery family and state, he was always skeptical of Black Americans’ intelligence and ability to contribute to society. When he assumed command of the Fifth Massachusetts Colored Cavalry late in the war, he became even more condescending and racist towards his own soldiers. Drawing on older, though still extant, racist ideas that characterized African Americans as animal-like, he even frequently likened the Black troops under his command to the horses.

Adams first encountered large groups of African Americans when he was stationed in South Carolina in 1862. Though the Black people he met were almost all refugees recently liberated from slavery, he complained that they were lazy, dishonest, and not fit for military service. He later came around to the idea of having African American soldiers in the military and

in May of 1864, he was offered command of a new Black regiment, the Fifth Massachusetts Cavalry. Unlike many Union officers, however, Adams’s experiences leading Black troops seemed to only lower his opinion of African Americans. Though many of his soldiers were former slaves with equestrian experience from working in their masters’ stables, he considered them categorically unfit for cavalry service. Adams claimed, “The negro makes a good soldier, particularly in those branches of the service where a high order of intelligence is less required.”

One recurring motif in Adams’s letters about the Fifth Cavalry was his comparison of Black soldiers to animals. In an acerbic letter to John, Adams joked about acquiring a plantation and slaves after the war and discussed his Black soldiers in terms of their monetary value, alongside the regiment’s animals and equipment, “Am I fit to be trusted with the care of $1,200,000 in n------ alone? And the horses and equipment? I feel myself unequal to my duty!” He frequently used the n-word in letters to his brothers, even though the term was already unacceptable in polite northern society by that era. While he avoided the slur in letters to his more abolition-minded father, Adams did not hide his distaste for the Black soldiers. He seemed to recognize the long-lasting negative impacts of slavery on African Americans but misdiagnosed the problem as the formerly enslaved peoples’ inaction against oppression and again equated them with non-humans. He wrote, “as the last result of two hundred years of slavery, they are as supine as logs or animals… our Africans have not the spirit, not of men, but of the lowest order of known animals.” If Adams could suppress his empathy for animals, he seemed able to turn it off entirely for Black people. Indeed, it is hard not to wonder if he sympathized more with the horses than his own African American soldiers. Adams saw the horses that suffered in wartime service as noble creatures consigned to an ignoble fate but

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believed that the brutality of slavery had only beaten the human spirit of resistance out of Black people.\textsuperscript{14}

**Conclusion**

The letters of Charles Francis Adams Jr. offer significant insights on horses during the American Civil War. They demonstrate the intense difficulties that the Union army experienced in transporting and deploying horses on the battlefield in the first years of the war. They also show how the demands of war led to mass starvation, overwork, and disease spread that killed 1.5 million equines. Adams’s letters are representative of the emotional difficulties that many soldiers faced in handling animals in wartime. While they loved and sympathized with the horses, they ultimately had to put aside their feelings due to the demands of war. The Civil War disrupted American society’s evolution on animal welfare, as it required people to treat horses as an expendable resource instead of a noble creature with feelings and the ability to suffer.

Adams’s writings also reflect his disillusionment with the war and its results, a feeling shared by many other Union soldiers who never fully embraced the cause of emancipation. Despite some early expressions of love for the cavalry duties, his letters had a bitter tone even by 1863. He disliked his daily life and the army’s leadership and frequently complained about both. While Adams always had a low opinion of African Americans, he repeatedly compared the Black soldiers under his command to animals and had little compassion for the harsh treatment

\textsuperscript{14} CFA II to JQA II, September 14, 1864. CFA II to CFA I, November 2, 1864, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters Vol. 2*, 212-19. Michael De Grucio’s article “Manhood, Race, Failure, and Reconciliation: Charles Francis Adams Jr. and the American Civil War,” *The New England Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2008): 636–75, argues that Adams’s rhetoric on race is representative of many Civil War era whites’ conflicted views on Black people, where opinions were constantly shifting based on observation and experience. There is some merit to this, as Adams did occasionally praise his Black soldiers’ ingenuity in letters to his father, but his default opinion was that African Americans were too oppressed by slavery to function in normal American society. Adams openly stated his view that Black people were inherently inferior to whites and believed that they had to prove their worth to white Americans to deserve freedom.
they had endured under slavery. Though the postwar era was defined by Reconstruction and a push for Black rights, Adams’s writings on race show an intense skepticism of the very idea that Black and white Americans could be equal. His letters foreshadow the corruption of the Republican Party and its pivot away from Black rights in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{15}

On January 19, 1907, Adams gave an address at Washington and Lee University in celebration of what would have been the one-hundredth birthday of rebel commander Robert E. Lee. He praised Lee’s character and military leadership, despite having fought against the Army of Northern Virginia forty years earlier. In a section describing Lee’s postwar life in Lexington, Virginia, Adams used Lee’s famous horse, Traveller, to create a portrait of the former rebel commander as a kindly old gentleman, “There is in the picture something altogether human – intensely sympathetic. ‘Traveller,’ he would write, ‘is my only companion.’” Besides sentimentalizing Lee, Adams also railed against emancipation, which he described as an act of, “confiscation” that destroyed billions of dollars of Southern wealth. Adams then claimed that Reconstruction had put Southern whites, “… under the civil rule of a different and distinctly inferior race,” and that as a policy, “… it ignored both science and the philosophy of statesmanship.” Adams’s speech, like the Confederate equestrian monuments built by Southern states and cities at the turn of the century, used a horse to glorify a traitor who fought to preserve slavery, while denigrating Black Americans and Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Charles Francis Adams Jr., \textit{Lee’s Centennial} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1907), 58-9, 64-5.
Conclusion: Equestrian Legacies

Introduction

By the end of the American Civil War, over 1.2 million horses and mules had perished in the conflict. Yet, the conclusion of the war did not bring an end to animal death. After the rebel surrenders at Appomattox Court House and Bennet Place, former rebels were allowed to take their horses home with them, while the Federal government put up many ex-army horses for sale. Unknowingly, many of these horses were carrying glanders, a highly contagious and frequently fatal bacterial infection with a long pre-symptomatic period. The dissemination of the infected animals caused a year-long epizootic that killed much of the livestock in the South. The reduction in animal population from the war was still apparent years after its end, as shown in the 1872 Statistics of the Wealth and Industry of the United States, a dataset compiled by the Federal government based on the 1870 census. Maine, for instance, had approximately 89,000 horses in 1860, but only around 80,000 in 1870. The Statistics compiler even opined, “It is hardly necessary to remark that the large relative falling off in the live stock of the country between 1860 and 1870 is due in great part, if not entirely, to the tremendous waste of four years of war.”

In the antebellum era, Northerners had been moving towards new visions of anticruelty and kindness for animals, though these emerging trends coexisted uneasily alongside the persistence of traditions linking enslaved African Americans with horses. The US Army, meanwhile, was unprepared in both tactics and number of animals for a war with large amounts of cavalry. The anticruelty movement opened the doors to friendships between soldiers and their

horses, as illustrated by the letters of Oliver Otis Howard. These relationships helped soldiers recover from the trauma of war and maintain connections with their families from the frontlines. In the eyes of other soldiers, the Union army’s lack of preparation and the demands of war required treating horses as a military resource to use up. The papers of Charles Francis Adams, Jr. demonstrate this pragmatic attitude, as well as the persistence of racist comparisons between animals and Black people during the war.

The narratives of these two men, as well as that of the warhorses, do not end with the conclusion of the Civil War. Though the conflict ended over 150 years ago, the legacies and commemoration of the war’s prominent people and events continue to have impacts on the modern United States. Howard and Adams both lived several decades after the war ended, and left divergent legacies on American society, particularly regarding race. Civil War horses also remain relevant in American culture today through commemorations of the conflict, particularly in equestrian statues.

Howard and Adams’s Legacies

Though Howard and Adams came from the same antebellum Northern society and had the shared experience of the Civil War, they took very different paths after the conflict. Howard ended the war as a Major General and commander of the Army of the Tennessee. He skillfully led troops through Sherman’s March to the Sea and the Carolinas Campaign and was present at rebel commander Joseph E. Johnston’s surrender in Bennet Place, North Carolina. In spite of having served during the darkest days of the Union war effort and enduring several controversies over his battlefield leadership earlier in the conflict, Howard always pushed on through doubt. His letters, like those of many enlisted Union soldiers, show that he maintained his values of
duty, honor, and a desire for victory throughout the war. He was proud to be on the winning side and hoped to use the Union victory to make gains for the newly freed African Americans. Howard served as the first, and only, commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau during the Reconstruction era, where he labored for Black rights, land redistribution, and education, even in the face of opposition from President Andrew Johnson and others in Congress. Most famously, he cofounded Howard University, originally a Black theological seminary, that was named for him. After Reconstruction, he continued to command soldiers in the American West. Despite his long and illustrious career, Howard never achieved the same notoriety as his commanding officer, William T. Sherman, or fellow Mainer Joshua Chamberlain. He is not widely known in public memory of the war today, nor is he commemorated beyond an equestrian statue at Gettysburg.²

Adams ended the Civil War less gloriously than Howard. After the Fifth Massachusetts Colored Cavalry finished training at Point Lookout, Adams led the regiment through the Petersburg Campaign. His unit was among the first Union soldiers to enter the insurgent capital of Richmond after the rebel Army of Northern Virginia withdrew from the region. While there was initially a triumphant attitude in the city, problems emerged during the resulting Union occupation of Richmond. A week after the war’s end, Adams spent eleven days confined at Fortress Monroe, awaiting charges that he had let his regiment steal from civilians and behave dishonorably. Adams had always been contemptuous of both his soldiers and superiors, but now

² John A. Carpenter, Sword and Olive Branch: Oliver Otis Howard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1965). Citations refer to the 1999 Oxford University Press edition. 81, 84-7, 90-2, 170-1. James M. McPherson, For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 136. I do not go into Howard’s post-Freedmen’s Bureau life, much of which was spent out west fighting Native Americans, as a summary and reckoning of this portion of his career would take up too much space. For an excellent analysis of Howard’s role in the Nez Perce War of 1877, his most famous Postbellum service, see Daniel J. Sharfstein, Thunder in the Mountains: Chief Joseph, Oliver Otis Howard, and the Nez Perce War (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017). For the monument, see Figure 4.
he blamed his troops’ bad behavior and the army’s double standards for his predicament, “The mounted portion [of the 5th] has behaved wonderfully well, - but the dismounted scoundrels steal horses etc.. – just what Sheridan’s men always do, only these fools did it at the wrong time and in the wrong place – and so I suffer.” Though Adams avoided a court martial and received a promotion to Brigadier General shortly before he left the army in May of 1865, his experiences at the end of the war permanently soured his opinion of both African Americans and Union leadership. His inglorious time at Fortress Monroe, combined with his earlier disillusionment, likely influenced his later intellectual defenses of the rebellion. His support for the Lost Cause had impacts beyond his lifetime. Literary historian Laura Fairchild Brodie identifies Adams as the first in a line of many Harvard alumni who promoted the Lost Cause theory and glorified Robert E. Lee; Presidents Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt later followed in his footsteps. Adams never seemed to believe that he had been on the righteous side of the war and spent his final years glorifying the rebellion he had fought against.3

Civil War Horses Today

Today, horses are largely gone from everyday American life and the equine veterans of the Civil War are treated more as curiosities and sidebars to the human conflict. Yet, Civil War horses continue to be relevant to the public today. Representations of horses are common in Civil War equestrian monuments across the nation. However, most of these statues only use the horse to glorify the rider, rather than commemorate the horse or show a human-animal friendship. Yet, a new set of monuments use the horse to push back on outdated narratives like the Lost Cause.

Many of the most famous Confederate monuments, such as the statues of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and J.E.B. Stuart that once stood on Richmond’s Monument Avenue, were equestrian memorials. The equestrian memorial uses the horse to glorify the rider by portraying them as masculine, physically fit, and in control of their steed. The third quality subtly implies control over soldiers as a leader, but for the Confederate monuments, it also hints at dominion over enslaved people as well. The Robert E. Lee statue that formerly stood on Monument Avenue is a major example of this dynamic in action. Plans for a Lee statue in Richmond began in the 1870s, but committees rejected several designs before settling on one which was constructed in 1890. The most common problem they had with the proposed designs was the depiction of Traveller or Lee’s horsemanship. Southerners wanted a very particular portrayal of Traveller, a healthy and handsome horse but one who was also completely under the control of his master.⁴

However, newer Civil War monuments used the horse to challenge traditional ideas about the conflict and the Confederacy. One example is the statue Civil War Horse, originally installed outside the Virginia Historical Society in 1997. The memorial depicts a riderless, emaciated warhorse with his head hung low and an inscription on the base honors the equines killed in the Civil War. Much like recent scholars’ questioning of the Civil War’s outcomes, Civil War Horse portrays the conflict not as an honorable war, but a disaster for equine life. The monument does not glorify any individual human and instead puts all focus on the suffering animal, an unwilling participant in the war. Rumors of War, installed at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts less than a quarter mile from Civil War Horse in 2019, similarly plays with the equestrian monument format. Made by sculptor Kehinde Wiley, Rumors depicts a Black man in modern clothing riding a horse, with the man and horse in almost exactly the same pose as the former monument to rebel

cavalry commander J.E.B. Stuart. Wiley uses the equestrian monument to challenge Stuart’s power and claim glory for modern Black Americans. Both Civil War Horse and Rumors of War demonstrate that the symbolic power of the horse can be used to disrupt historical consensus.⁵

There is now broad agreement that animals should be treated with compassion and respect, but misuse of the equine-human bond in Civil War monuments continues to haunt our nation. Scholars must critically engage with commemorations through our ongoing political conversations about the memories and meaning of these historical events. Ironically, the Confederate memorials that these two sculptures responded to are gone. The removal of statues glorifying the Confederacy across the United States represents the single greatest success of Civil War historians in recent memory, but more work remains to be done in this area. As most National Parks sites were closed early in the pandemic, Confederate monuments at Manassas, Gettysburg, and other battlefields escaped scrutiny, and have not been removed. Sites operated by the federal government should not memorialize a defeated separatist state. Monument removals should also be paired with new public art that memorializes Black Americans, including Black equestrian figures.

History shows that horses played key roles for the Union army both on and off the battlefield. Equines were essential for transportation, reconnaissance, and combat, but died en masse to facilitate the war. The equine-human bond also provided soldiers with comfort from the horrors of war and dreary camp life, as well as a way to stay involved with their families from afar. These friendships were not just sentimental, but key to maintaining morale through the

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darkest days of the Civil War. Horses have long both borne the burden of human conflict and
given us the emotional safety needed to persist through such times. Though equines are no longer
present in regular American life, the 1.2 million horses and mules who died in the American
Civil War are still deserving of recognition for their service.
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Figure 1 – Drawings, including a horse, in a July 12, 1861 letter from Oliver O. Howard to his daughter, Grace Howard. Courtesy Bowdoin College Special Collections.
Figure 2 – Howard’s sketches of camp life in a January 10, 1862 letter to Grace, including a mule ironically named “Fancy” and a humorous drawing of his crowded tent. Courtesy Bowdoin College Special Collections.
Figure 3 – Howard’s drawing of a puppy named “Castor” in a January 10, 1862 letter to Grace. Courtesy Bowdoin College Special Collections

Figure 4 – Carol M. Highsmith, photograph of the Howard Monument at Gettysburg National Military Park. Courtesy Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019690797/
Biography of the Author

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