

# HIS350

## Lost Cause, Turning Point and No Alternative – History's interpretations of Confederate motives behind the Maryland Campaign

by Arne Fivelstad

"It would be frivolous, even counterproductive, to reduce such a richly instructive story to a Grimm's fairy tale replete with fair heroes and foul villains. It is not necessary to oversimplify history to make it entertaining. The historian needs to admit frankly that no event, or any of its parts, can ever be known with certainty and then invite the reader to join the quest for the most probable answers. That the answers when found will never reach the finality of Hansel and Gretel will be unsatisfying only to those who seek escape rather than understanding. The ambiguity in history is the residue of the ambiguity that existed when the past was the present. Ambiguity is long, and life is short."

- Dr. Joseph L. Harsh, Taken at the Flood

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

150 years after it happened, the American Civil War stands as one of the most densely explored topics of history. In his preface to *The American Civil War - A Handbook of Literature and Research*, editor Steven E. Woodworth writes that some estimates on the number of books alone written on the topic "run as high as 70,000 books - more than a book a day since the war ended over 130 years ago. And interest in the war is not waning."<sup>1</sup>

Even allowing that the above quote is a high estimate (albeit one made 17 years ago as of the writing of this paper) it says something about the sheer bulk of the literature on the topic of the war - and by extension, the size of the readership required to sustain such an output. A century and a half after it happened, the war continues to capture the imagination of the American public, to shape American identity - and often still, to divide it. Debates about what exactly caused the war and what it "was about" are still being waged fiercely, as are the topics of which events within the war can be said to constitute its turning points and whether or not the South had any chance of winning the war - that is, succeeding in its goal of achieving independence. Over the years, as the discipline of history has evolved, the lens of scrutiny has widened to cover ever more topics of study within the larger subject of the Civil War. The histories of "ordinary people", of women, slaves, Native Americans and so forth within the larger context of the war have been added, and continue to be added, to the tapestry of American Civil War history.

The proliferation of history which has been written on the Civil War is made possible in large part due to the proliferation of primary sources available. Not only are there extensive records of the political and military communications taking place throughout the war, as well as newspaper articles and the like. There is also a great amount of personal observations by "ordinary" people during the war, diaries and letters which survived the war to be collected, preserved and published later. The American Civil War is exceptional in that it took place during a time in which many if not most free Americans were literate, but also before there was any censorship of wartime correspondence to speak of. As a result, common soldiers and their families wrote to each other frequently and freely. The American Civil War was also the first war to be documented photographically - and extensively so. Photographers like Mathew Brady would capture the horrors of war with images of corpse-strewn battlefields and show them to public audiences in exhibits like "The Dead of Antietam" of October 1862, leading one New York Times reporter to famously

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1 Preface to Woodworth, ed. (1996), p. xi.

comment: "If [Brady] has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets, he has done something very much like it."<sup>2</sup> In effect, added to the Civil War's wealth of written sources are the fruits of the birth of photojournalism.

In essence, then, the American Civil War has left its researchers with a vast multitude of stones to turn, and researchers have themselves, with enthusiasm, flocked to do so in appropriately vast multitudes. Finding new stones to turn - and indeed, determining which stones have been turned and which ones haven't is, to say the very least, a challenge. And yet historians, professionals and amateurs alike, continue to do so passionately, rubbing shoulders with each other and stepping over each other while they continuously reassess and argue about the greter, eternal questions of the war in light of their own findings, and at the same time struggle to keep up with the arguments put forth by their colleagues and peers.

This makes for a packed, confusing and often overwhelming field of study - but it also makes a fertile ground for historiography. There is hardly a single topic of any width within the broader topic of the war itself that has not been evaluated and reevaluated at least a dozen times over between the end of the war and today. As long as enough if not all of the literature detailing the subject in question can be identified from out of the vast, sprawling jungle that is American Civil War bibliography, it should be possible to make quite detailed and extensive observations on how the positions and arguments of historians on said topic have developed - or possibly failed to significantly develop - over the years.

### **Research question and aim of this thesis**

This thesis is going to be one such attempt at getting a clearer understanding of how the positions of historians on one particular sub-field of American Civil War History have developed over time. The research question for this thesis is going to be as follows:

*"How has history's understanding of the Confederate motives for invading Maryland in September 1862 developed from the earliest works on the topic to the present day?"*

The Confederate invasion of Maryland, usually called "the Maryland Campaign", was an offensive undertaken by the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia which lasted from September 4th to the night of September 18th/19th, 1862. It is historically significant for a number of reasons. It

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2 Holzer & Symonds (2010), p. 194.

represented the first large-scale penetration of the North by a Southern army in the Eastern theater of the war (the term "North" here meaning the territory of a state which was not in rebellion against the Union). It culminated in one of the bloodiest battles of the war, the Battle of Antietam, which remains the bloodiest single day in American history, as far as American casualties are concerned - a close-fought battle which could have spelled disaster for the Confederates if they had lost. And perhaps most importantly, the campaign and its aftermath had great political consequences that would in some ways change the nature of the war. They would set the stage for the abolition of slavery and remove whatever chance the South had of achieving diplomatic recognition - and possible aid in the war - by the nations of Europe.

The question of the South's motives for entering Maryland, then, is not an insignificant one when it comes to understanding the nature of the war itself. It is, however, primarily the historiography around this event which the thesis aims to examine. There seems to have been two dominant perspectives or schools of thought in Civil War history through whose lenses the Maryland Campaign has been viewed, these being the "Lost Cause" perspective and the "Historical Contingency" perspective. Through two chapters, one exploring older texts, the second more recent ones, I aim to explore what various authors have to say on the topic of the Confederate decision to invade, and how their opinions do (or do not) conform to these two broader perspectives or schools of thought. In doing so, I will also look into how these perspectives relate to each other historically, what may have caused the original near-total dominance of the Lost Cause perspective to give way to the birth and growth of the Historical Contingency perspective, and what this development meant for Maryland Campaign historiography. I will further investigate a subject matter inherent to the research question which neither of the two perspectives seem to answer in a satisfactory manner, which is: "What were the alternatives to invasion?" This question will be addressed in a chapter of its own. Finally, I will take a brief look at how the decision to invade has been presented in a few selected works of popular media and historical fiction.

The phrasing of this particular research question is made in such a way that any answer must almost necessarily be looked for in studies focusing on military and/or political history. This is intentional. It is not the direct challenge posed to the older, more well-established Ranke-inspired political- and military-focused school of history by later historical schools of thought such as Marxist or social history that it aims to explore, although the the Historical Contingency perspective seems to owe much of its growth to the same processes, in perhaps slightly different ways. The intention is to study the development of positions *within* the field of political and military history, and how that field has been challenged from *within* its own ranks.

## Outline of historical events

On April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1861, armed forces commanded by the newly formed Confederate States of America, at that time consisting of seven states who had declared themselves seceded from the USA, opened fire on Union-loyal forces occupying Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, SC. This action is commonly seen as the opening of the war that would go down in history as the American Civil War.<sup>3</sup>

The first several months of the war saw considerable success for the Confederate cause, bolstered by the secession of four more states from the Union and early military victories at Bull Run and Ball's Bluff.<sup>4</sup> By early 1862, however, the fortunes of war were changing in favor of the North. Southern armies were forced to retreat entirely from Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri.<sup>5</sup> Confederate efforts to assert themselves in the Southwest met with failure. Along the coast, the Union blockade of Southern ports tightened, and amphibious offensives established Union enclaves on the coast and captured New Orleans.<sup>6</sup> In the East, a large portion of the seceded state of Virginia had itself seceded from the state, and applied for independent statehood in the Union as West Virginia.<sup>7</sup> An amphibious flanking movement by Union troops had forced the Confederate armies to abandon Northern Virginia and brought the war to the gates of the Confederate capital of Richmond, VA.<sup>8</sup>

Desperate to stem the Union advance, the Confederate leadership turned to conscription in order to mobilize more soldiers, and endeavored to concentrate their forces to make their armies better equipped for offensive operations.<sup>9</sup> The initial Southern counteroffensives of 1862 were largely failures. Initial successes at Shiloh, TN and Seven Pines, VA quickly turned to defeat, further accentuated by the death of Sidney Johnston and the severe wounding of Joseph Johnston, two of the Confederacy's top generals.<sup>10</sup> Only Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's offensive through the Shenandoah Valley was successful, reversing the Union advancement through the valley and driving them back across the Potomac.<sup>11</sup> It was Joseph Johnston's wounding, however, which

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3 McPherson (1988), p. 273-275.

4 Ibid., p. 281, 362.

5 Ibid., p. 392-414.

6 Ibid., p. 369-372.

7 Ibid., p. 297-299.

8 Ibid., p. 454.

9 Ibid., p. 427.

10 Ibid., p. 406-410, 461-462.

11 Ibid., p. 454-460.

catapulted Robert E. Lee, who would become an icon of the Confederate war effort, into field command.

At the beginning of the war, then-Colonel Lee had been offered a generalship in the Union army by the Lincoln administration, acting on the advice of the aging General Winfield Scott. He declined this offer, however, and resigned his commission in the US Army before accepting his native state of Virginia's offer to command its armed forces when it seceded.<sup>12</sup> Lee's chief duty in this position was to oversee the transfer of Virginia's forces from state (and his own) command into a unified Confederate command structure. During the first year of the war, he served only briefly and largely unremarkably in the field, before being called away to oversee the construction of coastal defenses along the Confederate Eastern seaboard.<sup>13</sup> He also served as a key military advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis.<sup>14</sup>

With Johnston seriously wounded, Lee was called upon to take command of Johnston's army on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1862. Renaming it the Army of Northern Virginia (its name, on paper, had previously been the Army of the Potomac, incidentally also the name of the major Union army in the Eastern Theater of the Civil War), he launched a counter-offensive (which would go down in history as the Seven Days Campaign) against the encroaching Union army which, while costly, succeeded in convincing the commanding Union general, George B. McClellan, to pull his forces back from Richmond.<sup>15</sup> This development, in turn, convinced the Lincoln administration to withdraw McClellan's army entirely from Virginia in August, ending the immediate threat to Richmond.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after, in what would be known as the Second Battle of Manassas/Bull Run, The Army of Northern Virginia fought and defeated a second invading Union army, the Army of Virginia under the command of John Pope.<sup>17</sup>

In just under three months, the Army of Northern Virginia had managed to turn the fortune of war completely around in the Eastern theater of the conflict. In May, the Confederacy had seemed on the verge of losing Richmond, and with it possibly Virginia and even the war itself. By the end of August, one invading Federal army had been withdrawn from Virginia and another had been routed outright, leaving virtually all of Virginia under Confederate control once more.

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12 Ibid., p. 280-282.

13 Ibid., p. 371.

14 Ibid., p. 426-427.

15 Ibid., p. 462-471.

16 Ibid., p. 488.

17 Ibid., p. 524-532.

A long summer of hard marches and heavy fighting had left the Army of Northern Virginia fatigued and badly mangled. Many of its soldiers were underfed and over-exerted. What uniforms they used to have were in many cases reduced to rags and tatters, and a lot of them were marching barefoot after having worn out their boots. The fighting had claimed many casualties among the officers too, leaving several regiments without effective leadership.<sup>18</sup>

It was, as one observer put it, an "army of beggars", marching on little more than the momentum they had accumulated through a summer of hard-fought victories. Still, that momentum proved to be no small thing. Although the condition of his army would suggest that it was in no shape to undertake an offensive operation, that is exactly what Lee did. On September 4th, 1862, he marched his ragged army north, taking it across the Potomac, into Maryland and Union territory.<sup>19</sup>

The Confederate campaign met with initial success, despite a risky decision by Lee to divide his forces. A portion of his army captured the Federal garrison and arsenal at Harper's Ferry on September 15th.<sup>20</sup> By then, however, McClellan's Army of the Potomac had been reinforced with the remnants of the shattered Army of Virginia, and were marching northwest from Washington to confront the Confederates. Through a stroke of fortune, Lee's plans had fallen into the hands of the Federal commanders, and with the Southern army divided into parts, McClellan had a golden opportunity to defeat his opponent's forces in detail.<sup>21</sup>

McClellan was slow in seizing this opportunity, however, and by the time he launched his attack on the Confederate army on September 17th, Lee had succeeded in gathering most of his forces back together. Still badly outnumbered and with the Potomac River at their back, the Southerners barely but successfully held their ground against the Union attack. The last division from Harper's Ferry arrived late in the day after a long forced march, in the nick of time to prevent the Confederate line from collapsing and in all likelihood saving the entire Army of Northern Virginia from destruction.<sup>22</sup> The Battle of Antietam, as it came to be known on the Union side (the Confederates named it the Battle of Sharpsburg) was the single bloodiest day of the war, and indeed in all of American history, at least as far as American casualties are concerned. The final tally of dead, wounded and missing are estimated to have been around 23 000 in total, counting both sides, and the number of dead alone are estimated at around 6000.<sup>23</sup> Though the Confederates remained in

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18 Ibid., p. 534-535.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., p. 538

21 Ibid, p. 537

22 Ibid, p. 544

23 Ibid.

their positions through September 18th, the Union troops did not renew their attack, and during the following night Lee withdrew his forces back across the Potomac into Virginia, aborting his offensive and bringing the Maryland Campaign to an end.<sup>24</sup>

### **Traditional historical significance attributed to the campaign**

Many historical consequences have been attributed to the outcome of the Battle of Antietam over the years - enough for it to earn a reputation as one of the great turning points of the war. On the one hand it turned back the first serious penetration of Confederate forces into Union territory in the East and put an end to the string of victories the Southern forces had enjoyed through the summer and early fall of 1862. On the other hand, the indecisive result of the battle itself meant that the Army of Northern Virginia would survive to fight for another two and a half years.

Perhaps the most important single consequence was that the Union victory, narrow though it was, provided Abraham Lincoln the political opportunity he needed to issue his Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves of the rebelling states. Although he had written his first draft of the proclamation earlier that summer and presented it to his cabinet, Secretary of State William H. Seward urged him to wait for a battlefield victory before issuing it, so it could be presented from a position of strength. Issuing the Proclamation while the South was enjoying such success on the battlefield would appear to be an act of desperation, Seward cautioned, and Lincoln agreed to wait.<sup>25</sup> Antietam provided him the opportunity he needed. When he finally did issue the proclamation on September 22nd, it transformed the Union cause of the war. This new Union goal of eradicating slavery in the rebellious states made any intervention by the cotton-starved European powers on the side of the South politically unfeasible, began the process that would make it possible for African-Americans to serve in the Union army, and would eventually lead to the complete abolition of slavery in America.<sup>26</sup>

For their part, the Confederates could claim, with some justification, that the campaign had been an overall success. Although it had failed to achieve anything of significant strategic value, the capture of Harper's Ferry with its supplies and the failure of the Federal army to rout them at Antietam made for a net victory, it was argued.<sup>27</sup> Though it would have to resign itself to fighting the war without overt foreign aid, and though its armies were bruised and battered, the Confederacy was far

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 505

26 Ibid., p. 557-558.

27 Gallagher, ed. (1999), p. 5-6.

from dead, and the bloodiest years of the war were still to come.

### **Selection of sources and literature**

As previously mentioned, American Civil War bibliography is huge, and the Eastern theater of the war in particular has received a lot of interest from professional and amateur historians alike over the years. Therefore, the challenge in the selection of sources for this paper has been not so much in finding relevant texts to study as in deciding which ones to pick over others. The texts I have chosen to study can be roughly divided into the following genres or general categories: Declarations and missives, eyewitness accounts, biographies, monographs on the campaign and historical essays. In addition to this comes secondary sources, mainly historiographical literature useful to the understanding of historical context these texts were written within.

For the basic historical overview of the war up until the end of the Maryland Campaign above, I have tried to draw exclusively from James M. McPherson's *Battlecry of Freedom*, published in 1988. I have done so because it is a highly acclaimed (and Pulitzer Prize-winning) single-volume account of the war which should be easy for anyone to get hold of, making it easy for the reader to cross-reference this summary of events against the source material.

### Historiographical literature

The historiographical secondary sources referenced in this paper have been selected with three particular goals in mind. First, to identify which sources are the most relevant to the topic, the most acclaimed and the most widely read, thus making it an easier task to select from them. Second, to put the arguments presented within these sources into the larger context of American national history writing. The third goal is to identify, acknowledge and understand the historiography that has already been written on the same exact topic at this paper, so that it can properly build on top of (and if need be, argue against) its predecessors.

In the first task, one book has proven particularly useful: *The American Civil War - A Handbook of Literature and Research*, edited by Steven E. Woodworth. This handbook contains 40 historiographical essays, each focusing on a single sub-field within the larger subject of the war and written by a historian specializing in that sub-field. It has proven especially valuable in helping with the selection of literature on General Lee in particular, whose biographies number in the forties or fifties.

Regarding the second task, I have chosen to lean in large part on *That Noble Dream - The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* by Peter Novick. The book offers a good analysis on trends among American historians in general, and also includes valuable insight on how historians' approaches toward American Civil War history in specific have developed over the years.

As far as previous historiography on the same topic as this paper goes, a lot of it is present in texts which themselves presents arguments on the reason for the Southern offensive - either to draw support for their arguments from those earlier views, or to argue against them. These historiographical presentations are particularly developed in later texts (1970s onward) whose specific aim it is to critically re-evaluate the old "myths" about the Civil War in history. The presentation of Lee in history has been critically reexamined by Thomas Connelly in *The Marble Man - Robert E. Lee and his Image in American Society* and by Alan T. Nolan in *Lee Reconsidered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History*. Joseph L. Harsh has similarly critically examined the historiography of the Maryland Campaign itself in *Confederate Tide Rising* and the follow-up book *Taken at the Flood*. All of these will be discussed in this paper, both as secondary sources for their historiographical references and as primary sources for the arguments they themselves present on the Confederate reasons for the Maryland Campaign. In addition to those texts which are themselves examined, I have also made some use of an essay collection published in 1999 called *The Antietam Campaign*, edited by Gary Gallagher (not to be confused with the 1989 collection called *Antietam: Essays on the 1862 Maryland Campaign*, also edited by Gallagher and among the examined texts); and another essay compilation by Gallagher titled *Lee and his Generals in War and Memory* (1998).

### Declarations and missives

While they do not count as pieces of history writing themselves, it is still useful in the context of this paper to take a look at the original statements of intent made by the Confederate leadership regarding their decision to bring their army into Maryland. Chief among these texts are Lee's correspondence with Jefferson Davis in early September, 1862, expressing and explaining his intent to cross the Potomac, and also his Declaration to the People of Maryland.

### Eyewitness accounts

Some of the texts discussed in this topic are eyewitness accounts written by Confederate officers who were (or claimed to have been) close to General Lee and possessed (or claimed to possess) personal knowledge of the military decisions he made and his reasons for making them, at the time of the Maryland Campaign. These accounts are not historical studies, as they are drawn from personal memory and not from the examination and interpretation of sources. Even so, they have played a very important role in shaping later historians' views of the events as they happened, and perhaps too much of a role in the case of General Walker's account especially. Therefore, they definitely deserve to be looked at by this paper, particularly in regard to how they are interpreted and used by professional historians after the war.

### Biographies

A significant amount of the historical studies of relevance to the topic of this paper are biographies on General Robert E. Lee, who arguably continues to stand as the single most highly-profiled military figure of the American Civil War<sup>28</sup>. Several of these biographies will be examined in this paper.

One might wonder why the selected biographies exclusively are studies focused on Lee, and why they do not include biographies on Jefferson Davis, who was after all the Confederate President and Commander-in-Chief, and who kept an active interest in the conduction of Confederate military campaigns. The reason is simply that historical evidence overwhelmingly suggests that Lee made the decision to enter Maryland on his own, without receiving input from Davis or anyone else. As pointed out by Harsh, when Lee sent the dispatch informing Jefferson Davis that an opportunity for invading Maryland was ripe, he did not wait for the President's reply before launching the invasion.<sup>29</sup> Nor does there seem to be much evidence suggesting that Lee and Davis collaborated on any concrete plans to invade Maryland previous to Lee's decision. Yale historian David Blight seems to present such a view in Yale's Open Course lecture program on the Civil War and Reconstruction Era<sup>30</sup>, but there seems to be little in the way of sources corroborating this. That version of events seems unlikely in any case, since the invasion of Maryland followed right on the heels of the Second Battle of Bull Run/Manassas. Prior to this battle, Lee's primary objective as commanding general of the Army of Northern Virginia was to safeguard the Confederate capital of Richmond from the Federal armies threatening it, and between the battle and the invasion of

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28 Not counting Lincoln in his role as Union Commander-in-Chief - or Jefferson Davis in the equivalent Confederate role, although the literature on Lee probably exceeds the literature on Davis, too.

29 Harsh (1999), p. 64

30 Blight (2008) in Open Yale Courses: The Civil War and Reconstruction era, available at: <http://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-119/lecture-14>. Blight makes the argument referred to 47 minutes into the video.

Maryland he would have had no time to confer with Davis. An argument can of course be made to the effect that Lee's decision may have reflected a previously-achieved consensus between him and Davis on how the war should be fought, but I consider that perspective to be adequately addressed both in the biographies on Lee and in the monographs on the campaign itself. The history written on Davis, while more peripheral to the topic matter than the history written on Lee, has not been ignored.

### Monographs

Perhaps the most relevant genre to look at when addressing the topic of this paper is the historical monograph, a study of a single historical event - in this case referring to books that make the Maryland Campaign their topic of study. Considering the immensity of Civil War literature, it is a little surprising that the first published monograph devoted solely to the Maryland Campaign and Antietam<sup>31</sup> came as late as 1965, in the form of James V. Murfin's *The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam*. It was not, of course, the first published study describing and interpreting the events of the Maryland Campaign - other studies, such as biographies on Lee, had been tackling the subject matter for decades. Nor was it the first monograph actually *written* on the topic - the so-called "Carman Manuscript" penned by Ezra A. Carman, himself a survivor of the Battle of Antietam, carries that distinction. Carman's manuscript, though essentially complete around 1900, was never actually edited and published until 2007. Murfin's book was, however, the first study specifically focusing on the campaign which was available to the larger public.

It was followed in 1983 by Stephen W. Sears' *Landscape Turned Red: the Battle of Antietam*, in 1998 and 1999 by Joseph L. Harsh's two-volume study *Confederate Tide Rising and Taken By The Flood*, in 2002 by James M. McPherson's *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam*; then Carman's manuscript was finally published in its first edition in 2008 as *The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, before the so far latest monograph was published in 2012: *To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, by Scott Hartwig. As suggested by the titles, most of these studies place a certain emphasis on the Battle of Antietam, but all of them also look at the whole of the campaign and attempt to place it within a larger historical context. All of these texts are examined and discussed in this thesis.

### Historical essays

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31 Palfrey's study could be called monographic, too, but it also covers the Battle of Fredericksburg, and is consequently not solely focused on the Maryland Campaign.

A number of historical essays have been written on the topic of the Maryland Campaign. Of particular note is one compilation of such essays, published in 1989, edited by Gary W. Gallagher and titled *Antietam: Essays on the 1862 Maryland Campaign*. Two of the essays within will be examined in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, Gallagher has also published a larger collection of essays on Antietam, but it does not contain any essays directly relevant to the research question, and will only be used as a secondary source. All of these essays are relatively recent publications, from within the last two or three decades, but it is in recent decades that much of the traditional interpretations on the topic have begun to be challenged - and so, in this paper, the selection of articles will be biased in favor of these newer ones, since the traditional view will be amply demonstrated and examined within the larger texts in any case.

### Other text genres

There are some sources belonging to other genres that it might, at least at first glance, seem valuable to take a look at when writing about this topic, but which nevertheless will not be touched upon, or touched upon only lightly.

One such potential wellspring of sources might be Southern newspapers at the time of the Maryland Campaign. The papers were certainly full of news about the war, and the invasion of Maryland by Lee's victorious army was certainly a story that appealed to the Southern public. These newspaper reports will not, however, be looked into in any significant detail in this paper. The challenge of getting hold of and sifting through these sources aside, for one thing it seems very improbable that even frontline reporters would get hold of much more than the publicly declared intention of going into Maryland in order to dislodge the metaphorical bayonet pinning it to the Union - a popular Confederate interpretation of Maryland's political situation at the time. For another, while historians have certainly used these news reports to gauge Southerners' reactions to the events of the war, when studying the intent behind the campaign itself, they have naturally preferred to draw their conclusions based on Lee's own writings or on eyewitness reports from the people surrounding him. For the purposes of this paper, then, such news reports are little more than a dead end.

Another genre that really does have potential, in theory, to demonstrate how the motives behind the Maryland Campaign have been and continue to be understood and presented is popular history. The American Civil War is no more lacking in works of popular history than professional history - if anything the body of popular and amateur history on the war seems to be even larger than the body

of professional, academic historical studies. In the closing essay of his book *Drawn with the Sword*, McPherson claims that as of 1995, when the essay was written, there were "more than 250,000 subscribers to four monthly or bi-monthly Civil War magazines"<sup>32</sup>.

The main factor that makes this literature less than ideal for the purposes of this paper is that some of the most relevant popular magazine articles on the topic are written by some of the historians whose books (and, consequently, interpretations) are already covered in this study - making their full-length studies more interesting to examine. Another factor is, as McPherson also points out, that these essays are typically heavily focused on describing the military campaigns and battles as they happened, and not very interested in exploring and analyzing the wider context surrounding them. One big exception to McPherson's generalization in this regard can be found in the big body of so-called "Neo-Confederate" amateur history. These historical studies, to the degree they deserve to be called such, are very heavily politicized with a clear aim toward vindicating the Confederacy's historical reputation. Drawing very heavily upon the "Lost Cause" myth (which will be examined in its own regard), they typically paint the South's war effort as a noble, chivalric struggle, downplay the role of slavery both as a cause of the war and as much of a social ill to begin with, and emphasize on understanding the war as a war of "Northern aggression". While this particular subfield of (mostly) popular history might still be worth a look in the interest of looking at different presentations on the war, this particular study is not ideal to do so. This is simply because there is very little in the "orthodox" historical understanding of Lee and the events surrounding the Maryland Campaign that would contradict the opinions a Neo-Confederate would be likely to hold, as we shall see.

## Chapter 2: The Marble Man in Maryland – The first postwar century and the Lost Cause in the Maryland Campaign

This chapter will examine those selected texts which were written and, with one exception, published during roughly the first century after the war, from 1865 up to the end of the 1950s. It will look at each text in a chronological order and attempt to chart the way in which they build what will become a commonly accepted truth about the subject of Confederate reasons for invading Maryland – and in a broader sense, the war itself.

### **Original statements of intent**

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32 McPherson (1996), p. 243

The first statements put forward concerning the Confederate intentions in Maryland were made by Lee himself at the outset of the campaign. One took the form of a proclamation titled *To the People of Maryland* (often referred to by historians as *Lee's Proclamation to the Marylanders*), wherein the Confederate general tried to convince the locals that the Southern army had come as a liberator. It was issued on September 8th while the Army of Northern Virginia was camped at Frederick, MD.<sup>33</sup> The proclamation did not take for granted that the populace would in fact side with the Confederacy and rise against the Union. It did, however, express indignation on the South's behalf in regard to Maryland's treatment by Union authorities, and promised the Marylanders the opportunity to "decide your destiny freely and without constraint" along with a guarantee that the South would "respect your choice, whatever it may be".<sup>34</sup>

An even earlier statement of intent can be found in Lee's dispatch to Jefferson Davis on September 3rd, where he stresses the opportunity to "give material aid to Maryland and afford her an opportunity of throwing off the oppression to which she is now subject", just like he says in the Proclamation to the Marylanders. He goes on to explain that he has decided against attacking Washington directly, but that despite his assessment that his army is "not properly equipped for an invasion", they nevertheless "cannot afford to be idle". He proposes to forage in Loudoun (a county in Northern Virginia), threatening the Union hold of Shenandoah Valley to the west and the approaches to Washington in the east, and to cross into Maryland "if practicable".<sup>35</sup> The next day he sent another dispatch to Davis, announcing plainly his intention to move into Maryland, unless Davis should order him immediately not to do so (though leaving no time for Davis to actually reply in time). In this dispatch he also expresses a desire to continue into Pennsylvania if circumstances should allow, again unless receiving orders to the contrary from Davis. He also asks Davis to provide him with some means of payment to those Marylanders from whom he hoped to draw his supplies.<sup>36</sup>

Without going into a detailed independent criticism of these sources (it is, after all, the things written in hindsight which are the main focus of this paper), a few words are still in order. Lee's proclamation should of course not be taken at face value. Whether or not Lee's words are sincere, the intent behind his proclamation is clearly designed to influence how the Marylanders will react to the Confederate army marching into their state. It seems clearly aimed at convincing the locals to

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33 Harwell/Freeman (1961/1991), p. 356

34 O.R., XIX, II, p. 601-602.

35 Ibid., p. 590, 591.

36 Ibid., p. 591-592

remain at least non-hostile, and hopefully induce at least some of them to voluntarily supply the army or even join the ranks themselves. As such, it stands to reason that the Confederate general would want to present his army in the best light possible.

Lee's dispatch to Davis is a different matter. There doesn't seem to be any reason for Lee to deceive his own President regarding his intentions, especially since the two seem to have enjoyed a good relationship with each other.<sup>37</sup> Lee may still have tried to secure Davis' approval by citing the opportunity for political gain, but Davis was a military man himself, and it seems likely that he would also have been receptive to a proposition made on military grounds alone. This seems to lend some added credibility to Lee's words to the Marylanders, although his proclamation still wasn't the whole truth. It is, however, worth noting that in this dispatch, Lee only alluded to the possibility of crossing into Maryland – and that he never waited for a reply. Already the next day, on September 4th, he ordered his army to start the crossing of the Potomac, into Maryland and enemy territory.

Lee later elaborated on his reasons for entering Maryland in his official report to the Confederate government, which he issued in May, 1863. Pointing out that the victories of the summer and early fall had "transferred [the war] from the interior to the frontier", it stressed the strategic benefit of prolonging this situation. In the report, Lee argues the benefits of keeping the Federal army occupied in the defense of Washington (rather than allowing it to once again threaten Richmond), while simultaneously subsisting the Army of Northern Virginia on Maryland's agricultural produce. He goes on to explain his desire to "inflict further injury upon the enemy" and his plan to create an opportunity to do so by "threatening Washington and Baltimore", thus "drawing them away from their base of supplies". He also again mentions the motive of giving Marylanders the opportunity to join the Confederate cause. He also acknowledges that the Army of Northern Virginia was actually in no shape to undertake such an offensive, but defends the decision by arguing that he still judged it to be capable of detaining the Union's forces, keeping them north of the Potomac and away from Virginian soil.<sup>38</sup>

### **The first narratives of the war**

Let us go forward three years until 1865, as a victorious but internally conflicted North began to wrestle with the problem of reintegrating the South into the Union, and a defeated South struggled to make sense of what had happened. The guns had hardly gone silent before memoirs and

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37 This claim is disputed by some authors, as we shall see, but the general consensus seems to be that Lee's and Davis' relationship was overall a good one.

38 Reports of the Operations of the Army of Northern Virginia (1864), p. 27-28

eyewitness reports by participants on both sides of the war began to get published.

*Lee and His Generals*, by William P. Snow

As early as 1865, former Confederate Captain William P. Snow had a book published named *Southern Generals, Who They Are, and What They Have Done*. It was reissued in in 1867 as *Lee and His Generals*.<sup>39</sup> Although Snow was a Confederate veteran, this book is not an eyewitness report, but a study of eighteen of the most renowned Confederate generals, principal among them Lee.

Snow's assessment of Lee's intentions in his invasion of Maryland is short and to the point: "General Lee's determination now was to invade Maryland, and see if that State might not be aroused to join the South."<sup>40</sup> As his source for this statement, Snow cites Richmond Examiner editor Edward Pollard's publication *Second Year of the War*, which was published as early as 1864. He might as well, however, have gone directly to Lee's Proclamation to the Marylanders as his source, because he says nothing which it does not. It's not surprising that Snow has little to say about Lee's motives beyond what the people of Maryland were told. The war had barely just ended, after all, and Snow may not have had access to the correspondence between Lee and Davis, or to any of the confidantes of either leader. There is one interesting detail in Snow's writing that bears mention, however. While he is full of undisguised admiration for Lee and the other Confederate generals – as might be expected from a Confederate veteran – he also bestows a lot of praise upon the Union soldiers and their leaders. He describes the Army of the Potomac as "heroic", McClellan as "its beloved commander", and the relationship between Lee and McClellan as that of "two former close companions in arms". As early as 1867 (which is the text studied here, though it may have been evident in the 1865 edition, too) we see the beginnings of the reconciliation ideal which would come to exert a heavy influence on American Civil War history even to the present day.

*Four Years with General Lee*, by Walter H. Taylor

Another of Lee's early chroniclers is his own adjutant Walter H. Taylor, who served in his staff throughout most of the war and through Lee's entire career as a Civil War field commander. In 1877, he published the first of two wartime memoirs, titled *Four Years with General Lee*. Taylor's language is somewhat less flowery and more matter-of-fact than Snow's, and includes a lot of

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39 Woodworth (1996), p. 346.

40 Snow (1867/1982), p. 74

statistical information on such topics as the effective strength of the Army of Northern Virginia at various points during the war, division by division.

If Snow was brief in his assessment of the intention behind crossing the Potomac, Taylor trumps him in that regard by not putting forward any reason at all. He doesn't speculate on Lee's plans at all until the army is well into Maryland. Only then does he mention Lee's "plan of operation" which according to Taylor begins with the General's intention to seize the arsenal and garrison at Harper's Ferry, and then to gather his forces and do battle with McClellan's army.<sup>41</sup> Although technically Taylor is correct on both counts, as both of these actions were actually executed under Lee's orders, Taylor's wording gives the subtle impression that the Confederate commander retained the operational initiative throughout the campaign, and that the events as they happened were essentially the plan all along. He does however, acknowledge the Confederate blunder that allowed the plans for the division of the army for fall into the hands of the enemy, and goes a long way toward blaming this accident for the ultimate failure of the campaign, calling it "one of the pivots on which turned the event of the war."<sup>42</sup> This is a notion that still retains some popularity today, which is curious, because the great opportunity these wayward orders gave McClellan was the chance to catch Lee's army when it was still divided and defeat it in detail – a chance that he, for whatever reason, failed to seize.

There's not much more to say about Taylor's account, except to note that while he is somewhat successful in keeping the tone of his prose neutral and matter-of-fact, he does break that mold on occasions in order to praise various characteristics of Lee and the army, characterizing the general as a "great Confederate leader" with "extraordinary skill and vigor"<sup>43</sup> and describing the outnumbered Confederate defenders at Antietam as "a wall of adamant".<sup>44</sup> These characterizations play right into the "Lost Cause" interpretation of the war that would grow to dominate Civil War history.

### *The Antietam and Fredericksburg*, by Francis W. Palfrey

The earliest study of the campaign itself was made by Francis Winthrop Palfrey, another war veteran, who had been a Union colonel during the conflict. Published in 1882 as Volume V of a series of books named *Campaigns of the Civil War*, it is considered by some historians to be the first

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41 Taylor (1877/1996), p. 66

42 Ibid., p. 67

43 Ibid., p. 73.

44 Ibid, p. 70.

monograph on the topic. However, it extends beyond the Maryland Campaign itself to also include the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13th, 1862, in which the Union suffered one of its most shattering defeats during the war. The sections of Palfrey's book in which he details the movements and organization of the Army of the Potomac have a heavy autobiographical component, but he takes an analytical and critical approach when he describes and interprets those events to which he was not a direct witness.

Palfrey bases his entire understanding of the Confederate invasion on Lee's previously mentioned 1863 report, citing the entire relevant section in full. He does not accept everything in it uncritically, and characterizes Lee's assessment of the poor state of his army as an "excuse for failure". The Confederates, he argues, captured a great amount of supplies with their victory at Second Manassas/Bull Run, in addition to nine thousand prisoners – and, he argues, the Confederates were "far from scrupulous" where taking clothes and shoes from their prisoners was concerned.<sup>45</sup>

Palfrey's belief that the Army of Northern Virginia was better equipped than Lee would admit may have some truth to it where ordnance was concerned. However, if the Confederates did indeed pilfer shoes and clothes from their Union prisoners at Manassas Junction, they didn't do so on a large enough scale to make much of a difference. Eyewitness reports seem to universally agree on the abysmal state of the clothing and footwear worn by the Confederate soldiers. Most likely, Palfrey's comments reflect a personal, biased opinion of Confederate soldiers informed by his own service as a Union officer. He does, however, praise Lee's overall plan as a good one. Lee did not take success for granted when he marched his army into Maryland, Palfrey argues, but came with the intent to create opportunities and to exploit them as he went along – to see if he "might change the improbable into the possible, and the possible into the actual", with "everything to gain and nothing to lose".<sup>46</sup>

#### Harper's Ferry and Sharpsburg, by John G. Walker

In 1886, General John, G. Walker, a division commander in the Army of Northern Virginia during the Maryland Campaign, submitted his memoirs for printing in *Century Magazine* 32. Among other events, this recounting included a meeting with Lee early in the campaign, during which the commander of the army supposedly explained in great detail to his junior general what the motive and goal of the invasion was. According to Walker, Lee revealed that his intentions were to penetrate into Pennsylvania, capture Harrisburg, destroy the Pennsylvania railroad bridge across the

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45 Palfrey (1882/2012), Kindle Locations 274-282

46 Ibid., Kindle Locations 283-284

Susquehanna river (severely hampering Union communications between East and West) and then strike at either Philadelphia, Baltimore or Washington as the situation allowed.<sup>47</sup>

This account by General Walker has been heavily relied upon by later historians in their interpretations of what the Confederate goals were in the campaign. In a historiographical context it is consequently a very important text. As a source of knowledge for the events it describes, however, it is completely worthless. Over several pages in his book *Taken by the Flood*, Joseph Harsh tears the credibility of Walker's memoirs to pieces. Walker's timing of the event is shown to be wrong. His description of Lee's behavior is logically impossible (Walker talks about Lee tracing lines on a map with his finger, while both of Lee's hands were injured and bound up at the time). That Lee would confide his plan to Walker and not to higher-ranking generals with equally or more important roles to play in the execution of the campaign is implausible. The plan itself, as Walker has Lee describe it, sounds too fantastical to be real, especially given the exhausted state of the Confederate soldiers and the problem with stragglers. Walker also has Lee explain that the reason he is willing to be so audacious is because he knows McClellan to be excessively cautious. In fact, Lee had no way of knowing at the time that McClellan was the Union commander he would be up against, but every reason to believe it would be Pope, something Lee's own dispatches at the time reflected. Perhaps most damning of all is that Walker's account of the event is inconsistent with the report he himself made during the war itself, not even a month after this meeting with Lee took place. While the meeting itself probably did happen, it almost certainly did not happen in the way in which Walker describes in this memoir. And while Walker's own contemporaries seem to have quietly ignored his account in their own studies of the campaign and of Lee, it would be picked up by later historians and given a central part in their understanding of Lee, and it would not be directly challenged before Harsh so thoroughly demolished it.<sup>48</sup>

Arguably, the greatest impact Walker's in all probability false account has had on Civil War scholarship is not the argument it presents in regard to the goals of the Maryland Campaign. Instead, it is the argument it presents in regard to Lee's alleged ability to "read" his opponents, and his mastery at "knowing his enemy". This argument would become a key piece of the whole myth that was being constructed around the historic persona of Lee.

*The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, by Ezra A. Carman, edited by Thomas G. Clemens

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47 *Century Magazine* 32 (1886), p. 296-298

48 Harsh (1998), p. 133-145

One of the most interesting early studies of the Maryland Campaign was written by Ezra A. Carman. Just like Palfrey, he was a Union colonel during the war, and just like Palfrey, he fought at Antietam. Carman's 1800-page manuscript is not an eyewitness report, but an actual historical study of the topic. It distinguishes itself by being a very thorough study based on a wealth of source material, much of it gathered in the forms of letters from and interviews of veterans of the campaign from both sides.<sup>49</sup> Carman's study constitutes the first monograph focused solely on the Maryland Campaign, but he never published it before he died. Peculiarly, given the American public's interest in the Civil War, it would remain unpublished for a century after its writing – not lost, but available only to those historians who were willing and able to travel to Washington, D.C and study the raw manuscript at the Library of Congress. Serving to further complicate this process, a lot of the related letters were spread among several other repositories. In 2008, Carman's monumental study was published for the first time, edited by Joseph Pierro, followed in 2010 and 2012 by a more thorough, two-volume edition by Thomas G. Clemens, one of the foremost living experts on the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Antietam.<sup>50</sup>

Carman opens his manuscript by citing on the first page Lee's professed intentions of rescuing Maryland from that state's perceived bondage under the Union. His wording is quite neutral, noting only that Lee recorded this as one of the objects of the campaign, and declining to make a judgement on the sincerity of that claim. Instead he attempts to judge the truth about whether Marylanders really did feel oppressed or not, and arrives at the also quite moderate judgement that the state was "loyal at heart", but had "much sympathy with her Southern sisters", and desired most of all to be neutral.<sup>51</sup> Further on in the manuscript, Carman cites a long passage from Walker's memoir, wherein Lee expresses his intent to capture Harrisburg and destroy the bridge across the Susquehanna. Like Clemens points out in a footnote, Carman is unusual among historians who themselves were veterans in that he makes use of Walker's account, and that he seems to be unaware of any possible fabrications on Walker's part.<sup>52</sup> That Carman would be less suspicious than other veteran chroniclers such as Taylor and Longstreet is only natural, however. They were centrally-placed, high-ranking Confederate officers who knew Lee well, while Carman as a Union colonel was forced to rely entirely on second-hand accounts in his assessment of Lee and his strategic aim. Overall, it seems that Carman is content to take Confederate claims of intent at face value. In addition to citing Walker, he also includes in full two dispatches from Lee to Davis, including the September 3rd dispatch discussed earlier, and Lee's official after-action report, also discussed

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49 Introduction to Carman/Clemens (2010) p. ix-xvii

50 Foreword to Carman/Clemens (2010), p. vii-viii

51 Carman/Clemens (2010) p. 1-2

52 Ibid., p. 81-82

above. His only comment on them is a summary of what they say, and he makes no attempt to debate the claims put forward in those texts or to analyze them further.<sup>53</sup>

Another example of Carman taking sources at face value can be found in his elaboration on the Confederate political goals in the campaign. Citing Longstreet's memoirs<sup>54</sup>, titled *From Manassas to Appomattox*, he explains that one of the "political objects of the Maryland campaign" was to influence the upcoming Congressional elections in the North in favor of the Democrats, by showing the power to the South in bringing the war into the North, and to have President Davis join the army and issue a call for recognition. This was also why the Confederate soldiers had been instructed to respect the property of Northern citizens during the invasion, Carman argues.<sup>55</sup> The idea that the Confederates wanted to influence the Congressional elections in the North is one that has survived to the modern day, and is argued quite extensively by James McPherson in *Crossroads of Freedom - Antietam*, as we shall see later. There are other explanations for the order to respect the property of Marylanders, however. One of them was a desire to keep the war a limited one, a gentleman's war as it were – a position held by many officers on both sides at this time of the war, including both Lee and McClellan. Another reason would be the simple fact that excessive looting and brutality would invite retaliation in turn, if Union armies were to penetrate south into Virginia again. Perhaps most obvious of all, such looting and theft would thoroughly ruin any hope of seducing Maryland or any of that state's citizens into joining the Confederacy. Carman's (and Longstreet's) claim that it was Lee's intention to have Davis join the army is pointed out by Clemens in the notes as not being corroborated by any other sources. What Clemens does not mention is that Walter H. Taylor, in *Four Years with General Lee*, writes that Davis had decided to come north and join the army *without* seeking Lee's counsel on the matter, and that he (Taylor) was dispatched by Lee to talk the Confederacy's President *out* of such a dangerous idea.<sup>56</sup> It would not be a long stretch of the imagination to hypothesize that Longstreet, in remembering there being talk of Davis joining the army, remembered the details wrong.

Lastly, Carman argues that international politics played a factor in the Confederate motives for the campaign. As he rightly points out, the Confederacy had been lobbying for diplomatic recognition from the great powers of Europe for a long time, and the "cotton famine" resulting from the decrease in supply of American cotton was beginning to be felt in earnest by the European textile

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53 Ibid., p. 77-80

54 Gen. James Longstreet was one of Lee's highest-ranking subordinates. He would command one of two corps after the reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia in October 1862, the other corps being headed by Gen Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson.

55 Carman/Clemens (2010) p. 102-103

56 Taylor (1877/1996), p. 66

manufacturers. The war was drawing out, and as the summer of 1862 passed into fall, talk of recognizing Confederate sovereignty became louder and louder in the European halls of power. Napoleon III of France was eager to intervene, but would not do so except in concert with the more hesitant British government. Carman cites a letter from Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin to the diplomatic delegates of the CSA in Britain, written on July 19th, 1862. In it, Benjamin speaks of the "recent successes" in the field<sup>57</sup>, and urges the envoys to use these news as a means of convincing the European powers of the futility of the Union's war effort, hopefully thereby securing recognition for the Confederacy and a speedy and favorable end to the war.

Carman takes the message in the letter several leaps farther, claiming that it conveyed to the envoys "the declaration of the intention of the Confederacy to recover lost ground and move into Maryland", and also that the messenger carrying the letter was instructed to inform the envoys that "Kentucky, Tennessee and Missouri were to be redeemed, McClellan destroyed or captured, Pope overthrown, and the North invaded."<sup>58</sup> Carman cites no part of the letter which would seem to back either of these claims. A full transcript of the source has not been available for study while writing this thesis, and Clemens offers no further insight on the passage. If Carman is right, and this is in fact what Benjamin expected to happen, then those expectations were formed despite the presence of two intact Northern Armies on Virginian soil at the time of the letter's writing, and his alleged assertion that the North would be invaded, if accurate, must be regarded as either eerily prescient or entirely premature. Carman goes on to assert that at the time of the Maryland Campaign, Confederate soldiers of "all ranks, from the general to the private" had been paying close attention to European politics for the previous year, sharing this hope of achieving diplomatic recognition through military success.<sup>59</sup> His source regarding this seems to be Gen. Bradley Tyler Johnson's *Memoirs of the First Maryland (Confederate) Regiment*, according to Clemens, but the referencing is somewhat unclear, and there is nothing in other texts that would indicate that Johnson was in any position to know Lee's motives for the invasion.<sup>60</sup> Nor are there any indications in Lee's own writings or those of his closest associates to indicate that international matters made a difference in his decision to cross the Potomac.

*Recollections and letters of Robert E. Lee*, by Robert E. Lee, Jr.

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57 At the time of the letter's dating, McClellan and the Army of the Potomac had been pushed away from the gates of Richmond to a heavily fortified position at Harrison's Landing

58 Carman/Clemens (2010) p. 74-75.

59 Ibid., p.76.

60 In attempting to track the source, I have read through two texts by Johnson with the above title, respectively located in *Southern Historical Society Papers vols. 9 and 10*, but I have not been successful in finding the passage from which Carman takes his information.

In 1904, General Lee's son Robert published a book that was partly his own wartime recollections and partly a collection of annotated letters. Most of these letters were General Lee's own correspondence during and after the war, and the rest of them concerned Lee in some fashion. While there is nothing in the wartime letters that indicate Lee's motives for taking his army into Maryland in 1862, one of the post-war letters include an oft-cited quote in which Lee says: "I went to Maryland to feed my army."

While the quote is certainly a plausible one, two things need to be kept in mind when evaluating its use as a source. First, although it is sometimes wrongly attributed directly to Lee, it is in fact a second-hand quote from one of the letters Lee didn't write himself. The letter in question is written by Cazenove Lee, the son of General Lee's cousin Cassius Lee, and concerns a conversation that the author, his father and his brother had with General Lee when the author was a child. The letter is not dated, but from Robert Lee Jr.'s annotation it seems likely that it was sent to him as he was preparing to write his book, in which case the memory could be over 30 years old.

Second, the quote is sometimes used out of context. One of the participants of the conversation (it is not mentioned who) asks Lee why he did not assault Washington after Second Manassas/Bull Run. Lee replies that he couldn't ask his men to storm fortifications when they had nothing to eat. Then he adds the above quote about going to Maryland to feed his army. Consequently, the words attributed to Lee should not be read as: "I invaded Maryland with the sole and explicit purpose of feeding my army", but instead along the lines of: "Attacking Washington was impossible with the supplies I had, but if I went into Maryland I could feed my army, making that option a better one." Though subtle, the difference is a potentially important one. The first makes supplying the army the primary reason for invasion, while the other allows for the interpretation that while Maryland's produce was an important means to keep the army operating, subsisting the army was not necessarily itself the main goal of the invasion.<sup>61</sup>

### **The early post-war generations**

While many if not most of the 19th century histories of the war were penned by authors who were themselves veterans of the conflict, by the early 20th century, these veterans were getting scarcer. Their mantle was picked up by new generations of historians, who went to work piecing together the myriad recollections, letters and memoirs. The narrative of the American Civil War gradually

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<sup>61</sup> Lee [Jr.] (1904), p. 415-416.

passed from living memory into the hands of younger amateur and, increasingly, professional historians.

*Lee the American*, by Gamaliel Bradford

Bradford was a poet, dramatist and biographer from Massachusetts, born during the middle of the Civil War in 1863. He published his biography on Lee in 1912 and would later revise it for republication in 1927. In his preface to the revised edition, it is clear to see that by that time, the professionalization of history as an academic discipline presented writers of history with increasingly stricter demands of accuracy and diligent quotation. Bradford agonizes over his self-proclaimed deficiencies in that regard, while expressing an earnest desire to better meet the demands of academic scholars with his revision.<sup>62</sup>

Bradford's biography of Lee is a psychographic one, concerned more with Lee's personality, behavior and nature than with any thorough analysis and evaluation of his strategic decisions as a general. It consists mainly of a great many anecdotes, divided into chapters which each describe a different aspect of Lee's personality: Lee in his interactions with the Confederate government, Lee and his generals, Lee's spiritual life, Lee as a family man, etc. The only time he touches upon Lee's decision to enter Maryland is in the chapter titled "Lee as a General", in which he mentions Lee's constant lack of supplies, and cites the previously discussed quote from Lee Jr.'s *Recollections and Letters*, about Lee wanting to feed his army in Maryland. Bradford cites the entire quote and puts it in its appropriate context, but also accepts its veracity at face value.<sup>63</sup>

What's particularly interesting to note about Bradford's book is that it is highly symptomatic of the reconciliatory ideals that were prevalent among Civil War historians, professional and amateur alike, for a long time after the war, and that would to a great extent lead even Northern historians to agree with the Lost Cause interpretation of the war originally argued by their Southern counterparts. Although he was born and seem to have lived most of his life in Massachusetts, Bradford refers to the Confederate commander as a "great soul" in his original preface,<sup>64</sup> and is quick to pull out quotes such as this, attributed to one B. H. Hill:<sup>65</sup> "[Lee] was a Cæsar without his ambition; a Frederick without his tyranny; a Napoleon without his selfishness; and a Washington without a

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62 Preface to Bradford (1912/2003), p. viii-ix

63 Bradford (1912/2003), p. 124

64 Original preface to Bradford (1912/2003), p. xiii

65 I have not been able to discover who this B. H. Hill was, although it's possible it could be a misspelling of D. H. Hill, or Daniel Harvey Hill, who served as a division commander under Lee until after the Battle of Fredericksburg in December, 1862.

reward."<sup>66</sup> While, in all fairness, Bradford also cites some decidedly unflattering characterizations of Lee's ability from other chroniclers, he is quick to argue against those views, while letting those opinions that are favorable to Lee stand largely unchallenged.

*Statesmen and Soldiers of the Civil War*, by Frederick Maurice

This book, written by then-resigned British Major General Sir Frederick Maurice and published in 1926, is an example of European scholarship on the topic of the American Civil War. The book explores, through four chapters, the relationships between Davis and his two generals J. Johnston and Lee and between Lincoln and his generals McClellan and Grant, respectively. In so doing, he also the strategic concerns facing the two opposing sides, and how the interplay between the civilian and the military leadership helped shape the strategies of the war. In his preface, Maurice makes the bold claim that his studies are "frankly and unashamedly objective". This claim is made only a few paragraphs after a wistful anecdote about a previous meeting with Lord Kitchener, in which the two generals talked about how good it would be if civilian government had only been organized and approached problems in the same way as the military.<sup>67</sup> Far from coming across as objective, not only does Maurice in this anecdote show the kind of professional disdain a career soldiers might have for his civilian superiors, but he also had reason to feel bitter about the relationship between civil government and the military from personal experience. He had acted as a whistle-blower during the First World War, writing to the newspapers and accusing Prime Minister David Lloyd George of lying to Parliament about the strength of the British forces in France, causing a political uproar during which Maurice was forced to resign his commission.<sup>68</sup>

This bias seems to bleed through quite clearly in Maurice's assessment on the relationship between Davis and Lee. While he acknowledges Davis as a competent enough administrator and an "exceptional judge of men", and also his earlier military education and achievements to some degree,<sup>69</sup> he also accuses the Confederate President of being over-reliant on his "small military experience" and, in effect, of having a tendency to meddle too much in military affairs.<sup>70</sup> Throughout his analysis, Maurice consistently portrays Davis as a perhaps well-meaning but also disruptive figure who was constantly at odds with those of his generals who didn't possess the diplomatic acumen to know how to handle him, and whose antics even those who did have that skill

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66 Bradford (1912/2003), p. 120

67 Preface to Maurice (1926), p. v-vi

68 Spartacus Educational, biographical article on Frederick Maurice, available at <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWmaurice.htm>

69 Maurice (1926), p. 8-16.

70 Ibid., p. 17.

had to endure as they subtly tried to nudge him in the right direction. It bears noting that Maurice isn't completely alone in these assessments. Other historians, like Gallagher, have pointed out Davis' conflicts with some of his most successful generals, and remarked that Lee had a gift for planting ideas in the President's mind in such a way that Davis would believe them to be his own.<sup>71</sup>

Even so, Gallagher judges the relationship between Lee and Davis to be a much more like-minded one than Maurice does, and this shows clearly in the way in which Maurice writes about the Maryland campaign. Davis, quite whimsically it seems through Maurice's wording, went around affixing grand labels to the strategy he had been gently nudged into supporting by Lee. The general himself, who Maurice simply refers to as "the soldier", had no use for such labels, only the simple objectives of first pushing the enemy out of Virginia, and then keeping him out by invading Maryland, as argued by Lee in his September 3rd dispatch. Maurice goes on to attribute a secondary objective to Lee's invasion, that of showing Davis the value of the offensive – implying Davis needed such an education. Perhaps most remarkably, Maurice also blames Davis for the failure of the campaign. Lee's remark about the sorry shape of his army, Maurice argues, implied a clear request for Davis to send substantial reinforcements at once to support the offensive. In failing to do so, Maurice claims, Davis doomed the campaign to failure.<sup>72</sup> While it is true like Maurice claims, that Davis had to contend with political pressure from the various Confederate states who wanted to keep their soldiers at home for their own protection, exactly how Maurice expects Davis to have been able to wrestle more troops away from the Deep South and manage to send them to Maryland in time to reinforce Lee is a bit of a mystery. While Maurice does mention Jefferson Davis' hope for European recognition and intervention on behalf of the Confederacy in rather dismissive tones,<sup>73</sup> he makes no mention of that as playing a factor in the Maryland Campaign, nor does he make any mention of the Northern Congressional elections.

R. E. Lee: Volume 2, by Douglas S. Freeman

Published in 1934, Freeman's monumental 4-volume biography of Robert E. Lee remains a giant in the genre. In his essay on Confederate Generals scholarship in Woodworth's *American Civil War – A Handbook of Literature and Research*, Grady McWhiney calls this biography, together with Freeman's later study *Lees Lieutenants* (1934), "the most comprehensive and respected works on

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71 Gary W. Gallagher, "Presidents and Generals: Command Relationships during the Civil War", lecture at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. Nov. 4, 2011.

72 Maurice (1926), p. 40-41

73 Ibid., p. 40

the Army of Northern Virginia, its commander and his generals".<sup>74</sup> *R. E. Lee* won the 1935 Pulitzer Prize, and remains an extensively cited source on Lee still. In his foreword to the 1991 edition of Richard Harwell's 1961 single-volume abridged version of Freeman's Lee biography (published under the simple title *Lee*), James McPherson recounts Freeman's own background. Freeman grew up the son of a Confederate veteran and attended a school whose headmaster was also an ex-Confederate and would give moral lessons in the form of anecdotes about Lee. He was present at Confederate reunions, and came to regard them, in his own words, as "heroic figures". Freeman went on to earn a Ph.D in history at the age of 22, and initially became a journalist. In 1915 he won renown when he edited and published *Lee's Confidential Dispatches*, a collection of wartime correspondence from Lee to Davis which had been presumed lost until Freeman got hold of them. This earned him a contract with Charles Scribner's Sons to write a 75 000-word biography on Lee, which he expected to do within two years. Instead the work took twenty years, and one million words. More than anyone else, Freeman would cement Lee's image as a larger-than-life figure, almost as much of a mythical being as a person of history.<sup>75</sup> The object of study here will be Volume 2 of the biography, which is the volume in which the Maryland Campaign is featured.

In his analysis of Lee's decision to enter Maryland, Freeman begins by examining Lee's possible options after Second Manassas/Bull Run, and then subjecting that list of options to a process of elimination – an approach (and conclusion) that continues to enjoy great popularity among students of the campaign to this day. Freeman sensibly points out that the army could not remain where it was camped after routing Pope's army, since the surrounding land had been stripped of food and feed already. Going east would bring the army under the guns of Washington's defenses. Going west into the Shenandoah Valley would open strategic opportunities but leave Richmond dangerously exposed in the event of retreat. Withdrawing south to Warrenton would connect the army to Richmond by rail and also allow it to flank any Union advance toward Richmond, but would essentially entail not only abandoning the recently liberated counties of Northern Virginia to possible reoccupation by the Union, but also abandoning the entire initiative in the conflict. With all that in mind, going north into Maryland would seem the most sensible thing to do.<sup>76</sup>

Freeman goes on to point out that going north wasn't just the best choice by elimination, but it "offered positive advantage", too. Freeman cites Lee's September 3rd dispatch and his desire to draw the enemy away from the Washington fortifications and keep them away from Richmond while simultaneously feeding his army on Northern crops. He also mentions Lee's desire to harass

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74 Woodworth (1996), p. 347

75 Foreword to Harwell/Freeman (1961/1991), p. xi-xv

76 Freeman (1935/2001), p. 350-351

and if possible destroy the Union army from a "secure" position in Western Maryland or Pennsylvania. While Lee certainly did express a desire to "harass, if we cannot destroy" the Union army in his September 3rd dispatch, the word "secure" seems to be entirely Freeman's own. Exactly how the straggler-bleeding, shoeless and hopelessly outnumbered Army of Northern Virginia would be "secure" anywhere north of the Potomac is not explained by Freeman at all. The turn of phrase seems to be little more than a means of adding some extra illusory weight to his argument.<sup>77</sup>

Turning next to the issue of inciting revolution among the Marylanders, Freeman waxes poetic about how the Southern hopes for strong support from Maryland and its people seemed justified. Did not the many Marylanders already fighting in Confederate ranks demonstrate "what thousands of others would do if opportunity was theirs?" he asks rhetorically.<sup>78</sup> Freeman doesn't seem aware of the irony in his own question – though to be fair, neither did those Confederates who might have genuinely believed in such an outcome. If the many Marylanders already fighting for the South – and there were thousands – demonstrated one thing, it was that they already *did* have the opportunity to do so, and that those who were inclined to seize that opportunity had already been doing so for a long time, *without* the need for a Southern army to come to their state and lift the Union's proverbial bayonets from their throats. While it is true that the Federal government had been heavy-handed in its efforts to prevent Maryland from seceding as a state, it is difficult to see what effective measures the Union had to keep determined individual Marylanders from making their way to Virginia and joining the Confederate forces there.

Freeman goes on to mention Lee's suggestion to Davis during the campaign to make a peace proposal to the Union from a position of strength. He doesn't dwell long on it, though, pointing out that the turn of events foiled that plan before it could be put into action.<sup>79</sup> He expands on Lee's decision to divide his army in order to assault Harper's Ferry, and explains that Lee's acceptance of such a risk was rooted in his understanding of McClellan's cautious personality.<sup>80</sup> Further on, he reveals the source from which he seems to draw this idea: General John G. Walker's aforementioned account. Freeman writes in a footnote how curious it is that this account does not appear in any other published work on the topic (the Carman manuscript was still unpublished, and Freeman does not appear to have made use of it). He does not, however, seem to think that this curious detail merits further research into why it is the case, and ends up taking Walker's account at face value.<sup>81</sup> Like Maurice, Freeman makes no mention of trans-Atlantic politics playing a part in Lee's decision

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77 Ibid., p. 351.

78 Freeman (1935/2001), p. 351

79 Ibid., p. 358.

80 Ibid., p. 359-361.

81 Ibid., p. 362.

to enter Maryland, nor any desire to influence the Congressional elections in the North.

*The Robert E. Lee Reader*, by Stanley F. Horn (ed.)

This biography of Lee, published in 1949, was pieced together from numerous other biographies by Tennessee historian, publisher and editor Stanley Horn. Interesting in its approach, while the book does contain a bibliography listing the sources used, Horn sadly neglected to use any notes, or any other means of enlightening the reader as to which text he's using where. Although Horn apparently didn't write any of the content in his book himself except for the introduction, the content of its pages will still be presented as Horn's arguments. His selection of sources constitutes a historical argument, even though he didn't write any of it himself.

Horn claims in his introduction that it is Lee the person and not Lee the soldier who is the subject of the book, and that historical verdicts on Lee's military decisions will have to be sought out elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> This is not the case. While the battles themselves are not examined in this book, Lee's strategic decisions as an army commander certainly are – and for good reason. It would be a strange Lee biography indeed if it did not apply any interest toward his decisions as a general.

The Maryland Campaign gets its own chapter in the book, and begins in much the same way as Freeman's examination of Lee's various options. It does so in far less detail, however, and leaves out entirely the possibility of going west into the Shenandoah Valley. Further, it lists the same arguments visited by Freeman, again very briefly: Supplying the army, drawing the Federal army out of Washington and rallying Marylanders to the Confederate cause. The argument set out by Horn also talks about the possible demoralizing effect the Confederate army's presence might have on Northern morale. Whether this argument is meant as indication toward Lee's expressed desire to issue a peace proposal from a position of strength or it refers to a Confederate desire to influence Congressional elections (or possibly both) remains unspecified. The former is more likely, since the only previous historian to explore the latter option among the ones examined in this thesis was Carman, and his manuscript would remain unpublished for another 59 years after Horn's book was published.<sup>83</sup> Horn also regurgitates Walker's memoirs, citing the scene where the general describes his meeting with Lee in its entirety and largely confirming that after its use by Freeman, Walker's account was now firmly part of Civil War canon.<sup>84</sup>

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82 Introduction to Horn (1949).

83 Horn (1949), p. 235-236.

84 Ibid., p. 239-242.

The one so far new and interesting argument put forth in Horn's version of events is the claim that Lee's *Proclamation to the Marylanders* was issued not primarily out of a genuine hope of rallying the state to secede, but to reassure the local population that the Army of Northern Virginia would not seek revenge for the acts of plunder and brutality visited on Virginia by Pope's army earlier that summer. It would be interesting to see which source this particular claim is founded on, but unfortunately, the lack of notes makes it impossible.

*Gray Fox: Robert E. Lee and the Civil War, by Burke Davis*

Burke Davis was a journalist, fiction writer and amateur historian who was born in North Carolina and who also lived in Virginia for a long time.<sup>85</sup> His Lee biography, *Gray Fox*, was published in 1956. Davis begins the foreword to the original edition (reprinted in the 1998 edition) by proclaiming Lee to be "one of the great tragic figures of history, and one not well understood."<sup>86</sup> While Davis might technically be correct in claiming that Lee was not well understood, since historians had been busy for decades elevating Lee from human to mythical being, his book does nothing to dispel that myth. If anything, it elaborates upon it. Davis' lament that Lee in 1956 was a misunderstood figure becomes highly ironic when viewed in context of his introduction to the 1998 edition, where he deplores the "revisionist" approach the Civil War has been subjected to in later decades, and the "often erroneous judgments" such approaches arrive at.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike Horn, Davis does use some quotation, but only sparingly, and he makes a few seemingly baseless assumptions and guesses. He claims that Lee probably knew as early as September 3rd that McClellan would be the one leading the Union army to face him, without explaining what he bases such an assumption on. He also assumes that Lee actually did believe that the presence of his army would cause an uprising in Maryland, despite the tone of only cautious optimism evident in Lee's dispatches to Jefferson Davis. Moreover, Davis' narrative brings very little new in the way of either perspective or evidence to the table. Lee's reasons for undertaking the invasion remain essentially the same in Davis' eyes as they were in Horn's composite biography, or in Freeman's massive study before them. Most of the by now familiar list is there: Drawing the Federals out and keeping them north of the river; inciting Maryland to join the Confederacy; feeding the army; presenting a proposal of victorious peace from a position of strength; and, of course, strike into Pennsylvania and cut the Pennsylvania railroad at the Susquehanna, as recounted by John G. Walker. Davis' account then, falls firmly into the mold set by these previous authors. For all of Davis' professed

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85 Encyclopedia Virginia: Davis, Burke, available at [http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Davis\\_Burke\\_1913-2006](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Davis_Burke_1913-2006)

86 Foreword to Davis (1956/1998), p. v

87 Introduction to Davis (1956/1998), p. iii

desire to correct the misunderstandings about Lee, his book demonstrates nothing so much as how static the scholarship about Lee, and the Maryland Campaign in particular, had become, especially since Freeman. The only real way in which Davis' analysis of the Maryland Campaign differs from his immediate predecessors (save, perhaps, for a few anecdotes about such things as excitable young society women from Baltimore in their encounter with Confederate celebrity generals), is that he doesn't include any kind of reflection on the subject of the options available to Lee after Second Manassas/Bull Run. This, however, can hardly be held up as a merit.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the only time he shows any inclination to reflect over the veracity of sources during his depiction of the Maryland Campaign is when he feels the need to defend his inclusion of an anecdote which was previously discredited by Freeman, claiming that even though it may not have happened, it was still indicative of a truth.<sup>89</sup>

## Chapter analysis

As we have seen, the historical understanding of the Confederate goals in the Maryland Campaign evolved gradually over the course of the first century after the war. Early Confederate eyewitness accounts seem to largely accept the content of Lee's Sept 8th proclamation as the primary reason for the offensive, to the extent they reflected on the subject at all. There are a few possible reasons for this. Limited access to sources could be one. In particular, Snow, writing right after the war as he did, may not have had access to any other sources than Lee's proclamation. Perhaps they were sticking to this "official version" out of loyalty to Lee, worrying that his reputation, and their own by association, might be somehow tarnished if it were revealed that what Lee said in his proclamation was anything other than the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Walker's account is the odd exception, detailing as it does Lee's alleged intention of capturing Harrisburg and crippling the Pennsylvania railroad – but Walker's account does not, of course, hold up under scrutiny at all. It seems likely that Harsh is correct when, in *Taken by the Flood*, he posits that Walker's account is a product of either gross embellishment or fabrication, with the possible intent of "inflat[ing] his relatively minor role in the campaign into a major speaking part."<sup>90</sup> Snow, Taylor and Walker were not the only Confederate veterans who published memoirs and historical accounts after the war. Many others did as well, including such celebrities as James Longstreet and Jubal Early, who both served as generals under Lee. Over the course of the post-war century, a very Southern-friendly interpretation of history would emerge, which would come to be known as the "Lost Cause".

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88 Davis (1956/1998), p. 132-138.

89 Ibid., p. 154.

90 Harsh (1999), p. 144

In contrast to the early Southern views examined here, the two Union veterans among the selected authors, Palfrey and Carman, emphasize other factors as more crucial in explaining Lee's decision. Carman mentions the plans to encourage an uprising, but prefers to debate whether or not it could have succeeded instead of reflecting on its relative importance as an objective in the campaign. Palfrey hardly touches the issue at all. One striking thing that sets Palfrey and Carman's studies apart from all the other studies examined so far is that they both present and attribute significant importance to Lee's after-action report written in 1863, where the Confederate commander to some extent dispels the notion that he seriously believed Maryland would actually rise up against the Union. Palfrey bases his entire understanding of the campaign around this source, and while Carman takes an overall more balanced view, he still attributes importance to this document. Few if any of the other texts examined so far do. Again, there could be more than one reason why this is the case. Unlike any of the other authors, Carman and Palfrey are both veterans who fought on the Union side. It could be that old loyalties made them uncomfortable with the idea of attributing any great significance to a plan which hinged on the very idea that a loyal state was being held in the Union against its will, whether said plan was successful or not. Another possible reason for why these two studies are exceptional is that they are the only two studies examined thus far whose object of study is the events themselves, and not the principal character responsible for setting those things in motion. In focusing on the bigger picture of events, perhaps it was more convenient for Palfrey and Carman to use the source where Lee himself looks back on the events in an attempt to put them in a bigger context, while biographers of Lee would find Lee's correspondence during the campaign itself to be more suitable sources from which to extract information about the man himself.

Carman alone is exceptional in one regard. While several of the other authors mention the Confederacy's desire for European independence, and some mention the cotton famine from which Europe was beginning to suffer, Carman is the only one among the authors who postulates that winning diplomatic recognition was a factor in Lee's decision to invade. None of the other authors put this claim forward. That fact need not mean that his claim was being discarded, however. In all likelihood it only meant that nobody was aware of it, because his manuscript was still lying unpublished and largely unread. In fact, none of the texts studied in this chapter which were published after Carman wrote his manuscript list Carman among their sources at all. Carman is also the only one mentioning the US Congressional elections as a factor in the campaign.

After Palfrey and Carman wrote their studies,<sup>91</sup> study of the Maryland Campaign passed largely into the hands of biographers for several decades.<sup>92</sup> As has been shown, although Lee had many biographers, over the course of the early 20th century in particular there developed a remarkable uniformity of opinion among these scholars – an orthodoxy of how to understand the Maryland Campaign, closely linked together with the orthodoxy surrounding Lee himself. I believe it is fair to say, based on both popular impact in its time, the opinions of later historians<sup>93</sup> and the admittedly few latter texts examined above, that more than any other study, Freeman's monumental 4-volume biography on Lee cemented this understanding of the campaign and the man behind it into the minds of both historians and the general public alike. As we have seen, most of these biographies, not only Freeman's, painted Lee as a heroic figure and contributed heavily to the aforementioned Lost Cause perspective.

One important thing to keep in mind about the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War and the historical myth surrounding Lee is that they were – and still are to a significant degree, at least in popular history – not exclusively a Southern phenomenon by far. As demonstrated, even a New Englander such as Gamaliel Bradford is happy to consider Lee a great American hero, even though Lee did his very best to help break up the Union during the four years the Civil War lasted. Much in the reason can be found in what Peter Novick has to say about the role of national historians in the late 19th and early 20th century. With the wounds from the Civil War still raw and fresh in the American people's minds on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line, historians had an opportunity – and in the minds of many, doubtlessly a duty – to serve as healers of the nation, by constructing a narrative of the war in which neither side was ultimately to blame for what happened. Even better, taking onto themselves this ideological role did not pose any risk of compromising their reputation for objectivity, which they strove to maintain. Quite the opposite – by constructing a history that would be acceptable to both sides, their reputation for impartiality would only be bolstered.<sup>94</sup> That the losers in this convenient arrangement would be colored people was apparently an acceptable outcome. Put simply, the compromise constructed was one in which Southern historians essentially agreed that it was a good thing that the Union remained unbroken, and that slavery was an obsolete institution, no longer viable. Northern historians, for their part, conceded that secession and the war itself had nothing to do with slavery, that the immediate postwar period known as Reconstruction was unnecessarily harsh on the South and that the struggle of the Confederate soldiers was a chivalric and heroic one, though ultimately doomed to fail in the face of the Union's superiority in

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91 Strictly speaking just after Palfrey, since Carman was unpublished.

92 The exception being analyses of the battles themselves.

93 See Woodworth (1996), p. 347, Harsh (1999), p. 485, Connelly (1977), p. 139 for just some examples.

94 Novick (1988), p. 72-73.

industry and manpower."<sup>95</sup>. Essentially it was a view of history favoring the South, but one that white Northerners could afford to allow them, perhaps in recognition that it aided the original Northern cause of the war, that of keeping the Union together.<sup>96</sup>

Robert E. Lee is a very important figure in the Lost Cause understanding of history. He was already a hero in the eyes of his fellow Southerners while the Confederacy lasted, and became, if possible, even more of one after the war ended. While there were many who had disliked and distrusted Davis and other prominent politicians,<sup>97</sup> the heroic figure of Lee (and a select few other Confederate generals, in particular "Stonewall" Jackson) provided a symbol and icon the whole Southern people could gather behind. In all fairness, it must be said that Lee was by almost any account a remarkable man with many admirable qualities. He was by all accounts a handsome, dignified and intelligent man of good family, a member of Virginia's "aristocratic" upper class and the son of a renowned war hero who fought under General Washington in the American Revolution. He had an exemplary record at West Point and throughout his long military career, had few personal vices and kept a low profile as far as politics were concerned. On top of this, he won a number of victories during the Civil War and achieved feats of generalship that were impressive by any measure. It would not take any historian a lot of effort to paint Lee in a positive light. Lost Cause historians, however, still spent that extra effort in order to depict him in a nearly *divine* light. He became a tragic hero driven by honor and cruel circumstance to secede along with his state – a man who loved the Union, but loved Virginia more. Through a host of anecdotes, he became a figure of saintly kindness and grace, a man who would pause while withdrawing under enemy fire to stoop and pick up a fallen newly-hatched sparrow and replace it in its nest. And he became a fiery spirit of war and victory, repeatedly leading his torn and tattered army to triumph after triumph against the odds, a man who could read the minds of his enemies and whose only failures on the battlefield were caused by the shortcomings of his lieutenants. In the eyes of American history, Lee became what Thomas Connelly would call "The Marble Man".<sup>98</sup>

The reason why understanding this view of Lee is important in order to understand the historiography of the Maryland Campaign may not be readily apparent to the reader. After all, none of the arguments that have been explored in this study so far have been made in opposition to a

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95 Loewen and Sebesta (2010), p. 14-15.

96 Strictly speaking, any historical perspective that depicts the Confederate struggle as a heroic but futile one could be labeled "Lost Cause", even if it were to make no concessions to the Northern point of view and advocate renewed attempts to secede. Such an extreme Neo-Confederate viewpoint, while certainly existing as a fringe phenomenon, has for obvious reasons never managed to gather anything resembling nation-wide support.

97 Among them Edward Pollard, who was the originator of the term "Lost Cause". Woodworth (1996), p. 205.

98 Connelly (1977), p. 62-140.

favorable view of the Confederate commander. Emphasizing his professed desire to lift the proverbial Union yoke from the shoulders of Maryland does admittedly go some extra distance toward portraying him as a heroic savior figure, which may be one reason why it is an explanation that has found particular favor with Confederate veterans and Lost Cause historians alike. Even so, none of the more immediately practical motives go against the idealized version of Lee, either. His desire to feed his army demonstrates the compassion and responsibility he felt for his soldiers. His wish to call for an end to the war from a position of strength shows him to be, at heart, a man of peace. His intention to keep the enemy away from Virginia and Richmond demonstrates his sense of duty toward the civilian population of his state. His hope to draw the enemy away from their defenses in Washington and engage them in battle is a testament to his audacity and his skill as a strategist. His plan to invade Pennsylvania and destroy the railroad bridge as recounted by Walker is proof not only again of his audacity, but of his remarkable skill at reading his opponent. Only Carman mentions trans-Atlantic diplomacy and the Northern Congressional elections as playing a part in Lee's decision, but even that would fit into a Lost Cause interpretation as representing Lee's intelligence and political acumen. All the various motives that may have shaped Lee's decision to move into Maryland can be made to fit the Lost Cause doctrine relatively easily. There is only one possible opinion regarding his decision to invade – but a very crucial one – that would not be compatible with a Lost Cause understanding of the Maryland Campaign.

It could not have been *wrong*. Lee's decision to order his exhausted, disintegrating army across the Potomac River into enemy territory could not have been a *mistake*.

### Chapter 3: Turning Point – Losing the Lost Cause, and historical contingency in the Maryland Campaign

The 1960s and the Civil Rights movement had a big impact on the field of American Civil War history. The political issues of the time and the rise of social history posed a severe challenge to the by then traditional Lost Cause interpretation of the war. The histories of colored people, women, workers and even children joined the traditional political-military narratives of the war, and even though the field of political and military Civil War history continued to flourish, it was still influenced by the new historical perspectives rising around it. At the same time, understanding of the Maryland Campaign continued to develop as, for the first time in several decades, it became a topic for study in its own right.

## The Maryland Campaign in the past 50 years

### Lee, by Clifford Dowdey

Published in 1965, Dowdey's single-volume biography of Lee, titled simply *Lee*, was one of the earliest studies of the Confederate general published after the rise of the Civil Rights movement. As a Virginian who had worked as a reporter during Douglas Freeman's tenure as editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, for all his claims to re-evaluate old historical "truths", Dowdey still doesn't steer very far from the exalted image of Lee presented by Freeman, and a lot of the insights he has to share are the same as those presented by such authors as Freeman, Horn and Davis before him. Like Horn, Dowdey does not make use of any footnotes in his book. Unlike Horn, he actually defends this decision in his foreword, dismissing them as something that's only useful to "scholars seeking sources for their own use", and that "no reader, while reading a thousand-page book"<sup>99</sup> would ever feel any kind of need or desire to check the actual sources. He does, however, list an extensive bibliography, along with his professed belief that any reader should be perfectly capable of reasoning out for themselves which of his arguments are drawn from where, should they feel so inclined.<sup>100</sup> Because his arguments largely resemble the ones given by the three last authors examined in the previous chapter, and because the lack of citations makes it difficult to cross-reference his text against his sources, what Dowdey has to say about the Maryland Campaign will only be briefly examined in this thesis. There are a couple of interesting ways in which his account differs from those of his predecessors however, and these differences do deserve to be mentioned.

First, Dowdey mentions very briefly the issue of European recognition when he debates Lee's motives during the Maryland Campaign. It is not entirely clear whether he considers this issue something which factored into Lee's decisions, or if he just mentions it to show what was at stake on a larger scale. The latter does seem likely, as he mentions Lincoln's preparation of his Emancipation Proclamation in the paragraph immediately thereafter, before concluding that "[t]his was a period of balance when it seemed possible to achieve independence."<sup>101</sup> This implicit recognition that the Maryland Campaign was a time during the Civil War during which the outcome of the war might be decided either way is in itself interesting, and represents something of a divergence from the previously dominant Lost Cause interpretation of the war. It was something that would become even more clearly demonstrated in Murfin's study, discussed below.

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99 Dowdey's book is actually 783 pages long (including maps but excluding foreword).

100 Foreword to Dowdey (1965), page not numbered.

101 Dowdey (1965), p. 298.

Second, in another divergence from Lost Cause history writing, Dowdey seems somewhat more willing to criticize Lee than his predecessors were. In one passage he comes close to questioning Lee's decision to invade Maryland in the first place, claiming that "Lee did not consider the physical toll of the Manassas Campaign on the men", and furthermore that he showed little understanding for just how harsh the barefooted marches would be on the men on "the hard Maryland roads".<sup>102</sup> Although not a condemnation of Lee's decision by any means, Dowdey's willingness to question the Confederate commander's actions and level of insight is still a sign that, however slightly and slowly, the historical view of Lee and possibly on the war itself, was beginning to change.

*The Gleam of Bayonets*, by James V. Murfin

When Murfin published *The Gleam of Bayonets* in 1965, it was the first study of the Maryland Campaign itself that had been published since Palfrey's *The Antietam and Fredericksburg* more than 80 years earlier. Murfin's project began as a newspaper assignment in commemoration of the centennial of Antietam, but grew into a book-length monographic study of the Maryland Campaign, which Murfin grew to regard as "the most fateful days in American history."<sup>103</sup> Murfin's study, which he realized would not be "the last word on Antietam", would still play a very important role in revitalizing scholarship on the Maryland Campaign and exert a huge influence on that scholarship in more than one way for decades to come. Three factors in particular are important to note in this regard. First, Murfin was essentially the one who rediscovered Carman. Even though he doesn't cite Carman extensively in his study, he still revives Carman's arguments and brings them to the attention of a wider public. Second, he would be the progenitor of a kind of dynasty of historians, in which the Maryland Campaign and Antietam as topics of study would be passed down from mentor to student in succession: This proverbial torch would pass from James Murfin to his student Joseph Harsh, and from Harsh to his students Thomas Clemens, Ethan Rafuse and Joseph Pierro. Third, and arguably most importantly, Murfin seems the author who really established the view of the Maryland Campaign as a decisive moment in American history and as a primary turning point in the Civil War.

Murfin devotes several pages in his study to the topic of Lee's decision to enter Maryland. Like Freeman, he begins by examining Lee's options in advance of the campaign. Unlike Freeman, however, Murfin names only one other alternative besides invading Maryland: That of using part of his army as a picket line defending Richmond while sending the rest of it to fight in the West. While

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102 Ibid., p. 300

103 Preface to Murfin (1965/2004), p. 13

he concedes that there would be some merit in that strategy, Murfin argues that the Confederates, remembering McClellan's "amazing feat of reorganization" following First Manassas/Bull Run in 1861, could not afford to sit idle, and that invasion was consequently the only real option. In making this argument, Murfin makes two sweeping assumptions. First, that the Confederates knew they would be facing McClellan; and second, that they were not only cognizant of, but also intimidated by, McClellan's skill as an organizer. Murfin also claims that in invading Northern soil, Lee was assuming the initiative for the first time in the war – a strange claim considering Lee's relentless and vigorous attacks on the Union armies of both McClellan and Pope the past two months, which had led to the withdrawal of virtually all Union troops from Virginia.<sup>104</sup>

Having established that invading the North was the best possible course of action for Lee to take, Murfin sets about explaining what, exactly, made this strategy a good one. He explicitly lists six motives, "aside from the need for subsistence". First, Murfin argues, the invasion was an act of psychological warfare, intended to strike terror into the hearts of the Northern people and negatively impacting their morale. As the second motive, Murfin lists the desire to convince Maryland to secede and join the Confederacy. The fact that it did not, Murfin explains by pointing out that western Maryland was less sympathetic to the Southern cause than the eastern counties were, and that Lee mistakenly believed Southern sympathies to run high in every portion of the state. Murfin does not attempt to explain exactly how these two first goals could coexist - that is, how Lee could expect to strike fear into the hearts of the invaded people while winning them over to the Confederate cause at the same time.<sup>105</sup>

Thirdly, Murfin mentions Lee's desire to keep the Union armies away from Richmond, and that crossing the Potomac would force the North to confront him before they could risk sending their forces south. He briefly expands on this and claims Lee would have considered a direct assault on McClellan's army if he had had a couple more days to prepare, and cites an alleged post-war conversation Lee allegedly had with William Allan, who served as an officer in the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>106</sup> In this conversation, Lee claims a few more days would have allowed him to let his men rest and bring up his stragglers. This may well be a genuine quote, but it is worth considering that even if it is, it is one Lee made with the benefit of hindsight and perhaps a good deal of wishful thinking. A few days of rest would no doubt have done his soldiers good, but it wouldn't have given them shoes, the lack of which seemed to have been the cause of a good deal of the straggling. Nor would it necessarily have brought up those stragglers who may have been

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104 Murfin (1965/2004), p. 63-64

105 Ibid., p. 64-65

106 Murfin (1965/2004), p. 66

reluctant to go into enemy territory as opposed to staying to defend Confederate soil.

Lee's fourth motive, Murfin explains, and cites Lee's Sept 4th dispatch, was to invade Pennsylvania next, capture Harrisburg and destroy the railroad bridge across the Susquehanna.<sup>107</sup> Although he doesn't cite Walker's account, it is obvious that that's the source from which Murfin draws this by now familiar claim. He expands on this point by explaining how vital these railroads were to the war effort of the Union, but does nothing beyond this to corroborate Walker's dubious testimony.

Fifth, Murfin (along with Dowdey, as their books were published the same year) revives the idea that winning European recognition was one of Lee's motives for launching the Maryland Campaign. "Europe's eyes were on Lee's progress," Murfin argues, "and he knew what was at stake."<sup>108</sup> Murfin does not cite Carman in support of this claim, but the combined facts that none of the other examined texts have mentioned this as a factor at all and that Murfin's study is the first one to list Carman in his bibliography makes it quite likely that Carman's manuscript was where he got this idea from. As evidence for his claim, Murfin instead lists four letters of correspondence between British Prime Minister, the Viscount of Palmerston, and his Foreign Minister, Lord John Russell, where the two debate the merits of recognizing the Confederacy, based on recent Confederate successes. These letters do indeed corroborate Murfin's claim that "Europe's eyes were on Lee", and are important pieces of evidence for the historian who wishes to understand what was at stake during the Maryland Campaign, and which impact the outcome had. What they do not corroborate is the second half of Murfin's argument, that Lee knew – and, by implication, concerned himself with – what impact his battles might have on foreign policy in Europe. In fact, the earliest of the letters listed as evidence by Murfin was written on September 14th, three days before the Battle of Antietam, in London. There is no possible way Lee could have been aware of it at any point during the campaign. The last two letters were written after the Confederates aborted their campaign and withdrew back into Virginia.<sup>109</sup>

The sixth reason, Murfin argues, was a desire to influence Congressional elections in the North. Like many before him, Murfin cites Lee's September 8th dispatch to back this claim. Instead of focusing overly much on the first part of Lee's suggestion to Davis, that of issuing a peace proposal from a position of strength, Murfin sensibly (and unlike some previously mentioned authors), puts this proposed peace offer in its proper context as explained by Lee in the second half of the dispatch. The hope was not that the current Republican-dominated US Congress would accept the

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107 Ibid., p. 66-67

108 Ibid., p. 67

109 Murfin (1965/2004), p. 394-401.

proposal, but that a scared or war-weary Northern populace would elect new Congressional representatives who would.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to these six primary motives listed by Murfin (seven if counting his remark regarding supplies), he goes on to present two more. One is found within a dispatch written by Davis "sometime between September 7 and 12" and sent to three of his commanders, among them Lee. This document contained a proclamation to be issued to the people and state governments of any Northern state invaded by Confederate forces, urging those state governments to sign separate peace treaties with the CSA.<sup>111</sup> None of the Confederate armies ever got a solid enough foothold in the North for their commanders to act upon these orders, however, and as it was written after the Army of Northern Virginia was already in Maryland, it can't have played a factor in Lee's decision to invade.

The eighth and final motive Murfin attributes to the Confederates is a desire to satisfy public opinion. Southern newspapers, he points out, were always clamoring for an invasion of the North, and Murfin claims that "it can be assumed with certainty that public opinion played an important role in the decision." He goes on to cite newspaper editorials which urge the Confederate armies to go on the offensive.<sup>112</sup> This only serves to paint said Southern newspaper editors as fire-eaters, however, and does in no way prove that Lee listened to such voices. In fact, it seems unlikely that he would have felt a reason to do so. He can't have felt any worry for his personal career and position. His relationship with Davis was certainly good enough that he would never be replaced in order to please some over-anxious editors, at least one of whom vocally disliked Davis in the first place.<sup>113</sup> Even if he had been in danger of being replaced, Lee's reluctance to push for a field command early in the war indicates that he wasn't the type to jealously guard his appointment in such a fashion. Nor did reports such as these indicate any danger of losing the people's support for the war. To the degree in which they indicated anything about public morale at all, it was that the public were feeling combative and that support for the war was high. There was no reason for Lee to feel compelled into any sort of action because of them, and there is any indication that he ever did, Murfin does not produce any evidence for it.

Even though some of Murfin's arguments don't seem to hold up well under scrutiny, *Glean of Bayonets* still clearly represents a leap forward in Maryland Campaign scholarship. Murfin may not

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110 Ibid., p. 68.

111 Ibid., p. 68-69, 339-342.

112 Ibid., p. 69.

113 Pollard, as mentioned earlier.

present satisfying evidence for all the arguments he makes and conclusions he draws, but he nevertheless presents new evidence, new arguments and new conclusions on a historical topic which had for decades consisted merely of each new historian parroting the ones before them. Even though he still lets himself get caught up a little too much in the myth about Lee, especially regarding Lee's ability to read his adversaries, he still manages to keep from sliding into such starry-eyed hero worship as that exemplified by Freeman.

*The Marble Man: Lee and His Image in American Society*, by Thomas L. Connelly

When Connelly published this historiography and reappraisal of Lee in 1977, it represented the first serious challenge to the historical image of Lee as presented by Freeman and other ardent admirers of Lee. In it, Connelly first takes a long and thorough look at the historical accounts of Lee and their authors, and demonstrates how these biographers constructed a myth around Lee that made him appear to be more than human, turning him into not only a Confederate symbol but an American one, from a rebel general into a figure of national reconciliation. While Connelly agrees that Lee was a man with many positive attributes in his reappraisal, he also paints him as a man who suffered from many personal doubts, fears and even a certain lack of self-worth. Connelly's Lee is a man who could and did make mistakes.

There is little to read in *The Marble Man* about the Maryland Campaign, and nothing at all on Lee's specific motives behind the offensive, beyond the very general assessments Connelly makes that he often took great and potentially disastrous risks,<sup>114</sup> and that his love of taking the offensive led to horrendous casualties that would eventually bleed the Confederacy dry.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, there is also little to write about it here. No historiography on the topic of Lee's purposes behind the Maryland Campaign would be complete if it did not at least inform the reader about this monumental challenge to the historical perspective on Lee himself, however, and Connelly's perspective will also be further examined and debated to some extent in the chapter analysis.

*Landscape turned Red – the Battle of Antietam*, by Stephen W. Sears

In 1983, 18 years after Murfin's monograph on the Maryland Campaign, historian Stephen Sears published his own study on the campaign and its principal Battle of Antietam. In his introduction to the book, Sears echoes Murfin's opinion that Antietam represents a turning point in the war. He also

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114 Connelly (1977), p. 197-198.

115 Ibid., p. 208.

mentions Carman's study in his introduction, and his own book is the first published narrative of the campaign to use Carman's material.<sup>116</sup> This is not entirely true. While Sears certainly seems to have made more extensive use of Carman's study than Murfin did before him, Carman is still listed in the bibliography of Murfin's *Gleam of Bayonets*. It also bears noting that *Gleam of Bayonets* was the *only* study of the campaign published between Carman's research project and Sears' own monograph, which means that technically, Carman's project had been used in *every* published narrative of the campaign since the time of his research.

Sears' study does have quite a few new anecdotes - or rather, old, unpublished ones - to share with the public, and sheds some extra light on some of the battles of the campaign. His analysis of the campaign itself, however, is nothing new. On the topic of Lee's decision to invade, he is surprisingly conservative. Eighteen years after Murfin's monograph and six years after Connelly's reappraisal of Lee, Sears' perspective seems little influenced by either. In discussing the options facing Lee after Second Manassas/Bull Run, Sears, unlike Murfin, doesn't consider the option of dividing the army at all. Instead he falls back on the same set of options listed by Freeman.<sup>117</sup> He does agree with Murfin that Lee was hoping to attack the Union army, citing Allan as his reference.<sup>118</sup> He also mentions very briefly the hope for European recognition and how this was tied to Confederate battlefield success, but although he judges Lee as being an audacious commander whose strategies complemented such a goal, he doesn't tie this hope explicitly to Lee's motives for the campaign.<sup>119</sup>

All considered, while Sears' perspective certainly does show a more modern outlook on the topic than that provided by Freeman, and he does further Maryland Campaign and Antietam research by deservedly giving Carman's papers more exposure than any author before him, his opinions on Lee's motives for the campaign actually seem *less* advanced than those presented by Murfin eighteen years earlier. On this topic it seems fair to say that *Landscape Turned Red* represents more of a regression of scholarship than an advancement of it. In spite of this, it would stand as the premier narrative of the campaign for at least another fifteen years.

*Antietam: Essays on the 1862 Maryland Campaign, by Gary W. Gallagher (ed.)*

This collection of five essays on the Maryland Campaign was published in 1989. It is edited by Gary W. Gallagher of the University of Virginia, who remains a leading authority in the field of

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116 Introduction to Sears (1983), p. xi-xii.

117 Sears (1983), p. 63-68.

118 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

119 Sears (1983), p. 61

American Civil War history. Two of the five essays are written by Gallagher himself. The other three are written by Dennis E. Frye, Robert K. Krick and A. Wilson Greene, respectively. Like some of the studies examined earlier, one failure of this book lies in the regrettable absence of quotations, making any factual claims difficult to check. Nevertheless, the arguments within the two essays which are relevant to this thesis will receive fair consideration.

The first of the essays is titled *Season of Opportunity*, and written by Gallagher himself. In it, he explores the opportunities that lay before each of the warring parties that autumn of 1862 and the way in which those opportunities affected the decision of either belligerent. Gallagher starts out by outlining the political objectives of the South. He mentions the desire for foreign recognition, the hope of influencing Northern elections and the hope of inducing Maryland to secede as all being important factors in the decision to invade.<sup>120</sup> Gallagher expands on all of these issues to examine whether either of these objectives had any real hope of being realized even in the event of a Confederate success in the campaign, and arrives at the conclusion that they would probably not. Regarding the issue of European recognition and possible mediation or intervention in the war, he argues that the Lincoln administration had been clear that they would not accept mediation, and that military intervention was highly unlikely. He doesn't cite any evidence for the latter claim, just an argument that circumstances were different than they were in 1778, when France intervened on the side of the American rebels. Gallagher does not, however, consider that Britain had already made threats to intervene earlier in the war during the "*Trent* affair" of 1861, where a Union warship had stopped and searched the British steamer *Trent* and captured two of its passengers, who were Confederate diplomats – provoking British troop deployments in Canada and a diplomatic ultimatum that ended with US authorities having to back down and release the prisoners.<sup>121</sup> In light of this it's hard to take Gallagher's claim at face value. The hope to win independence by getting more Democrats into the US Congress he dismisses on the grounds that even Northern Democrats did not wish to see the Union dissolved, citing the Democratic party slogan of "The Constitution as it is, the Union as it was" – which seems like a reasonable claim. As far as inducing fervor for the Confederacy went, Gallagher argues, like others before him, that Lee invaded the wrong part of Maryland to have any hope of success in that regard. Whatever the reality of the situation, however, Gallagher does argue that all of these hopes did factor into the Confederate objectives.

The principal reasons for the campaign, however, Gallagher argues, were military. The campaign was not intended to be an invasion, but a raid – because the objective was not to lay claim to the

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120 Gallagher, ed (1989), p. 3-7

121 McPherson (1988), p. 389-390.

land indefinitely. Instead, Lee was hoping to keep the Northern forces occupied north of the river while Richmond's defenses were strengthened and the Virginian harvest safely gathered, and then withdraw back across the Potomac after winter set in and exhausted the supplies to be had in Maryland.<sup>122</sup> The lack of citations makes it impossible to check which evidence, if any, Gallagher bases this claim on. It does seem speculative, however, and there are objections that can be raised against it. First of all, Lee clearly does use the word "invasion" in his Sept 3rd dispatch to Davis.<sup>123</sup> This can of course be explained by hypothesizing that Lee and Gallagher may not have had the same definition in mind when they used the word. Secondly, nowhere does Lee explicitly specify that he intended to withdraw back across the Potomac once winter came. He does however, talk in his after-action report about not letting the "season of active operations" pass without further engagements,<sup>124</sup> which, together with the practical difficulties connected with maintaining his army within enemy territory in winter, may be taken to imply that he would have been forced to withdraw in winter in any case. Thirdly and more importantly, if the campaign was intended as a raid, as Gallagher suggests, that would have entailed either acquisition of supplies by force, the destruction of infrastructure and/or property, or both. This was not the case. The Confederates paid for their supplies (albeit with Confederate money), and Lee's soldiers were under orders not to plunder.<sup>125</sup> If it was a raid, it was a very well-mannered one – and it would have to be, if there was to be any hope at all of winning converts to the cause.

Robert K. Krick's essay in the same book, titled *The Army of Northern Virginia in September 1862 – Its Circumstances, Its Opportunities, and Why It Should Not Have Been at Sharpsburg*, also talks about Lee's decision to invade. Krick claims that there were "[a]mple and numerous military and political reasons for a move across the Potomac", but decides to mention only three: Relieving the already badly strained Northern Virginia countryside of the burden of supporting the army; the terrain of Maryland being somewhat easier to maneuver in; and the hope of inducing Maryland to secede. He doesn't expand on either of these, but expects his reader to take his claim that Lee's decision to undertake the invasion itself "cannot be rationally gainsaid".<sup>126</sup> Krick goes on to claim that once the problem of straggling had become evident, and the fact that Lee's plans had fallen into McClellan's hands, the offensive should have been aborted, yet still repeats the claim at the end of the essay that the need for Lee "to raid north of the Potomac can hardly be doubted".<sup>127</sup> Just like Gallagher in his essay, Krick does not seem to find the ideas of raiding in Maryland and courting

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122 Gallagher, ed (1989), p. 7-8.

123 O.R., XIX, II, p. 590-591.

124 Reports of the Operations of the Army of Northern Virginia (1864), p. 27.

125 Harsh (1999), p. 73.

126 Gallagher, ed (1989), p. 36-37

127 Ibid., p. 54.

the affection of the state and its citizens to be mutually exclusive.

*Lee Considered: General Robert E. Lee and Civil War History*, by Alan T. Nolan

The second of the two groundbreaking reassessments of Lee and his place in history, *Lee Considered* was published in 1991, fourteen years after Connelly's *The Marble Man*. Admitting to a "perverse skepticism of lives of the saints", Nolan claims in the preface to his book that the purpose of his study is not to bring new and previously unknown material about Lee to light, but to reassess "familiar and long-available evidence" in such a way as to "set the record straight" about Lee. Nolan acknowledges a debt to Connelly in this regard, but also points out that while Connelly's aim was primarily to trace the development of the historical myth constructed around Lee, the aim of his own book is to take a new and critical look at Lee himself.<sup>128</sup>

Nolan delivers on his promise. While Connelly attempted to directly reassess Lee himself only in the final chapter of his study, Nolan's focus remains on Lee, even as he is deconstructing the myths around him. Where Connelly only remarks in the very broadest sense about the negative impacts Lee's excessive boldness and combativeness may have had on the Confederate chances of winning the war, Nolan is significantly more willing to elaborate in detail on why this was so. In the fourth chapter of his book he makes a highly critical review of Lee's generalship, arguing that the Confederate commander pursued an almost exclusively offensive strategy which was not only at odds with the stated Confederate goals in the war, which Davis proclaimed to be "entirely defensive", but which was actively detrimental to the Confederacy's chance of independence and survival as a nation.<sup>129</sup>

In regard to the Maryland Campaign, Nolan argues that it was this alleged constant psychological need to stay on the offensive that guided Lee's decision to cross the Potomac, and also his decision to stay and fight at Antietam. Although Nolan allows that the battle itself was fought on the defensive, he argues, quite sensibly, that the campaign was conducted on the strategic offensive, and that the only thing compelling Lee to stand at Antietam was his own unwillingness to run from a fight.<sup>130</sup> Corroborating Nolan's interpretation, although he seems to make no mention of it anywhere, is the fact that even after the horrendous Battle of Antietam on September 17th, during which the Army of Northern Virginia only narrowly avoided annihilation, Lee decided to stay his precarious ground for another full day – in McPherson's words, "almost as if to dare McClellan to

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128 Preface to Nolan (1991), p. ix-xi

129 Nolan (1991), p. 68-89.

130 Ibid., p. 90.

renew the assault".<sup>131</sup>

Nolan does not make any arguments concerning which other motives Lee may have had to invade Maryland beyond his aggressive mentality. What he does challenge, however, is the argument other historians have made that invading Maryland was Lee's best, or indeed only, option after Second Manassas/Bull Run. This "no-alternative rationale", as Nolan labels it, originally put forward by Lee's staff officer Charles Marshall, refined by Freeman and used, as we have seen, by several historians since, is dismissed by Nolan as a "series of straw men". He concludes that there is no reason why the "slight move southwards" option presented by Freeman would be unfeasible and, consequently, there obviously was an alternative to going North. It could be pointed out in Freeman's defense that even such a slight move southwards with his whole army would have exposed Northern Virginia to Federal re-occupation, lending at least some reinforcement to this particular alleged strawman. Still, it is hard to argue with Nolan that, especially given the state the army was in, such a move *was* an alternative.<sup>132</sup>

#### Robert E. Lee, by Emory M. Thomas

Published in 1995, Thomas' book is the last of the Lee biographies to be discussed in this thesis. Another Virginia-born historian, Thomas informs the reader in the preface to his book that he used to listen to Freeman talk on the radio during his childhood, had a graduate mentor who insisted that "Douglas Freeman is God", and that he is a long-time acquaintance of Thomas Connelly, who was a fellow graduate student of his. In describing his approach, Thomas argues that his study is neither "classical" like Freeman's, nor "revisionist" like Connelly's and Nolan's, but instead what he chooses to call "post-revisionist" (as though every new historical study did not represent a revision of history). His position on Lee himself, he claims, is that "Lee was a great human being, perhaps as great as Freeman believed, but not great in the ways in which Freeman described."<sup>133</sup> All in all, Thomas' book comes across as an earnest attempt to reconcile the traditional view of Lee with the criticisms levied against both that tradition and the man himself in more recent decades.

Like Nolan, Thomas does not make a list of separate objectives compelling Lee to march his army across the Potomac, but attempts instead to look into Lee's personality for answers there. What he finds is largely the same as what Nolan found: Lee possessed an aggressive mentality in war, Thomas argues, and where Davis would have preferred to fight the war in a purely defensive

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131 McPherson (1988), p. 544.

132 Nolan (1991), p. 91-92.

133 Preface to Thomas (1995), p. 13-14.

manner, Lee constantly (but "never openly") "attempted to bend the President" when he could – with considerable success, it must be assumed. Elaborating on the subject of the Maryland Campaign, Thomas points out that Lee must have known that once he succeeded in drawing the Union army out from the Washington defenses, they would seek to confront him in such a way that any claims of wanting to merely "harass" and "annoy" the Federal army would become moot. He concludes that "deeds demonstrate that Lee intended to fight." Thomas hardly touches the topic of Lee's options at the outset and the "no-alternative rationale" as Nolan termed it, except to note, briefly, that Lee had no intention of assaulting Washington directly.<sup>134</sup>

Thomas definitely comes off as more critical of Lee's decision to invade than Freeman and other older generation biographers of Lee. Reviewing a popular and often-used quote attributed to a Maryland boy who observed that, although the Southern men were dirty and ragged, they had "a dash about them that the Northern men lacked" and that "[t]hey rode like circus riders", Thomas soberly points out that "[m]ost of these men did not ride 'like circus riders'; they walked, and as Lee admitted, they walked without shoes."<sup>135</sup> Thomas and Nolan differ in that Thomas never criticizes Lee's judgments and decisions quite as harshly as Nolan does, but their positions on the topic of his reasons for invading Maryland are essentially the same.

#### *Confederate Tide Rising and Taken at the Flood*, by Joseph L. Harsh

This remarkable study in two parts,<sup>136</sup> published in 1998 and 1999, respectively, constitutes what can fairly be called the most groundbreaking research on the Maryland Campaign since Palfrey's and Carman's studies more than a century earlier. The author, Joseph Harsh, was himself a student of James Murfin, and was afforded special mention by Murfin in the preface to his *Gleam of Bayonets*, where Murfin correctly predicted that Harsh would be "a likely subject for future Antietam honors."<sup>137</sup> Harsh was himself a native of Maryland, who grew up not far from the old battlefield of Antietam, and admits to a passionate interest in the Civil War from childhood onwards, which would grow into a career. His preface to *Taken at the Flood* begins with the words: "This is a book I probably could not escape writing."<sup>138</sup>

The basic premise for Harsh's study is that a proper understanding of the Maryland Campaign

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134 Thomas (1995), p. 255-257.

135 Ibid., p. 259.

136 A third "companion volume" titled *Sounding the Shallows* was published in 2000, containing various compiled primary sources and short essays.

137 Preface to Murfin (1965/2004), p. 14.

138 Preface to Harsh (1999), p. xiii

necessitates a complete rethinking of what the war aims and the grand strategy of the Confederacy were. The first volume of his study, *Confederate Tide Rising*, provides the groundwork of presenting these true Confederate aims as he perceives them, and analyzes the Confederate offensive from Lee's appointment to field command in June 1862 up until the point of invasion. *Taken at the Flood* continues from there, and analyzes the Maryland Campaign itself in light of what Harsh perceives the Confederate strategy and goals to be. "Is it possible," he asks rhetorically in the opening of the first volume, "that in Lee's mind, he was engaged in neither a raid or an invasion?" A raid, he argues, becomes a pointless endeavor once any heavy casualties are taken, and an invasion is impossible to sustain if the invading force lets itself be trapped by the enemy. Despite this, Lee chose to stay and fight in Maryland, delaying his departure for as long as he could.<sup>139</sup>

To understand Lee's decision, Harsh argues, it is necessary to understand how the Confederacy understood itself. The leaders of the Confederacy did not, he claims, merely view themselves as consisting of just those eleven states which had seceded by June 8th, 1861.<sup>140</sup> Instead they believed that the other slave-holding states would eventually secede as well, bringing Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri into the Confederacy, and they also laid claim to the "southwestern territories", which included the Indian Territory (today's Oklahoma) and the territory making up modern-day New Mexico and Arizona. Harsh cites considerable evidence in support of this claim. The official Confederate declaration of war on the US in May 1861 exempted all the aforementioned states and territories. Kentucky and Missouri were formally admitted as Confederate states, given seats in the Confederate Congress and stars were added to the Confederate flags to represent them. The only reason why the same did not happen in regard to Maryland, Harsh argues, is because it was immediately and heavily occupied by Federal forces and its most vocal pro-secession leaders imprisoned before a secession vote could be held, in order to ensure that Washington did not become encircled by enemy territory – creating the impression in the minds of the Southern people that Maryland was held to the Union "by the bayonet". Treators and alliances were also made with the Native Americans of the Indian Territory.<sup>141</sup>

The Confederacy had three principal war aims, according to Harsh. To expand their nation to include the states of the Border South and the southwestern territories, to secure the integrity of their territory by seizing Federal installations and facilities and by keeping Union troops out, and to

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139 Harsh (1998), p. 3-4.

140 This being the date of Tennessee's secession as the last state to do so.

141 Harsh (1998), p. 9-10. Incidentally, the last Confederate general to surrender would be Stand Watie, a Cherokee leader and the only Native American general of the war (discounting Ely Parker, who didn't actually serve as a general).

maintain the independence they, in their own eyes, believed they had already won.<sup>142</sup> In pursuing these goals, it was a necessity for the Confederacy to concentrate their armed forces in field armies and push the Federal forces back from the areas it lay claim to. Failure to do so would have meant a failure to maintain territorial integrity, and led to the loss of vital infrastructure needed to continue the Confederate war effort. The only alternative path to victory would have been to pursue a strategy of guerrilla warfare, Harsh argues, and that would have necessitated the abandonment of the plantation economy and ended the viability of the institution of slavery, which the Confederacy sought to defend.<sup>143</sup> Although local governments in the South may or may not have subscribed to this understanding of the conflict and of their own nation, Harsh argues that Davis and Lee certainly did, and that Davis' claims of pursuing a purely defensive war were not reflective of actual policy, but merely presented for the sake of political and diplomatic convenience.<sup>144</sup>

A reasonable objection to Harsh's theory might be that if Lee's movement into Maryland was not intended as either a raid or an invasion, why then did he propose to continue into Pennsylvania? Harsh anticipates this question – and it is in addressing it that he subjects General Walker's account to critical scrutiny as the first historian to do so, it being the principal source detailing Lee's alleged plans in Pennsylvania. As previously noted, Harsh in his investigation rips Walker's credibility to shreds over a several-page long argument where he stacks piece after piece of evidence against it.<sup>145</sup> The second piece of evidence often cited by those historians who believe that Lee intended to strike into Pennsylvania is his September 4th dispatch to Davis, where he mentions the possibility of entering that state. Harsh argues that this statement does not reflect an intent to invade the North, but is instead meant to inform the President that crossing the border might be necessary in order to effectively maneuver against the enemy. The western part of Maryland where the army entered is quite narrow, and Harsh opines that the dispatch only proves that Lee would not let the border to Pennsylvania unduly confine his movements. At the same time, Harsh cleverly argues that Lee's dispatch the day before, where he admits that his army is unfit for an invasion, demonstrates the general's lack of intent to make any deep foray into Pennsylvania. That same passage could conceivably be used to challenge Harsh's view that Lee did not regard his movement into Maryland as an invasion. Possibly anticipating this objection, Harsh pre-empts it by interpreting Lee's word in such a way as to strengthen rather than weaken his theory.<sup>146</sup> One specific motive he attributes to Lee is a desire to harm the Union politically by presenting them with the previously mentioned offer of peace from a position of strength. Harsh argues that Lee hoped that the predicted Union refusal

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142 Ibid., p. 6-10.

143 Harsh (1999), p. 493-494.

144 Harsh (1998), p. 17-21.

145 Harsh (1999) p. 134-145

146 Harsh (1999), p. 77-79.

might paint the Federal government as unreasonable warmongers, and might convince the Northern public, war-weary and intimidated by Confederate successes, to push for an end to the war in the upcoming Congressional elections.<sup>147</sup> Harsh's views in this regard are of course not new, and closely resemble the arguments put forward by Carman and Murfin in their studies and dismissed as unfounded (but still present) hope by Gallagher in his essay *Season of Opportunity*.

Harsh differs from other researchers who have studied the campaign not only in many of his conclusions, but also in his basic approach. While other monographers such as Murfin and Sears elected to argue their views through a basic construction of narrative, explaining things as they saw them and lavishing little attention on views that might differ from their own, Harsh is thoroughly analytical in the way in which he constructs his arguments. He is not content with just stating his case, but also weighs the arguments put forward by earlier historians, accommodating them into his own understanding or discarding them according to their perceived merits or lack thereof. In so doing, his study becomes not only a history of the campaign, but a historiography of it too. For example, the notion that Lee let the deliberations of the British government on the topic of Confederate recognition influence him in any way is examined and dismissed on the grounds that Lee could not possibly have known about it, and that there is nothing in his writings which would indicate that it was a topic he thought much about.<sup>148</sup> Also, as noted, he seems to anticipate which kinds of criticisms others might choose to bring against his interpretation in turn, and takes steps to address these questions before others can ask them. This he does brilliantly, making it very hard to probe his argument for weakness. Gary Gallagher is quoted on the back cover of *Taken at the Flood*, saying that "not everyone will agree with [Harsh's] sometimes provocative arguments". That is probably true, but it would take a lot of knowledge, eloquence and probably even new historical evidence to seriously discredit most of them as being implausible. There is one argument Harsh makes that could possibly warrant a challenge, however. Although his theory underlying Lee's decision to enter Maryland is certainly argued well enough to stand on its own merits, Harsh still for some reason feels the need to supposedly strengthen his hand even further by repeating the "no-alternative rationale". He admittedly does so with more eloquence than most earlier authors, devoting more space and argument to destroy each "strawman" in detail, as Nolan would have put it, but he still does not afford Lee a greater basic number of options than earlier historians have done.<sup>149</sup>

*Crossroads of Freedom - Antietam*, by James M. McPherson

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147 Ibid., 125-127.

148 Ibid., p. 126.

149 Ibid., p. 21-25.

In this book, published in 2002, it is James McPherson's turn to offer his interpretation of the Maryland Campaign.<sup>150</sup> As briefly previously noted, McPherson is one of the most renowned Civil War historians alive, his pinnacle achievement being the Pulitzer Prize-winning single-volume study of the war published in 1988, titled *Battle Cry of Freedom*. He has written several more renowned books, including titles such as *Drawn with the Sword*, *This Mighty Scourge* and *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*. He has also written the forewords to several of the other studies mentioned and used in this paper, including Harwell's abridged version of Freeman's Lee biography and Woodworth's *The American Civil War - A Handbook of Literature and Research*. Others again, like Nolan's *Lee Considered* and Harsh's *Confederate Tide Rising*, have McPherson's praise printed on their covers, to give a sense of the esteem in which McPherson is held.<sup>151</sup>

The premise for McPherson's study is the examination of the Maryland Campaign and Antietam as a possible turning point or, as it is also called in the opening pages of the book, a "pivotal moment" in the war. The purpose of the book is described by its editor David Fischer as being a hope to "encourage interest in problems of historical contingency" – moments in history where small factors can be seen as having played an instrumental role in shaping the course of history, and things could easily have gone a different way.<sup>152</sup> The idea that the Maryland Campaign and its outcome belongs among these pivotal moments is hardly new, and has in fact been put forward either explicitly or implicitly by most if not all of the studies examined in this chapter.

From these words, it would seem reasonable to expect that *Crossroads of Freedom* would be an analytical study in much the same vein as Harsh's two-volume study a few years earlier. And, to be fair, there are moments in it, most notably toward the end of the book, where McPherson's writing takes on an analytic pattern. Most of the book, however, reads in much the same way as Murfin's and Sears' monographs on the same topic, focusing on narrative far more than it does on debate. It is a good narrative, entertaining and well-written, but it still features disappointingly little of the "speculation" alluded to by Fischer in his editor's note.<sup>153</sup>

A quote printed on the back cover of Harsh's *Confederate Tide Rising* cites McPherson in crediting Harsh's study as making "clearer than ever before the context of the campaign that culminated at Antietam." It is surprising, then, that McPherson, in his assessment of why Lee chose to cross the

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150 In monographic form, that is – he also covered the topic earlier, in *Battle Cry of Freedom*.

151 Largely deserved, in the eyes of this author, even though parts of this review might indicate otherwise.

152 Editor's Note in McPherson (2002), p. xiii-xiv

153 Editor's Note in McPherson (2002), p. xiii-xiv

Potomac, seems to lack an interest in exploring any of the new arguments or pieces of evidence Harsh brings to bear on the issue in his study. It is beyond question that McPherson was aware of Harsh's study as he was writing *Crossroads of Freedom*, because he makes mention of it and even has citations pointing to it in his book. Though this fact might seem to counter the claim that McPherson does not acknowledge Harsh, the citations, as we shall see, are not necessarily reflected in the arguments in which they are cited as support. McPherson is of course under no obligation to agree with Harsh's arguments, but he doesn't even present them to argue against them. Instead he seems to simply acknowledge and applaud the fact that Harsh did write a study on the Maryland Campaign, only to then quietly disregard much if not most of it. Harsh and McPherson are in agreement that Lee sought to lower Northern morale and bring the war to a swift conclusion by impacting the Northern elections with his proposed offer of peace. That is not, however, an argument that originated with Harsh. It is one that was put forward by Murfin, by Carman and, most importantly, by Lee himself, explicitly written in his September 8th dispatch to Davis. McPherson also doesn't seem to explicitly state anywhere that international recognition factored into Lee's decisions as a commander, as Harsh argues against. Neither does he specify that the Confederate commander didn't, however, and the heavy emphasis he places on the diplomatic issue – understandable on the grounds that it is indeed relevant in terms of the campaign's consequences, if not its goals – would strongly suggest to the even slightly unattentive reader that this did in fact play a role in Lee's decision to invade. Harsh's interpretation of a Confederate grand strategy is not mentioned or even implicitly acknowledged at all, except perhaps for the fact that McPherson, like Harsh but unlike Connelly and Nolan, argues that Lee and Davis were of like mind regarding how the war was to be fought.<sup>154</sup>

This quiet regression of thought regarding the campaign – as it appears to be – while puzzling and somewhat disappointing, might still be shrugged off as simply that, if not for one surprising and frankly embarrassing component of McPherson's text. "If all went well," McPherson writes, "the Army of Northern Virginia might even invade Pennsylvania and destroy the vital railroad bridge over the Susquehanna River."<sup>155</sup>

As has already been clearly pointed out in this thesis (and first pointed out by Harsh), the only source mentioning anything about a plan to deestroy the railroad bridge across the Susquehanna is Walker's account – which had of course been thoroughly discredited by Harsh by the time McPherson wrote *Crossroads of Freedom*. That McPherson doesn't seem to realize this is troubling

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154 McPherson (2002), p. 88-95.

155 McPherson (2002), p. 89.

by itself, especially since he was clearly aware of Harsh's research at the time. There is another surprising fact, however, which serves to aggravate his mistake. Among the studies McPherson cites in support for this passage in which he continues to give credit to Walker's account is Joseph Harsh's *Taken by the Flood*, chapters 1-3 – the last of which includes Harsh's attack upon and dismantling of Walker's story.<sup>156</sup> Even though McPherson also points to Freeman in his footnote, who does support his argument, his ignorance of Walker's likely deception and his simultaneous inclusion of Harsh's study in this footnote can only be described as a scholarly blunder.

In conclusion, while *Crossroads of Freedom – Antietam* is an entertaining read and a generally good, if traditional narrative of the campaign, it does not build in any noticeable way on the latest research before it, and therefore can not be said to have advanced the scholarship on the topic in any significant manner. Looking back at the aforementioned editor's note in the beginning of the book, it is ironic to note David Fischer's statement that "[i]n a work of large purpose, where particular details make a difference, historians must get the small things right" – and, furthermore, "a reader might miss the author's unrivaled command of the subject, his mastery of the materials, his meticulous attention to matters of substance and detail..."<sup>157</sup> He is right, though perhaps not in the way he would have hoped.

*To Antietam Creek: The Maryland Campaign of September 1862*, by D. Scott Hartwig<sup>158</sup>

The latest narrative of the Maryland Campaign so far, Hartwig's analysis was cleverly published in September 2012, the sesquicentennial for the campaign and the Battle of Antietam. Intended as a study in two parts, Hartwig's book traces the Confederate and the Union armies from the beginning of the campaign up until the evening before the Battle of Antietam. The second volume, still to be published, is intended to be an analysis of that climactic battle itself and the political and military consequences the campaign and the battles in it had on the war and on history.<sup>159</sup>

*To Antietam Creek* especially distinguishes itself by giving greater consideration to the earlier battles of the campaign, namely the South Mountain battles and the capture of Harper's Ferry, than any study before it. Hartwig has written, on the whole, a very thorough analysis not only of the events themselves, but also of the opposing armies. He describes and evaluates in detail not only the

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156 Ibidl., p. 171.

157 Editor's Note in McPherson (2002), p. xiv

158 It should be noted that this thesis cites the Kindle edition of Hartwig's study. The page numbers cited may not match the corresponding page numbers of the hardcopy book. Most of the citations given here refer to Chapter 2 of the book.

159 Introduction to Hartwig (2012), p. 1-2.

leaders of the armies, but the organization and composition of the forces available to them, right down to an evaluation of the men serving in the various separate combat arms, the shape they were in and the equipment they had available for use.<sup>160</sup> He also estimates that the Army of Northern Virginia numbered close to 70 000 soldiers before crossing into Maryland – which is fully double that of the lowest earlier estimates – although he does point out, like others before him, that straggling was a severe problem even before going into Maryland, and would only increase in severity after the Potomac crossing.<sup>161</sup>

In his analysis of the decision to enter Maryland, Hartwig begins, as so many others, by essentially re-stating the no-alternative rationale. He gives Lee two possible options, either staying at Warrenton – which he discards on the same grounds as others before him, in that doing so would mean exposing Northern Virginia again and fail to capitalize on the gains won through the summer – or going north into Maryland, with its many possibilities.<sup>162</sup>

Hartwig's evaluation of the objectives of the campaign is somewhat traditional, but the list of motives is shorter and more thoughtfully argued than in some other studies. The hope to draw the Federals out from Washington's defenses and keep them occupied north of the Potomac through the fall so that Virginia farmers could reap their harvest unmolested – while supporting the Confederate army on the produce of the enemy – is cited as an important motive. Lee's hope to offer peace from a position of strength, thereby influencing the Northern Congressional elections, is also emphasized. Echoing those authors who have emphasized Lee's aggressive nature, Hartwig agrees with their assessments that Lee also went into Maryland actively looking for a fight, and places faith in Lee's post-war assertion that he went into Maryland "to give battle." Even though both Harsh and McPherson seem to agree with him on these points, Hartwig disagrees with them in that he believes the purpose of these tactics was not to end the war swiftly, but to increase the North's war-weariness by prolonging it.<sup>163</sup>

Hartwig mentions the question of European recognition, but agrees with Harsh that there is nothing in Lee's own writings or other primary sources that suggest this question factored into his plans. Echoing Lee's after-action report, he also argues that Lee never believed the presence of his army would cause a general uprising of Marylanders against the Union, but that he only believed it would

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160 Hartwig (2012, p. 61-89.

161 Ibid., p. 59-60.

162 Ibid., p. 49-50.

163 Ibid., 49-54.

allow them to voice their opinions freely.<sup>164</sup> Although he briefly mentions the possibility of the Army of Northern Virginia entering Pennsylvania (as Lee himself did in his Sept 4th dispatch), Hartwig does not fall into the trap of using Walker's account to expand on this. He only mentions Walker's account in order to point out that it has been discredited, citing Harsh as reference.<sup>165</sup>

Like McPherson before him, Hartwig praises Harsh for his insights into Confederate grand strategy without actually interacting with Harsh's arguments in any broad sense. He clearly regards the movement into Maryland as an invasion, and seems to make no references to Harsh's views on a larger Confederate national identity. While it would have been nice if he did give some attention to addressing these topics, such concerns are easily outweighed by the sheer thoroughness of his work on a whole.

Hartwig consistently plays it safe. He successfully avoids falling into the traps of relying on discredited sources, or of attributing any knowledge to the historical figures under study that they couldn't possibly have held at the time. Nor does he engage in wide-ranging speculation on the broader picture of the war or creative re-interpretations of the wording of sources to fit his ideas, like Harsh sometimes does. Hartwig sticks very close to the primary sources, subjecting them to an analytic approach without straying overly much into the territory of unverifiable claims. While not, perhaps, as ground-breaking and visionary as Carman's or Harsh's studies, the result is a very strong and solid study of the campaign. It rightly deserves to be regarded as, if not the definitive study of the Maryland Campaign, then at least the most well-founded one to date.

## **Chapter analysis**

The first signs of serious challenge to the Lost Cause interpretation of Civil War history came with America's involvement in the Second World War, which people quickly came to see as another war against a racist regime. Nazi Germany's atrocities against ethnic minorities would appall and infuriate an entire world, and the United States were no exception. Although America's armed forces were marred by racial segregation, colored servicemen would serve with distinction through the war, and that service would fuel post-war rhetoric demanding equal rights. Simultaneously, the long-standing segregation of races in the South was furthering the growth of all-African-American communities, and these communities were producing community leaders of their own. The sun was also beginning to set on the once-great colonial empires of Britain and France, and it became clearer

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164 Ibid., 52.

165 Ibid., p. 119.

and clearer that Western leaders would have to deal with colored heads of state elsewhere in the world.<sup>166</sup>

As the question of racial equality pushed itself into the forefront of public interest again, so did the inconvenient truths hiding behind the Lost Cause interpretation of history begin to reemerge from behind the decades-old screen of national reconciliation. The change didn't happen overnight, and in fact, the Lost cause has never truly been lost. It still lives on in popular romantic myths about the Civil War, which continue to be promoted through partisan publications and works of historical fiction. By the time of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s it had, however, lost so much ground that it didn't dominate the field of Civil War history quite so completely as it once did.

This loss of dominance would of course become most obvious in the growth of new schools of history, especially various branches of social history. In the past, Civil War historians had looked primarily at the actions of politicians and generals in order to understand the national crisis that plunged the nation into war against itself from 1861 to 1865 – or, to a somewhat lesser extent, at the clash of two competing economies. Now they were casting their eyes wider, at slaves, women, Native American and other people who were perceived to have been given no previous voice in history. The topic of post-Civil War Reconstruction, held by the gentleman's agreement of the Lost Cause to have been a shameful chapter in the nation's history, had the dust brushed off it and was re-examined in a new, appreciative light.

The question might be asked if and how any of this is relevant to the topic of this thesis. It is a reasonable question. The subject matter is, after all, a very traditional one in principle. It examines, after all, the verdicts of history regarding the decisions of a white, male upper-class Virginian commanding the principal army of a celebrated, if lost rebel nation. The inclusion of slaves and women into the pages of Civil War history does not, of course, magically catapult those slaves and women into command of the Army of Northern Virginia. That is true. But it is not the whole truth about the waning of the Lost Cause.

There seems to be a marked change in the construction of narratives and analyses involving the Maryland Campaign published from the second half of the 20th century onward. There is an idea that the campaign, and others like the Gettysburg campaign, represented something special in the history of the war. That it was a turning point, a pivotal moment in time where the course of history hung in the balance, and great things were decided by small measures. This idea had never been

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166 Loewen and Sebesta (2010), p. 330.

completely absent. For example, Longstreet himself wrote in his memoirs on the topic of the Battle of Antietam: "*At Sharpsburg was sprung the keystone of the arch upon which the Confederate cause rested.*"<sup>167</sup> Even so, Longstreet, who became a Republican after the war, had long since been disowned by the torchbearers of the Confederate myth at the zenith of the Lost Cause's influence. One crucial component of the whole Lost Cause interpretation of the war – so crucial, in fact, that it was the idea from which the entire theory took its name – was the understanding that the war for the South was lost with the firing on Fort Sumter; that they had fought as bravely and tenaciously and intelligently as humanly possible, and only been defeated because the odds stacked against them were literally impossible to prevail against. This is an interpretation of the war that does not logically lend itself well to the idea of turning points.

The decline of the Lost Cause, then, not only opened the door for social histories of the Civil War, but allowed for fresh perspectives on political and military history, too. If the Old South was not the chivalrous, aristocratic society portrayed in such classics as *Gone With The Wind*, then perhaps the great iconic leaders of the South (chief among whom was arguably Lee) were not as flawless as had previously been supposed. If they were not flawless, then perhaps they had made mistakes. And if they had made mistakes, perhaps the outcome of the war could have been different, if they had acted differently.

Although the (fighting) retreat of the Lost Cause in the face of the Civil Rights movements must have been an important factor in allowing this idea the proverbial space it needed to grow, another historical event that soon followed must have played a significant role in spurring the growth itself. During the 1960s, the United States became deeply involved in the Vietnam War, a war it would eventually lose in 1975. This loss, although some historians were slow to admit it, would completely knock over the arguments of those who persisted in viewing the Civil War as a war the Confederacy could not win. By the measures commonly used to compare the strength of manpower, industry and overall resources between the North and South, the differences of which were commonly held up as proof of the Lost Cause argument, the Confederacy certainly didn't face worse odds than the North Vietnamese did – rather the opposite. Their war aims, Joseph Harsh's theory of Confederate national identity notwithstanding, were essentially the same. And still, North Vietnam managed to wear down the American public's support for the war until the United States eventually had to withdraw from it, while the Confederacy was subdued after only four years of bloody fighting.

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167 McPherson (2002), p. 156.

The analogy is far from perfect. For one thing, the United States had an arguably greater stake in pursuing the conflict to the bitter end during the Civil War than it did during Vietnam. After all, the Civil War was fought to prevent the break-up of the Union itself, while Vietnam was never itself a part of the American nation. Another factor to consider is that the Vietnam War was fought on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, while the territory claimed by the Confederate States of America was situated literally right across the river from Washington, D.C. – making it not just all the more imperative to take that land back, but also making it much easier for the Union to bring its superiority of men and resources to bear against the enemy.

Even so, the question does persist: Would the South have had not only a chance, but a *good* chance to win if its political and military leadership had committed their forces to guerilla warfare, rather than collecting them in field armies and hurling them into the larger armies of the North like they did? A cursory examination of some of the few Confederate commanders who actually did specialize in guerilla warfare seems to suggest the answer is "yes". One such commander, John Singleton Mosby, won lasting fame or notoriety – depending on which side you asked – for the exploits of his at most 800-man strong company of partisans operating in northern and western Virginia (and the infant state of West Virginia). McPherson writes that "whole counties in northern Virginia became known as Mosby's Confederacy", and "[n]o Union supplies could move in this area except under heavy guard."<sup>168</sup> Another guerilla hotbed (since the days of Bleeding Kansas before the war, in fact) was Missouri, where the guerillas, "who numbered only a few thousand, tied down tens of thousands of Union soldiers and militia who might otherwise have fought elsewhere."<sup>169</sup> Harsh makes a good argument to why this strategy of warfare wasn't more widely used by the Confederacy, claiming that relying on guerilla warfare "would have necessarily sacrificed slavery and the plantation system".<sup>170</sup> If they had been willing to make this sacrifice, they could have worn out the Union and won their independence, but they were not willing to do so. That conclusion knocks another hole in the Lost Cause interpretation of the conflict, more specifically the idea that the South was only fighting for its independence and not to preserve the institution of slavery. This is consistent with the examples of Confederate guerilla action given above. It mainly took place in such places where there either was no great amount of slaves to be lost, or within those slave-holding states that had stayed loyal to the Union, and where the institution of slavery was consequently not in immediate danger.

This entire analysis so far may appear to have gone on a wild tangent, diverging from the topic of

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168 McPherson (1988), p. 737-738.

169 Ibid., p. 784.

170 Harsh (1998), p. 16.

examining history's changing views on the Maryland Campaign. The intention, however, has been to construct the foundation of an argument around how the decline of the Lost Cause and the growth of a belief in a real chance of Confederate victory have contributed in making Lee's decision to invade Maryland a monumentally important one;<sup>171</sup> and furthermore, how the resurgence of scholarly interest in the campaign over the last fifty years reflects this changing perspective of the war. The dominant view of the war, this argument aims to demonstrate, has changed from the static view that the outcome was inevitable, to a more dynamic one in which the actions, choices and strategies of its leaders mattered, and mattered greatly.

It is admittedly an argument built on circumstantial evidence. No study of the campaign, whether partial or monographic, has been found in which the author explicitly states that the decline of the Lost Cause myth is a contributing cause to his<sup>172</sup> interest in the subject. Even so, said circumstantial evidence does seem to point in that direction – though more pronouncedly by far in the examined monographic studies than in the biographies.

Going back to the beginning of the chapter, we see already in Dowdey's Lee biography, traditional though it may otherwise be, a brief acknowledgement of the historical importance of the campaign. Though he makes no attempt of exploring the subject in detail and declines to make a strong verdict on the matter, he recognizes the Maryland Campaign as a time when independence seemed possible.

It is Murfin's study, however, which really demonstrates this shifting perspective. Murfin's monograph of the campaign is the first such study to be published since 1882. In his foreword to the 1965 edition of his study, Murfin explicitly writes about the Battle of Antietam that it was "the turning point in the history of the Confederacy", and further, "on it hinged the very existence of the United States".<sup>173</sup> Then he goes on to state in his preface his concern about the "alarming lack of interest in the 'bloodiest single day' of the war."<sup>174</sup>

There is more than one possible explanation for this "alarming lack of interest". Murfin wrote his study during the ongoing centennial of the Civil War, and one could hypothesize that this fact by itself is responsible for spurring the dawning resurgence of interest in the campaign and its climactic battle. It doubtlessly does play a part, and Murfin does mention there being such a

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171 Along with many other decisions made by Lee and other Confederate leaders; this being merely a case study.

172 Or potentially her, though the historians chronicling the campaign in any detail seem to be exclusively male.

173 Foreword to 1965 edition of Murfin (1965/2004), p. 9.

174 Preface to Murfin (1965/2004), p. 13.

centennial-driven resurgence of interest in the Civil War, further on in his preface. If this was the whole explanation, however, one would expect, when looking at the historiography of the Maryland Campaign through a broader lens, to find studies of it clustered around significant anniversaries. Looking back to the 50-year anniversary of the war, there is in fact a book on the Campaign – yet another account by a Union veteran, named Isaac Heysinger – titled *Antietam: And The Maryland And Virginia Campaigns Of 1862*.<sup>175</sup> Then there is nothing until Murfin's *Gleam of Bayonets*. If anniversarial interest were the only factor responsible for the scholarly revisit of the campaign, one would think that the interest would again die down until the sesquicentennial of the war from 2011 to 2015.

As we have seen, that has not been the case. Interest in the Maryland Campaign has remained heightened, with Sears publishing his study in 1983, Harsh presenting his interpretation in 1998 and 1999, McPherson in 2002, two essay collections on the campaign edited by Gary Gallagher in 1989 and 1999 and the publishing of the Carman manuscript and papers in 2008, before the sesquicentennial did arrive with Hartwig's *To Antietam Creek*. The latest 50-year period has been a busy one on the subject of Antietam compared to the 50 years before that.

And yet, those five (or even ten) decades before the 1960s were hardly devoid of publications on the Civil War. As we have seen, publications on the topic of the most iconic figure of the Confederacy, Robert E. Lee, continued to appear throughout these years, growing remarkably static in their content and viewpoints after Freeman's monumental biography.

The argument here can then be constructed as follows:

1 – That previous to the second half of the 20th century, most if not all of the historical studies touching upon the Maryland Campaign were written as homage to a romanticized Lost Cause idea of the war and the people and leaders who fought it. They were not written as critical investigations with the idea of historical causation in mind, but adhered to a silent agreement that the outcome of the war was a foregone conclusion.

2 – That this goal of paying homage to the Lost Cause led students of the war toward a certain

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<sup>175</sup> I was unfortunately unable to procure a copy of Heysinger's book for study in preparing this thesis. What little information I have found on it (amounting to a single review found at <http://www.amazon.com/Antietam-Maryland-Virginia-Campaigns-1862/dp/054863548X> ) suggests that it is primarily an eyewitness account of the Union side of the campaign, written with the explicit intent of redeeming General McClellan's reputation and harvest praise for the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac. It is hardly if ever mentioned at all by any of the texts I have examined in this study, and does not appear to be considered a "true" study of the campaign.

selection of topics that lent themselves naturally to this pathos-driven understanding of their national history. These topics, typically, were either central historical figures of the war, who in the process were built into semi-mythical national icons (such as Lee or for that matter, Lincoln), or events that could easily be given a veneer of apocalyptic symbolism, such as the Battle of Gettysburg, or Sherman's "March to the Sea".

3 – That the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Antietam, bloodiest day of the war though that battle may have been, did *not* meet the criteria for being associated with such symbolism. As bloody as it was, tactically it was inconclusive, with no clear victor – and strategically, as the Army of Virginia pulled back in good order across the river, unpursued, it represented only a return to the status quo in a strict military sense. More to the point, from a Lost Cause perspective in which the war was already decided, it was also inconclusive and anticlimactic in a *dramatic* sense. This is why the campaign did not draw a lot of interest as a separate topic of study for as long as the Lost Cause perspective of the war was the dominant one.

4 – That as Lost Cause arguments were challenged and to a significant extent discredited by such historic events as the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War, historians became more accepting to the idea that the Civil War could easily have gone the other way. This recognition spurred on a search for the turning points of the war, pivotal moments during which "history hung in the balance" – where the course of history was decided by very small margins. This is the "Historical Contingency" perspective.

5 – That the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Antietam, when viewed from this new perspective of the war, would suddenly appear to be *highly* significant, perhaps even so significant as to name it the single most decisive event of the war. This would set the stage for several studies in which the Maryland Campaign, Antietam and the perceived monumental change of the war which followed in their wake would themselves be the focal topics of study.

6 – That the Historical Contingency perspective, ironically enough, is not necessarily fueled by a desire for objective historical evaluation as opposed to the romantic narrative spun in the name of the Lost Cause. Despite the surely good intention of every historian claiming to strive toward an objective view of the event, their studies are still aimed toward the creation of national drama, evidenced plainly already in their titles: *Gleam of Bayonets. Landscape turned Red. Taken at the Flood. Crossroads of Freedom.* The pull toward the dramatic, the urge to tell a story that will capture the imagination of the reader is still there as strong as ever. Only the genre has changed. It is

no longer the romantic-apocalyptic myth of the Lost Cause, but instead a more modern political thriller.

7 – That this new perspective, although it opens for more critical examination of the principal historical figures than the Lost Cause perspective did, still needs some basic pre-suppositions in place. It is fine to critically evaluate the decisions and actions made by these figures during these pivotal moments in which they were central, and how these decisions shaped history. The steps which they took up to the point of those pivotal moments, however, still need to be seen as having been justified. In order for a pivotal moment to truly stand out as *pivotal*, the events leading up to it must continue to be given a certain veneer of historical inevitability.

8 – That in the case of the Maryland Campaign, the no-alternative rationale represents one such moment of presumed inevitability leading up to a pivotal moment, and that the tenacity of it is due to its usefulness to both the Lost Cause and Historical Contingency perspectives. In the Lost Cause interpretation of the history, the decision to invade was essentially inevitable because the course of the war was inevitable, and because Lee did not make mistakes. In the perspective of Historical Contingency, the idea is that the Maryland Campaign represents a point in history during which the course of history resulting from it could have gone either way. This implicitly suggests that the immediate events leading up to that moment could not reasonably have gone another way.

9 – That the implied necessity of the campaign by extension implies that whatever rationale Lee had for entering into Maryland, the risk-to-benefit ratio of his decision, *based on the information he had*, must have been good enough to justify his decision to invade. Lee's various reasons for rolling the die may be examined, compared against each other, criticised and individually discarded, but the collective weight of these reasons, when held against any perceived alternatives, *must always weigh in the favor of actually rolling the die*.

10 – That in order to ensure that the perceived gains for Lee's invasion warranted the risk, the perceived alternatives to a full invasion must be constructed in such a way as to support that claim. It must be argued that every other possible decision he could have made would have been a poor one.

As we have seen, the monographic studies of the Maryland Campaign examined in this chapter each put forward a lot of different reasons for Lee's choice to enter Maryland. They don't always agree on these reasons, and some of them get discredited and discarded along the way. Harsh and

McPherson think Lee went into Maryland looking for a quick victory. Hartwig, using largely similar evidence, believes he invaded in the hope of prolonging the war. Murfin puts forward fully nine possible motivations for the campaign in his book. Harsh rips the notion of any deep penetration of Pennsylvania to pieces and severely discredits the idea that Lee was gambling on European intervention. Hartwig, as the latest historian to delve thoroughly into the subject matter, acknowledges Harsh's criticisms, and also casts severe doubt on there being any realistic hopes of rallying Maryland to the side of the Confederacy. Murfin's belief that public opinion may have played a part has been quietly left by the wayside by the other historians, unaddressed. They all agree that Lee meant to feed his army in Maryland, that he wished to draw the Federals out from their fortifications to engage them in some form of combat north while keeping their attention north of the river, and that he intended to try to influence the Northern Congressional elections through the clever entrapment of his proposed offer of peace. All of these are safe positions to hold, drawn directly from Lee's correspondence with Davis.

All of these studies also agree on two other things. Firstly, the Maryland Campaign represented a turning point in the history of the Civil War (and there seems to be a general agreement that it was the single most decisive of the turning points in the war). Secondly, the decision to enter Maryland was the best decision Lee could have made, considering the options available to him. These positions are consistent with my argument as outlined above. Even the one single campaign-centric study among the selection which unequivocally argues that Lee should not have fought at Antietam, Robert Krick's essay in Gallagher's 1989 publication, still strongly argues the case that the decision to cross the Potomac in the first place was the right one.<sup>176</sup>

The Lee biographies tell a somewhat different story – and it's only reasonable that they do, given that their research topic is a different one. In fact, the contrast between the early and the modern Lee biographies<sup>177</sup> is remarkable. The early biographies diverge little from each other, and while the dominant one is clearly Freeman's million-word mastodon, they all stand united in their presentation of Lee, painting a very uniform image of the Confederacy's premier icon. A convincing argument could be made that "if you have read one, you have read them all".

The modern biographies, on the other hand, seem to be positioned in different corners of a proverbial intellectual arena, across which they attack each other – and, more commonly, the early biographies. Dowdey's book is mostly traditional in the way in which it presents Lee, but already

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176 Gallagher, ed. (1989), p. 54.

177 For the purposes of this thesis, as defined by their inclusion in chapter 2 or chapter 3, respectively.

there, one can see the cracks beginning to appear in the marble facade. Connelly leads the first assault on the Lee myth, directing his attacks against those he perceives as its constructors. Nolan goes even farther in drawing his own alternative picture of Lee, one that is decidedly unflattering in many ways. In what appears to be an attempt at bridging the gap, Thomas chooses to offer his own "post-revisionist" view of Lee, in which he acknowledges Freeman's monumental contribution to Lee biography, affords significant professional respect to Connelly and attempts, not too subtly, to sideline Nolan entirely by placing him firmly in Connelly's shadow.<sup>178</sup> In addressing the topic of Antietam, these three latter biographers all look for answers in Lee's personality, however, and they all essentially come to the same conclusion: that it was his aggressive mentality that drove him to order his troops across the Potomac.<sup>179</sup>

These latter three biographies do not fall cleanly inside the framework of the 10-point argument made above, like the monographs and campaign-focused essays do. Connelly, curiously, seems to turn the Lost Cause as it is presented in this thesis on its head in some regard, in that he himself seems to view the outcome of the war as inevitable, and regards the romantic Southern view as the one where the viability of the struggle persists. He calls this perspective the "Everlasting If", and paints a somewhat derisive image of a kind of historical contingency view existing *within* the Lost Cause perspective as early as the 1930s. This particular view can be summed up like this: "If only [insert circumstance here] had been the case, the South could have won independence." There is certainly evidence of Connelly's claim being the case, and he cites a few examples. "If only Albert Johnston hadn't died" is one example. "If we had only had more men at Gettysburg" is another. Of particular ironic note is the example given of a claim that the Confederates would have swept the Federals from the fields around Sharpsburg (in the Battle of Antietam) "if we had one more division" – a bold claim to make about a battle where the Southern army was only barely saved in the nick of time by the arrival of its last division, and during which Fitz-John Porter's 20 000 veteran Union troops stood by and watched without ever entering the battle at all.<sup>180</sup> Even so, this "Everlasting If" differs from the Historical Contingency view as defined in the 10-point argument above in that these "ifs", as described and exemplified in Connelly's text, all seem to be made in regard to circumstances, not actual actions and strategies. "If we had one more division" is not in actuality an argument against historical inevitability at all. It is a wish for something *beyond* the control of those people who were in the middle of that history as it happened. It is a belief that if *circumstances* had been better, things could have turned out differently, as opposed to a belief that

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178 Preface to Thomas (1995), p. 14.

179 Connelly admittedly does not mention Lee's decision to invade Maryland specifically, but this position can still be inferred from his assessment of Lee's generalship in general.

180 Connelly (1977), p. 133-134. Some of the quotations given are not directly copied from the text, but are still in quotation marks for the sake of basic grammar.

the war could have been won if the people driving history had made wiser decisions.

On Nolan's part, he falls outside of the 10-point argument framework in one very crucial detail. He is the only author presented in this entire thesis who holds the opinion that Lee's decision to invade was the wrong decision to make. What needs to be taken into consideration is that the monographers and the biographers presented in this chapter are writing within a different topical frame, and with different goals in mind. The monographers are trying to construct (or re-discover) a new national drama from the pages of history, different from the old drama presented within the framework of the Lost Cause. To this end, they are all operating within the framework of these 10 points, as shown. The biographers, on the other hand, are engaged in something entirely different: a scholarly battle over the historical image of Robert E. Lee. The biographer's goal is to present whichever image of Lee it is they favor, and that is the only context in which the Maryland Campaign will be examined. Whether it was a turning point in the war or not is an entirely secondary concern, relevant only to the degree in which it affects their verdicts of Lee himself. Although their research overlaps with that of the monographers, the campaign itself is not their focal topic of study, and so, as implied in point 5, there is no pressing need for them to stay within the above framework. They are essentially free to dispute the merits of the campaign as a whole if doing so supports the arguments they are making about Lee, and in the case of Nolan, Lee's harshest critic, it definitely does.

Nolan makes the argument that nobody else will: Given the circumstances facing him at the beginning of September, 1862, Lee should *not* have chosen to lead his army into Maryland. Nolan does not attempt to expand upon the list of alternatives offered Lee – as though Lee were actually faced with such a clearly suggestive multiple-choice questionnaire in reality. He ends up suggesting a choice that had already been discarded by every other study in which it was mentioned, on the grounds that it would mean giving up the gains won at Second Manassas/Bull Run. But he *does* recognize that there *was* a real choice, and that the Maryland Campaign was not in fact inevitable.

In concluding this chapter, it seems safe to argue that a lot of good research has been made regarding the potential advantages of a Confederate invasion into Maryland in September 1862. The proverbial stones have been turned over again and again. The conclusions reached by Hartwig are extremely solid and well-founded on the primary source material, both in the factors he supports and the factors he rejects. Additional possible factors are supplied by Harsh in his portrayal of the Confederate grand strategy and by Lee's biographer's in their assessments of Lee's personality – both of which are factors which are unlikely to ever be conclusively proven or disproven. It seems

reasonable to conclude that research on the advantages of invasion – both in regard to how these advantages were perceived by Lee and in how they can be assessed with the benefit of hindsight – has progressed as far as it can go, barring the discovery of new evidence, which by this point seems unlikely. Any future research on Lee's decision to invade, then, should consider taking a closer look at the advantages of *not* invading, which is a topic that has received very little scholarly attention over the years. It seems to have been used as nothing more than a rhetorical springboard from which to argue the merits of invasion, almost never as a topic of serious consideration in its own right. The next chapter will seek to readdress that issue in some small regard.

## Chapter 4: Alternatives to the No-Alternative

In the previous chapters, considerable criticism has been levied against the persistence of the no-alternative rationale, as Nolan called it, in historical studies of the Maryland Campaign. This chapter of the thesis will attempt to take a closer look at how this rationale has been argued, and what alternatives to the options presented in them might be constructed. Some possible objections to this attempt within the context of this thesis could be raised, and will be addressed at once.

The first objection that might seem reasonable to make is that this study is supposed to be primarily historiographical in nature, and that speculations about military operational strategy therefore does not belong within it. The first reply to this must be that the no-alternative rationale is, by its very nature, a historical argument – and as such, a critical assessment of it very much does fall under the purview of a study that examines historical arguments. Furthermore, since the no-alternative rationale is heavily criticized by this study, there exists an academic responsibility to provide a solid foundation for that criticism. This is best done by attempting to provide plausible alternatives to the "non-alternatives" the rationale presents.

A second objection could be made that this represents an attempt of writing contrafactual history, of which, of course, one should be careful. No matter the arguments presented here, Lee and his army did cross the Potomac, did fight the Union army to a bloody draw at Antietam, and did withdraw back into Virginia on the night of September 18th/19th. So why waste one's time arguing over and analyzing something that could have happened, but did not? The answer to this, of course, is that the no-alternative rationale *itself* is an implied statement of contrafactual history. Studies of the Maryland Campaign virtually consistently inform the reader that Lee's decision to enter Maryland was the best option available to him. It is an argument that seeks to inform the reader's

understanding of Lee, of military strategy and of history, and if that argument is fair to make in the first place, then scrutinizing it for flaws is also fair. In fact, the entire idea of historical causation, as opposed to historical inevitability, invites and even necessitates contrafactual historical arguments by implication. This is especially true in the case of studies which promote the view of historical contingency. The idea of pivotal moments from which two or more widely different courses of history could have resulted is inherently contrafactual in its nature, and it is the dominant perspective in modern research on the Maryland Campaign.

The third and last of the seemingly likely objections is the argument that this represents an attempt by a civilian author to judge the circumstances around a military decision, and that the necessary qualifications for doing so may be lacking. That is a fair argument – but it must be noted that with only a few exceptions, the same could be said about the other historians, amateur or professional, who don't hesitate to present this no-alternative rationale as fact. It must be noted that the originator of the no-alternative rationale seems to have been Charles Marshall, who like Taylor served as Lee's aide-de-camp during the Civil War. Marshall was of course a military man. As Lee's aide-de-camp he was far from being a neutral observer, however, and it seems likely that he would be inclined to present his commander – and by extension his own service and even the Confederate war effort as a whole, as per the Lost Cause view – in as favorable a light as possible. Additionally, as we shall see, there is some evidence that some officers-in-training have been offering at least one alternative suggestion to invasion, as we shall see.

### **The traditional no-alternative rationale**

Freeman presents the most commonly-adopted version of the no-alternative rationale. It goes essentially as follows:

1 – The army could not have stayed where it was after Second/Manassas/Bull Run, since the surrounding countryside was largely depleted of sustenance, the railroad bridges over the Rapidan and Rappahannock were destroyed (making supply by train impossible) and the army's wagon supply train was insufficient to keep the army supplied from Richmond.

2 – The army could not go east, because that would have meant moving directly against Washington, and the army was not supplied for a siege.

3 – Going west would bring the army into the Shenandoah Valley. While it would be possible to

supply it there, and the location offered some strategic possibilities, it would also leave Richmond exposed, especially if the army should be forced to retreat.

4 – Withdrawing south to Warrenton would allow for supplies from Richmond, and also leave the army in a position to flank an enemy approaching the Confederate capital from Washington. Even so, it would mean abandoning northern Virginia to possible Union re-occupation, and send a message to the North that the South was too weak to capitalize on its victories.

5 – Going north into Maryland, then, was the only option that offered positive advantage.

All of these statements essentially seem to make sense, with the exception that option 5 was not the sole remaining option. Regarding point 4, though, it bears mentioning that if the Confederates were afraid of being seen as too weak to capitalize on their victory, it might very well be because they actually *were* too weak to do so, having marched and fought for months. Lee seems to admit as much in his Sept 3rd dispatch to Davis, and expands upon the issue in his Sept 7th dispatch.<sup>181</sup> Ignoring that weakness and pushing on regardless would only invite disaster when the bluff was actually called, as Lee seems to have known it must be. In light of that, pushing north could easily be argued as being dangerously irresponsible.

### **Supplementing imperatives**

Among the several "positive advantages" of moving into Maryland, there are two arguments in particular which are often put forward to explain why it was imperative to push into Maryland quickly. These are:

1 – The terrain in northern Virginia is very difficult to maneuver an army in. The terrain in Maryland is still not ideal, but better, and going into Pennsylvania makes maneuvering easier still. Lee was an expert at maneuver warfare, and preferred it to being on the defensive.

2 – Lee had gotten news that the Union troops in Washington had just been reinforced with as many as 60 000 fresh recruits. It was imperative to draw them out from Washington and defeat them in battle before they could be properly trained.<sup>182</sup>

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181 O.R., XIX, II, p. 590-591, 597.

182 Lee himself gives this figure and seems to suggest such a plan of action in his Sept 3rd dispatch to Davis. Ibid.

In regard to the first point, there are several counterpoints that could be made. First, any difficulty Lee would have had in regard to maneuvering in Northern Virginia is one that would necessarily also be shared by any invading enemy force. Difficult terrain would seem to imply that there are many places to which there are limited avenues of approach, which in fact seems ideally suited for a smaller, defending army like the Army of Northern Virginia would likely be. And if Lee was indeed a master of maneuver, he should still be able to put that skill to good use against an enemy not similarly talented. That, combined with greater familiarity of terrain, a friendly local population and a shorter supply line would all seem to be factors playing to Lee's advantage.

Moreover, it really does not seem to matter how skilled a general may be in the art of maneuver warfare if his army is in no condition to take advantage of it. By all accounts, at the time of Second Manassas/Bull Run, Lee's army had already lost several thousand men to straggling, leaving a long wake of exhausted, hungry, sometimes sick and often shoeless men who were simply not able to keep up with the breakneck pace demanded by their commanders. To illustrate with just one example, General Lafayette McLaws' division was down to half strength at the time of the Maryland invasion without having seen any battle at all – it had suffered nearly 50% casualties seemingly from straggling alone. It did not help matters at all that the officer corps had been badly mangled during the summer's fighting, and that units were in desperate need of reorganization as a result. The straggling only increased with the crossing of the Potomac, and collecting stragglers north of the Potomac was risky and cumbersome. By the time of the Battle of Antietam, Lee had already maneuvered his army half to death. A few more weeks of maneuver – and "harassing" the Union army, as he proposed to do, would have meant exactly that – and it seems likely that he would have had no army left. It seems quite reasonable to claim that Lee preferred offensive maneuver warfare, but preference does not equal merit.

To this can be added that despite all of the misgivings some authors give about the suitability of the terrain of northern/north-eastern Virginia for fighting, this is the geographical area in which the Army of Northern Virginia won all of their victories, many of which were fought on the tactical defensive, under Lee's command. The First Battle of Fredericksburg in 1862 and the Battle of Cold Harbor in 1864 were the most decisive among these, although the latter of the two definitely amounted to "too little, too late" at a time when the Confederacy was bleeding dry of manpower and resources in earnest. The Battle of Antietam, which can almost be termed a Confederate success by virtue of escaping near-annihilation, was also fought on the (tactical) defensive.

Regarding the second imperative, the same counterpoint about Confederate straggling applies. The

desire to strike a blow against these green Union recruits before they could be trained is understandable, but counting on a fast disintegrating army of shoeless, starving and exhausted men to do so, veterans though they may be, would seem to offset any advantages that might be had from fighting the enemy early. The most likely result, it seems, would be to trade the lives of Confederate veterans for a roughly proportionate amount of Union fresh recruits, and the Confederacy had far less lives to spend than the Union did. Any hope of catching these green recruits by themselves, unsupported by veteran troops from the Peninsula Campaign, also seems like a far-fetched one.

Lee appears to have earnestly believed in the ability of his troops to withstand any force being sent against it, quoting passages like this one, from the September 7th dispatch he sent to Davis: "[T]he material of which [the army] is composed is the best in the world, and, if properly disciplined and instructed, would be able successfully to resist any force that could be brought against it."<sup>183</sup> He admits in the same dispatch, however, that the army was *not* "properly disciplined". Lee seems to chalk the straggling down to low moral fiber among the troops, and to believe that the creation of a provost guard to keep the men in line would solve most of the problem. While on the one hand he acknowledges the lack of shoes and food as well as the hard marches and labor the men had been subjected to during the summer, he seems convinced that their failure to keep up with the main body of the army (to the degree it could still be called such) was a sign of laziness and cowardice more than exhaustion.

The quoted passage could easily be read as an example of Lee arguing against himself. If his army, "properly disciplined and instructed" could really be counted on to prevail against "any force that could be brought against it", one would think that the *real* imperative course of action would be to promptly go about the task of actually seeing to that discipline and instruction – in essence, to take a page out of McClellan's book. If "any force" could be withstood by a rested, re-organized, re-shod and adequately-fed Army of Northern Virginia, one would think that same force could include another 60 000 drilled and organized but still un-blooded Union soldiers without it making a net detrimental difference. And yet, Lee agonizes in his Sept 3rd dispatch that "we cannot afford to be idle",<sup>184</sup> and all the chroniclers of the campaign nod their heads along with him.

### **Adding to the alternatives**

So, if there really were feasible alternatives to going into Maryland, what were they? The first and

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183 O.R., XIX, II, p. 597

184 O.R., XIX, II, p. 590-591.

easiest reply would be to point at the fourth alternative already given in the list above: Withdrawing south to Warrenton in order to rest and regroup. Most historians discard it on the grounds that it would mean giving up the gains of defeating Popes army and show weakness to the enemy, but inviting the enemy to call that bluff and only narrowly avoiding being wiped out in the process hardly seems a better idea. Nolan readily argues as much,<sup>185</sup> and Krick also agrees that Lee should have drawn back from Maryland once the aggressiveness of the enemy advance was becoming apparent, rather than standing to fight at Antietam.<sup>186</sup> About Lee's oft-praised tactical brilliance during the battle and the ferocity of the Confederate soldiers, he writes: "In a perverse way, the splendid performance of his army highlights the degree to which Lee's determination to fight the battle must be adjudged one of his worst decisions of the war."<sup>187</sup>

Looking closer at the traditional list of possible options, however, there is one detail they all have in common. They are all presented from the basic assumption that whichever option Lee chose to pursue, he would have to do so with a unified army. The options listed are essentially "Stay at Manassas with all the army", "Withdraw to the south with all the army", "Cross into Maryland with all the army", and so on. No option to divide the army and have one part do one thing while another part does something else is among the presented alternatives.

At this point it bears noting that for the Army of Northern Virginia, operating as a single cohesive force was the exception and not the rule, at least during this stage of the war. Lee repeatedly divided his army. He did so in the weeks leading up to Second Manassas/Bull Run, splitting his attention between McClellan and Pope.<sup>188</sup> He did so again during the build-up to that battle, ignoring military maxims cautioning against dividing one's force in the face of the enemy.<sup>189</sup> He would do so yet again during the Maryland Campaign, while operating inside enemy territory.<sup>190</sup> And even before Lee was appointed to command, the army was still divided during the spring of 1862, when Jackson campaigned in the Shenandoah Valley while Johnston tried to delay McClellan's advance toward Richmond.<sup>191</sup> There seems to be no conceivable reason at all why Lee could not have divided his army within the relative safety of a Virginia all but cleared of Union troops, with a presumedly disorganized and demoralized enemy hiding behind the fortifications of Washington.

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185 Nolan (1991), p. 91-92.

186 Gallagher, ed (1989), p. 54.

187 Ibid., p. 52.

188 McPherson (1988), p. 525.

189 Ibid., p. 526.

190 Ibid., p. 536.

191 Ibid., 454-460.

Any new alternative added to the list would then necessarily involve the division of the Army of Northern Virginia. The only one of the texts studied here that suggests such a thing is Murfin's *Gleam of Bayonets*. Murfin points out that a part of Lee's army could be sent west in order to assist the Confederate offensive taking place in Kentucky. Ironically, the main thing which leads Murfin to discard this option is the fact that McClellan was "back in command" – a fact of which Lee was not aware, as pointed out by Harsh.<sup>192</sup><sup>193</sup> The same idea is mentioned in an essay by Carol Reardon titled *From Antietam to the Argonne*, which examines the ways in which the Maryland Campaign has been used by the US Army War College. One of the students mentioned in the essay was of the opinion that if Lee had sent 25 000 men to aid Bragg in Kentucky, utilizing the interior lines enjoyed by the Confederacy, the tide would almost certainly have turned in Bragg's favor.<sup>194</sup> Reardon does not mention what reception this suggestion was met with from the instructors, but it is clear throughout the essay that Lee's decisions in general through the Maryland Campaign have been met with a lot of criticism from War College students and instructors alike.

Another possible option could have been to withdraw the bulk of the army to Warrenton, but to leave behind at Manassas as large a body of troops as could be supplied by the wagon train to discourage any Union reoccupation of northern Virginia – hoping for the reconstruction of the Rapidan and Rappahannock railroad bridges quickly enough to solve the supply problem and reinforce those troops before the Union could mount another thrust against Richmond. Even if Federal troops were to engage this force, it could conceivably mount a fighting retreat south past Warrenton, where the by then hopefully rested and regrouped main body of the Army of Northern Virginia would be able to assault the Union flank.

A third option could be to, again, pull the main body of troops back toward Warrenton, but send a force to capture or force the evacuations of the garrisons of Martinsburg and Harper's Ferry – like the Confederates would do during the Maryland Campaign in any case. The same forces could be used for the purpose, commanded by Jackson, McLaws and Walker, necessitating only a slight penetration into Maryland by the infantry in order to capture the Maryland Heights across the river from Harper's Ferry – or not even that, if the garrison's escape across the river was not seen to be a concern. Stuart's cavalry could conceivably penetrate some farther distance into Maryland to screen the infantry on the Maryland side from attack, and although such a screen would perhaps not be as solid as the forces fighting the delaying actions at South Mountain during the actual campaign, the enemy would perhaps have been less quick to approach with no "Lost Special Order" spurring them

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192 Murfin (1965/2004), p. 63-64

193 Harsh (1999), p. 79.

194 Gallagher, ed. (1999), p. 297.

on. It would mean that a sudden Union thrust south from Washington would keep the two Confederate forces apart, and perhaps be able to fall on the reforming army near Warrenton before troops could have been brought back from Harper's Ferry to assist, but that is a flaw similar to what the campaign as it unfolded turned out to have anyway. And besides, the Confederates would have every reason to believe that the Federals would need more time than that to reform.

A fourth alternative could be to again leave the main body of the army at Warrenton, and send a force west into the Shenandoah Valley to create and exploit opportunities there.

A fifth could be to concentrate all the infantry at Warrenton, but send most of the cavalry north to raid in Pennsylvania, destroying railroad bridges and cutting telegraph wires and disrupting the communications between Washington and the western Union armies – and possibly also capturing much-needed supplies for the army at home.

None of these suggested options would provide the same "positive advantages" that could conceivably be gained by crossing the Potomac. They would not have served to encourage any general uprising in Maryland, and they would not necessarily have kept the Union forces occupied north of the Potomac throughout the harvest. It would also mean continuing to subsist the army on Southern supplies, rather than on Maryland produce which would otherwise have gone to support the enemy. And it would not have permitted an offer of peace from a position of strength, as Lee had hoped to do. But it would have allowed for better preservation of the army, and hopefully allowed it to meet the enemy on better terms, like it did in December at Fredericksburg and in April-May of 1863 at Chancellorsville. Incidentally it would also have denied Lincoln the victory he needed to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, but of course Lee could not have known that.

These suggestions are admittedly those of an armchair general only. They are not necessarily militarily sound. But then again, neither are the "non-alternatives" already outlined by so many studies – and neither, as this chapter has hopefully successfully argued, was the decision that Lee actually did take, which historians have been so eager to label as the only reasonable option. The new alternatives listed here might not hold up under critical scrutiny, but they do at least *deserve* a critical scrutiny before being discarded, and a place among the other "non-alternatives".

**Chapter 5: Even New York – The Maryland Campaign in popular history and historical fiction**

While the depiction of the Maryland Campaign in popular history and historical fiction is not the focus of this thesis, it does deserve some mention. It should first be noted that drawing the line between popular and professional history in the case of the Civil War is not always easy. There is an abundance of research done by amateur historians, many of whose studies are used prolifically as sources by professional historians in their work. If the author's education determines where the line is drawn, half of the texts examined in this thesis, and certainly all of the texts produced by Civil War veterans, would fall under the heading of popular history. Conversely, the public interest in the Civil War is large enough that certain publications made by professional historians draw the attention of huge audiences. If the line is to be drawn on the basis of the audience reached, both Freeman's *R. E. Lee* and James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom* would be considered popular history. Articles for popular magazines would count as popular history by default, but as previously mentioned, are typically written by professional historians who have already published books or essays on the topic, and are unlikely to reflect any significantly different views. There are, however, a few TV documentaries made in the last few decades which touch on the Maryland Campaign. Although these typically feature commentaries by professional historians, the overarching narrative is often not. Two such documentaries will be examined to see if and, if applicable, how they differ from the studies examined in this paper.

There is a considerable amount of historical fiction relating to the Civil War, both in writing and on the screen. The themes explored in such fiction are mostly sentimental in nature, however, and rarely touch on the strategic dilemmas confronting the leaders of the war. There are exceptions, among which the most well-known is probably Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels*, a novelization of the Battle of Gettysburg, as well as the recent movie *Lincoln*, which explores the circumstances around the passing of the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution during the final days of the war. So far, the Maryland Campaign and Antietam has been severely underrepresented in fiction. It has almost not been explored at all in movie fiction. This is puzzling given that the battlefield of Antietam has been kept meticulously in the state that it was at the time of the battle (presumably making it usable for a movie set), and that the actual historical battle certainly fulfills all the criteria for drama that a Hollywood production could want – to the point of featuring a last-minute heroic charge by the last Confederate division to appear on the field late in the day. Confederate general A.P. Hill force-marched his men 17 miles from Harper's Ferry, and appeared at exactly the right time and place to save the rapidly crumbling Confederate right flank, throw the attacking Union soldiers back and in all likelihood, saving the Army of Northern Virginia from destruction.

Although under-explored on a whole, Lee's decision to enter Maryland features briefly in Jeff Shaara's *Gods and Generals*, which he wrote as a prequel to his father's *The Killer Angels*. Like the case was with his father's novel, *Gods and Generals* was also filmatized, but the movie *Gods and Generals* skips right past the Maryland Campaign entirely. Also, a novelization of the Maryland Campaign was published quite recently, in May 2012 – no doubt to take advantage of any boost to sales the sesquicentennial of the campaign may have offered. It is written by James Osterhaus and titled *Antietam – A Harvest of Blood*.

## TV documentaries

### *The Civil War*, by Ken Burns (dir.)

*The Civil War* by Ken Burns is probably the best-known TV documentary series about the Civil War. It was released in 1990 and narrates the course of the war through 11 hours and 9 episodes total. The series has won several awards, including Emmy and TCA Awards and, according to IMDb, "broke all previous ratings records for public TV."<sup>195</sup> It includes expert commentary from several historians and noted authors on the topic of the Civil War, such as Edwin Bearss and Shelby Foote, and is narrated by David McCullough. The writers are Ken Burns, Ric Burns and Geoffrey Ward.<sup>196</sup>

The subject of the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Antietam is featured in the third episode of the series, titled *Forever Free*. The specter of Confederate independence is a constant theme throughout the episode, with considerable attention given to the Cotton Famine in conjunction with European diplomacy, to Lincoln's draft, preparation and eventual presentation of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and to the far-reaching consequences this had for the rest of the war. Chief among those consequences, of course, was the redirection of the nature of the war into a fight about slavery, and what this meant for both American society and for the prospects of European recognition of the South.<sup>197</sup>

This is of course a theme that fits well within the view of historical contingency, with the course of history hanging in the balance. The Confederates are presented as having earnestly believed that they would be well-received in Maryland – a conclusion certainly supported by some researchers.

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195 IMDb - Ken Burns - Biography. Available at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0122741/bio>

196 IMDb - *The Civil War* (1990) - Available at [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098769/fullcredits?ref\\_=tt\\_cl\\_sm#cast](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0098769/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast)

197 Burns (1990) *The Civil War*, Ep. 3: *Forever Free*.

Lee's military objective is presented as being the invasion of Pennsylvania in search of a final, decisive victory for the Confederacy, which he hoped to find at Harrisburg – the target indicated by Walker in his discredited account. The makers of the series can certainly be forgiven for this argument, since the series was made previous to Harsh's critical re-evaluation of Walker. However, there is one piece of narrative which can not. After briefly referencing the opening of Lee's Sept 3rd dispatch to Davis, the narrator goes on: "One more successful campaign, [Lee] wrote Jefferson Davis, would force Europe to recognize the Confederacy."<sup>198</sup> Lee, of course, never wrote such a thing. Some historians certainly held the opinion that European recognition factored into Lee's plans, but unless Burns was in possession of some very interesting piece of new evidence, placing those words directly into Lee's mouth (or pen) in such a way is intellectually dishonest. It is historical fiction presented as truth, to a very large audience.

*Ten Days That Unexpectedly Changed America – Antietam*, by Michael Epstein (dir.)

A more recent and (by episode) narrowly-focused TV documentary series in which the Maryland Campaign has been featured is the first episode of Michael Epstein's 2006 series named *Ten Days That Unexpectedly Changed America*. Like Burns' series, it features commentary by several historians and authors, including such an authority on the campaign as Gary Gallagher. It is narrated by Jeffrey Wright and written and directed by Epstein himself.<sup>199</sup>

Just like Burns' Civil War, Epstein's Antietam documentary is firmly placed within a "historical contingency" understanding of the campaign – as could be supposed from the title of the series alone. The narrator states outright that Union victory was far from inevitable in the summer and early fall of 1862, and that some Northerners even perceived victory as unattainable. The primary purpose of Lee's invasion, Gallagher comments, was to impress upon the Northern civilian population that the war "wasn't worth it". This is followed up with a comment by David Blight, who states that "Lee [was] not unaware of the possibility of British intervention".<sup>200</sup> This comment by Blight, while technically true, is not unproblematic in the context in which it is given. Lee was certainly aware that efforts were being made to win European recognition, but as previously noted, there are no primary sources suggesting that this actually factored into his invasion plans, and he certainly wasn't privy to the communication going on between and within the French and British governments at the time. The average listener will however be likely to believe that diplomatic

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198 Ibid.

199 IMDb - Ten Days That Unexpectedly Changed America - Antietam (2006). Available at [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0775548/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_2](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0775548/?ref_=fn_al_tt_2)

200 Epstein (2006), Ten Days That Unexpectedly Changed America - Antietam.

recognition was one of Lee's invasion goals, from the way in which this documentary is presented. This might have been more excusable if the documentary was made before or even right after Harsh's study, but it was made several years later, and the creators and contributors should have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with his new research on the topic. Whether the fault in this presentation lies with Blight or with the way in which he has been edited is hard to say at a glance.

Like the episode of Burns' series discussed above, the questions of intervention, independence and emancipation are strong themes throughout this documentary. Curiously, Gallagher, judging by his commentary, comes across as believing quite strongly in the possibility of European recognition of the Confederacy during the fall of 1862. This seems to be at odds with the conclusions he arrives at in his essay titled *Season of Opportunity*, examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Whether this impression is due to a genuine shift of opinion on Gallagher's part or caused by the editing is, again, hard to tell for sure.

The documentary goes on to claim that Lee never intended to fight a battle in Maryland, but intended to press on into Pennsylvania, and was halted at Sharpsburg by events outside of his control. No obvious reference to Walker's account is given, but of course, the claim that Lee intended to press into Pennsylvania is a rather tenuous one given that the only solid evidence of such is Lee's mention of the possibility of doing so in his Sept 4th dispatch to Davis. And while Lee's adventure into Maryland may indeed be said to have been checked by events beyond his control, the strong implication that he was forced to make a stand at Sharpsburg is misleading to say the least. He could have retreated back into Virginia instead, had he chosen to do so.

## **Historical Fiction**

### *Gods and Generals*, by Jeff Shaara

As implied above, *Gods and Generals* is a novelization of the first part of the American Civil War, published in 1996. It begins as early as November 1858 and stretches up to the days immediately before the Battle of Gettysburg. The narrative is written from the points of view of a handful of characters (switching the point of view with every chapter), among them Confederate generals Lee and Jackson. It was written as a prequel to Mike Shaara's novel *The Killer Angels*, which was published in 1974.

Shaara presents the Confederate plans of invasion through a fictitious conversation taking place between Lee, Jackson and Longstreet in the wake of their victory at Second Manassas/Bull Run. During this conversation, Shaara has Lee put forward the need to feed the army as the most pressing concern weighing on him. He has Lee present a variation of the no-alternative rationale, in which Lee argues that only one real alternative to invading Maryland exists, and that is to go west into the Shenandoah Valley and leave Northern Virginia exposed. To this obvious disadvantage, Shaara has Lee add that doing so would probably displease Davis (probably true, since it would expose Richmond, too!), and also that it might greatly damage "the morale of the people". Curiously, this last remark Shaara puts in Lee's mouth seems to echo Murfin's otherwise never-again-repeated suggestion that (Southern) public opinion played a significant part in Lee's decision to go north. Shaara's Lee is reasonably sober in his assessments of the Marylanders, hoping only for hospitality and some volunteers from among them, not full-scale revolution. He is all the more optimistic in his invasion plans however, and speaks about "threatening destruction against Northern cities, Philadelphia, even New York" – the boldest plan yet attributed to Lee by any writer! Finally, Shaara has Lee plan the capture of Harper's Ferry already at that point, while the army was still in Virginia – leaving the question of how McClellan got hold of Lee's orders a completely open one.<sup>201</sup>

Grand plans about pouncing upon New York and unreasonably lost Lost Orders aside, Shaara's reinterpretation of the event seems a decent one for having been written in 1996, before Harsh's study. It is a little curious that Shaara's Lee mentions nothing about foreign diplomacy (given that the idea of this factoring into Lee's decisions was still in favor at the time), but unintended or not, in hindsight it is at worst an error on the side of accuracy. As a scene in a novel it seems to work as intended. It bears noting, however, that there are plenty of Civil War histories that almost read like novels while still staying faithful to the sources, or at least attempting to do so. In light of that, such novelization of Civil War command seems redundant, and perhaps that is why we don't see more of it – as opposed to for example romantic dramas like *Gone With The Wind* and *Cold Mountain*.

#### *Antietam: A Harvest of Blood*, by James Osterhaus

We do, however, see one more example of such a novel in regard to the Maryland Campaign. Published in May 2012 and given an appropriately ominous title, this book by James Osterhaus seems strategically published at such a time as to take full advantage of the sesquicentennial of the Maryland Campaign and Antietam. This is not necessarily a sign of poor quality, as Scott Hartwig's excellent and even more strategically-timed study shows. Osterhaus' book *is* unfortunately a very

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201 Shaara (1996), p. 240-243.

poor piece of writing, however – and worse, in light of when it was published, highly outdated in its research.

Like Shaara, Osterhaus decides to use a fictitious conversation between Lee, Jackson and Longstreet through which to convey the goals of the campaign to the reader. He decides to have this scene take place inside Maryland, at the Confederate headquarters near Frederick. It is obvious that Osterhaus has done a bit of research, because he has managed to dig up almost every motive ever ascribed to Lee's decision to enter Maryland – and decided to use them all uncritically in his own depiction of Lee. Osterhaus' Lee wants to feed his army on Maryland's crops; urge a general uprising in Maryland; influence Northern morale and with it, the elections; draw the Federals out from Washington with the intent to smash them; secure diplomatic recognition and even intervention from Britain – and of course, invade Pennsylvania, capture Harrisburg and destroy the railroad bridge across the Susquehanna, because he can read McClellan's mind and knows the Union general will be cautious about following. Osterhaus has his Lee recite long passages of Walker's account verbatim. And he goes even farther still, by presenting the reader with a fantasy that Lee allowed every barefooted soldier to stay behind on the Virginia side as the army crossed the Potomac. Fiction or not, the research underpinning the book is far too weak for anything written in 2012.<sup>202</sup>

The way in which he portrays the generals is a blatant pandering to old Lost Cause sensibilities, depicting Lee as a fatherly, noble and downright saintly man; Jackson as a socially inept eccentric who is brave and loyal but would be hopelessly lost without Lee's guiding, benevolent hand; and Longstreet as a tactically gifted yet obstinate subordinate who doesn't know his place. It is, overall, a poor piece of writing, and all it seems to teach of value is that Lost Cause romanticism, though largely driven from scholarly circles, is still alive among the larger public.

## **Chapter analysis**

There is not much to say in the conclusion of this chapter, except to note that every production mentioned here shows signs of either poor research or (in the case of the fiction) unwarranted fabrication of facts. The selection is perhaps too small to fairly be called representative, although Burns' TV series and Shaara's book have both certainly reached wide audiences.

Popular history, though looser in form than scholarly studies, still needs to found its presentation on

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202 Osterhaus (2012), Kindle Location 576-793.

solid research. Historical fiction does not share that same responsibility, but if it is founded on poor research, that usually does not count in its favor, especially not if the distorted view of history it presents is taken by its readers (or viewers) as the truth. Just like Walker's account can be criticised for being fiction masquerading as history, books such as Osterhaus' can be viewed as poor history masquerading as fiction so as to avoid scholarly censure. It is not at all surprising that books like his continue to be published today, but it is discouraging.

## Conclusion: Ambiguity Is Long

A hundred and fifty years after the scarecrow soldiers of Robert E. Lee chased their dreams of independence across the Potomac into Maryland in 1862, those fourteen days of Confederate feet on Union soil continue to stand as one of the most intriguing and captivating events of American history. The story of the Maryland Campaign is a powerful one, grander in its details than most epic fiction could ever hope to be. It features a starving and exhausted but victorious army pushing beyond its limits into enemy territory. It features a bold and risky plan by that army's commander to divide his forces, in order to capture an enemy garrison behind them. It features the plans of that risky maneuver accidentally falling into the hands of the enemy. It features a desperate scramble by the endangered army to pull together before the enemy army is upon them. It features a defiant stand against overwhelming odds, with their backs to the river and nowhere to run. It features a giant battle in three acts during a long and terrible day, the bloodiest in American history, giving names to landmarks that linger on to this day: The Cornfield, Bloody Lane, Burnside's Bridge. It features a moment of despair when a whole flank of the army is crumbling before the enemy charge. It features a miracle – when all hope seems lost, the last missing portion of the army, after covering seventeen miles at a run, arrives at just the right moment and in just the right place to smash into the flank of the enemy charge, throwing it back in a rout and saving the entire army from annihilation. More than anything else, it features history hanging in the balance. The independence of a nation weighed against the freedom of four million people.

Who could avoid falling in love with such a story? It is no wonder that anyone immersing themselves in this mesmerizing narrative of actual events seem to find a sense of destiny in it, a sense that this great, pivotal moment in history, where everything hung in the balance, was itself inevitable. Looking back through the lens of history, there is a strong appeal to the idea that while the final chapters of the story could easily have had a different end than they did, the story itself was still somehow *there* even before it happened, *waiting* to be written in gunpowder and blood.

If anything, it is a wonder that it does not feature more strongly in American imagination and American identity. Perhaps there is still a significant number of people who believe that the outcome of the war was inevitable, and that no matter how the story of the Maryland Campaign had ended, it would not have significantly altered the course of history. If that is the case, it is easy to see why those fourteen days in 1862 have been so frequently overlooked in favor of other events of the war. If the war was going to end the way it did in any case, if the South was going to lose no matter what, and the end of slavery was inevitable, the Maryland Campaign quickly fades into insignificance. To such minds, it must seem like an inconclusive offensive leading to a bloody but equally inconclusive battle and concluding with an inconclusive aftermath that left both sides roughly at where they had started a year and a half before. Better, then, to look for meaning in the events that seem to carry the momentum of inevitability within them. Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. Sherman's March to the Sea. But those eyes which refuse to see inevitability, that keep searching for that alluring, elusive "may have been", though not blind to Gettysburg or Atlanta, will always return to linger on that hopeful, agonizing, desperate, heart-breaking September when history itself seemed to hold its breath.

When James Murfin brushed the dust off this long-neglected story in 1965, he wrote about this story in his foreword: "This student makes no claims to solving its mysteries", nor did he intend to discourage others who wished to "quench their thirst". "Should this work do little more than arouse interest in one of the most beautiful of our historic shrines," he wrote, "then the mission will be fulfilled." He succeeded in his mission.

Just like Murfin fifty years ago, this student makes no pretense of having solved the mysteries before him. I have looked at the solutions proposed by others, often critically, perhaps often erroneously too. I have also tried to look beyond them, deeper into the "may have been", to find the mysteries they *don't* attempt to solve. The solutions themselves are a mystery of their own, and my answers are by no means final. Like Harsh so aptly put it, a proclamation of finality is escape, not understanding.

The mission of this work, then, is to invite other readers of the story to look even deeper into the "may have been". To take a new and different look at the story leading up to the story, and perhaps discover that *every* moment in history, to some degree, is pivotal. To look beyond the no-alternative rationale and perhaps find that the story of the Maryland Campaign, for all its dramatic appeal, was not the only option, but one alternative among many.

Ambiguity is long.

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## Sammendrag

Dette er en historiografisk oppgave som studerer ettertidens tolkninger av General Robert E. Lees avgjørelse om å føre hæren sin inn i Maryland i september 1862 under den amerikanske borgerkrigen, i det som i ettertid er blitt kalt en invasjon av Nordstatene. Oppgaven tar mål av seg å kritisk beskrive, sammenligne og bedømme hvilke faktorer sentrale historieforfattere (både amatører og utdannede historikere) vektlegger i sin forståelse av Lees avgjørelse.

Publikasjonsdatoen på tekstene som oppgaven studerer strekker seg fra 1867 til 2012.

Kildeanalysene er inndelt i to hovedkapitler. I tillegg blir det tatt en liten kikk på TV-historie og historisk fiksjon vedrørende emne i et delt kapittel. I hvert av hovedkapitlene analyseres først hver tekst separat før de settes inn i en større historisk sammenheng i en samlet kapittelanalyse.

Opgaven tolker tekstene inn i to ulike historiske perspektiver som har hatt mye å si for ettertidens forståelse av den amerikanske borgerkrigen. Det første av disse er "Lost Cause"-perspektivet, et generelt sørstatsvennlig historisk perspektiv som mange historikere både i nord og sør valgte å støtte – sørstatshistorikerne for å gi mening til nederlaget, nordstatshistorikerne for å muliggjøre en nasjonal forsoning etter krigen. "Lost Cause" eller "Tapt Sak"-doktrinen erkjente at Sørstatene var dømt til å tape krigen, men fremstilte den likevel som en heltmodig om enn håpløs kamp mot overmakten. Tekstene som analyseres i kapittel 2, som strekker seg fra 1860-årene til slutten av 1950-tallet tolkes i stor grad inn i dette historieperspektivet.

Det andre perspektivet som har hatt mye å si for borgerkrigshistorien og kanskje spesielt Maryland-felttoget er "Historical Contingency"-perspektivet, som kan oversettes til "Historisk Betinging" eller kanskje aller helst "Vendepunkts-perspektivet". Dette perspektivet avviser ideen om historisk

predestinasjon, og leter etter vendepunkt i historien, hvor historiens gang hadde muligheten til å ledes i flere forskjellige retninger. Maryland-felttoget er spesielt interessant for historikere som foretrekker dette perspektivet: De mener at Maryland-felttoget var et slikt vendepunkt hvor to nasjoners skjebne hvilte på avgjørelsene og handlingene til et fåtall mennesker. De fleste tekstene i kapittel 3, med publikasjonsdatoer fra 1960-tallet og utover, faller inn i denne kategorien. Kapittelanalysen prøver også å gi en forklaring på samspillet – eller motsetningene – mellom disse perspektivene, og hvordan det kan ha seg at vendepunktsperspektivet har vunnet frem på bekostning av Lost Cause-perspektivet de siste tiårene. Kapittelanalysen sier også noe om et fenomen begge disse perspektivene tradisjonelt har latt være å studere nøyere – det såkalte "no-alternative rationale" eller "null-alternativs"-ideen.

Kapittel 4 retter et kritisk blikk mot dette "null-alternativet", som er hypotesen om at Lee ikke hadde reelle alternativer til å invadere Maryland i 1862. Kapittelet tar mål av seg å dekonstruere dette argumentet, og fremlegger nye alternativer til vurdering.

I kapittel 5 tas det en kort kikk på og kritikk av populærhistoriske TV-dokumentarer og historisk fiksjon som berører Maryland-felttoget som tema. Disse sammenlignes opp mot og kritiseres på grunnlag av forskningslitteraturen som var tilgjengelig da de ble publisert. Utvalget av undersøkelsesobjekter er ikke stort, men noen av dem har nådd ut til et stort publikum, som gjør dem representative til en viss grad.

Endelig oppsummeres oppgaven med en oppfordring til spesielt "vendepunkts-historikere" om å åpne seg enda mer for mulige historiske vendepunkter, også på mindre skala. Oppgaven føyer seg dermed inn i rekken av vendepunkts-orienterte studier, om enn med en intensjon om å promotere en ide om at historiske vendepunkter ikke behøver å være like monumentale som det Maryland-felttoget ofte hevdes å være.