Colonel Richard Owen Bust (Indianapolis, Indiana)

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In downtown Indianapolis, tucked between the State Budget Agency and the Clerk of Courts office at the Indiana Statehouse is a bronze bust of a man, Colonel Richard Owen, bearing the lines: “Tribute by Confederate Prisoners of War and Their Friends.” Is this statue a Confederate monument? The answer is a complicated one.

In 1913, nearly fifty years after the Civil War, Sumner Archibald Cunningham, a Confederate veteran, put out an appeal for donations in the January issue of his magazine, *The Confederate Veteran*. “Friends of the South and of the Confederates who suffered in prison,” he wrote, “this is the best opportunity to demonstrate your appreciation of a man who knew the Southern people and treated prisoners as fellow men and with an eye single to the hereafter.” Cunningham was appealing for the creation of a monument to Union Colonel Richard Owen. By donating, he suggested, readers of his magazine could overcome their own memories of prisoner of war camps. Memorialization, he argued, could be a form of healing. While Owen had died twenty three years earlier, Cunningham, now 70 years old and living in Nashville, Tennessee, had been just 19 years old when he was imprisoned in Camp Morton, Indiana, under Colonel Owen.

The prison camp system started almost as soon as the war began. Initially, camps held a prisoner of war until a soldier of a similar rank was captured by the opposing side and he could be exchanged. By 1863, though, the exchange system broke down as the Confederacy refused to trade Black captives equally with white prisoners. The population of the camps swelled. About 674,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were imprisoned during the course of the war, or about 18% of enlisted men. More than 150 camps existed across the eastern U.S., although today we often only remember the most notorious Confederate Camps, such as Andersonville in Georgia. As the National Park Service notes, around 61,000 men died in the camps, North and South. After the war, images of emaciated and deformed camp survivors became one of the most enduring legacies and horrific symbols of the atrocities of the war in the national memory.

Richard Owen ran Camp Morton differently, though. Born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, a small town about 45 minutes south of Glasgow, Owen’s father,

COLONEL RICHARD OWEN BUST (INIDANAPOLIS, IN)

Robert Owen, was a noted social reformer, and in 1824 packed up the small fortune from his textile mill and moved to Indiana with his sons. Here, in New Harmony, Indiana, he established the Owenite Community, a utopian experiment founded on socialist principles, or in Owen's words, the creation of a "New Moral World." After two years, however, the community dissolved and Robert Owen returned to London. The principles of self-sufficiency, though, he imparted to his son.

When the Civil War broke out at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Richard Owen had been working as the first Indiana State Geologist. Like over two million others who enlisted in the Union army, Owen responded to the federal government's call for troops and would lead the 15th and 60th Indiana Volunteers over the course of his army career. He was 50 years old at the time of his enlistment. Eventually, in February 1862, he was assigned to Camp Morton in Indianapolis. Camp Morton had originally been a Union training camp. Locals were mesmerized. On one Sunday in April 1861, an estimated ten thousand visitors, in "carriages of the best people of the town" came up the dusty dirt road to watch the Union troops in training. Nobody expected the war to last long. Yet by 1862, the camp was converted to hold captured Confederate soldiers, Cunningham among them. But at Camp Morton, Owen adopted philosophies from his father's utopian project to allow prisoners to visit comrades in the hospital, buy magazines, and form glee clubs, as well as an Ethiopian minstrel group, who would likely have performed in Blackface for the soldiers. Some contemporaries would have recognized this as a racist form of entertainment, but its inclusion in a Union camp offers us some insight into the cultural continuities that existed between northern and southern treatments of African Americans, despite the efforts of northern abolitionists. To circumvent the food shortages that hit the North during the war's latter half, soldiers baked their own bread in an onsite bakery. The money saved bought Confederate prisoners stamps and stationery for letters home. In April 1862, however, Owen and the 60th Volunteers were removed over concerns of "leniency" despite a petition from camp inmates.

Owen's humanity was not forgotten. From the early 1890s, in a lofty brick building at 810 Broadway on the corner of 9th Street in Nashville, the Methodist Publishing House was printing evermore copies of Cunningham's *Confederate Veteran*. Begun in 1893 to raise money for a Jefferson Davis monument (eventually erected in Richmond, Virginia, in 1907), the magazine's initial print run consisted of only 5,000 copies. It was kept afloat by funding from prominent veterans' organizations and, as the magazine described its personal donors – who varied in military rank and social standing – "approved and indorsed officially by a larger and more elevated patronage, doubtless, than any other publication in existence." By 1900, the magazine boasted more than 20,000 subscribers. In 1911, when Cunningham decided to construct a monument to Richard Owen, he raised $1,500 (about $50,000 today) from its

readers. Many donations came from veterans of prisoner of war camps. Contributions ranged from fifty cents donated by a "Mrs. Allen Johnson" in Stilwell, Oklahoma, to $110.00 from a "Col. V. Y. Cook" in Batesville, Arkansas. Donations came from as far as New York City and Pasadena, California. That so many donated demonstrates the way in which monument creation could offer itself as a form of healing and ease the ideological boundaries between North and South, even as it sought to remember the conflict about fifty years after the war's close.

Cunningham wasn't new to crowdfunding monuments. By 1871, he had bought and edited a slew of newspapers across the South before becoming a journalist in New York City. Cunningham returned south as a correspondent for *The Nashville American*. By now, he was an established 'representative of the South', as some newspapers in the North referred to him. When a New York newspaper reported in 1889 that Cunningham had attended a "Centennial Celebration," for the U.S. Constitution, it described him as "an impulsive Southerner and a Democrat" and "a Confederate soldier." Thus in 1891 as fundraising plans unfolded for a monument to Jefferson Davis, first and only president of the Confederacy, Cunningham became the General Collector of the project. "Every town and city in the South should give liberally," declared a newspaper in Columbus, Georgia. "Everybody can give something, and every little helps," another article pleaded. As the newspapers reported his work, "*Mr.* S. A. Cunningham" became "*Capt.*" As fundraising efforts reinvigorated the memory of the Confederate war effort. Thus in 1893, when Cunningham founded the *Confederate Veteran*, it was "to be an auxiliary in maintaining and arousing interest in the Jefferson Davis memorial project, and…committed to a cause that should and will illustrate the undying devotion of the living to the memories of the dead."

That statue of Jefferson Davis which Cunningham helped erect in Richmond, Virginia in 1907, was toppled by protesters during the Black Lives Matter protests almost 100 years later in 2020 and subsequently removed. This is a part of the reckoning with the legacies of the "Lost Cause," or the interpretation of the Civil War which emerged among white Southerners during the political, social, and economic upheaval of the war's aftermath. Emphasizing that the war was fought over secession, not slavery, that the South lost to the North's superior manufacturing and manpower, and that enslaved Black Americans were "faithful" to their masters and unprepared for freedom, its obfuscation of historical facts has lent to its characterization as a myth and legend by scholars. In 1898, for his work on the Davis monument, a newspaper in Dallas, Texas, declared Cunningham "a gallant soldier of the 'Lost Cause.'"

But the Richard Owen monument speaks to a more complicated side of this narrative: reconciliation. The year the Richard Owen bust was unveiled in 1913 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. Speaking in 1913 at the battleground, President Woodrow Wilson instructed Americans that "We are made by these tragic, epic things to know what it costs to make a nation—the blood and sacrifice of…men lifted to a great stature in the view of all generations by knowing no limit to their manly willingness to serve." In the rhetoric of reconciliation, the U.S. Civil War became an *American* and masculinized war where vigor was displayed by both sides. Wilson alluded to the war's legacy of emancipation only briefly, stating that "a government had now at last been established which was to serve men, not masters," and the continuing project of "righteous peace." Yet at a time often referred to as the "Progressive Era," Wilson avoided speaking directly of the tension surrounding slavery and abolition which started the conflict. The vagueness of Wilson's speech suggests the unresolved and uneasy place of slavery and racism in the rhetoric of reconciliation.

As historian David Blight has argued, reconciliation, too, reframed the narrative of the Civil War. Memories of bitter fights over slavery, the active participation of Black Americans, and the promise of emancipation were subsumed by narratives which allowed for the unification of white memory at the cost of Black memories of the war. Indeed, the second issue of the *Confederate Veteran* in 1894 had above its title the words "Patriotic and Progressive." In 1897 and 1898, a cover page reformatting saw the epithet change to "fidelity–patriotism–progress". By 1899, though, the attachment to progress was gone. We can't be too sure why the *Confederate Veteran* gained and lost the word "progress" but it suggests the magazine's growing devotion to the past and its divergence from mainstream conceptions of "progress".

Cunningham even seemingly rejected the terms "Lost Cause" and "New South." In 1904, the inside front page of the magazine explained to potential contributors that "The *civil* war was too long ago to be called the *late* war." The magazine would substitute, "War between the States."[6] But in 1905, a line was added to that statement: "The terms 'New South' and 'lost cause' are objectionable to the Veteran." It is possible that Cunningham, like other Southern elites, objected to the abandonment of Southern aristocracy in the term 'New South'. In the 'New South,' an idea coined by Atlanta newspaper writer Henry Grady, racial hierarchy would be maintained even as the plantation system gave way to a model of industrialization based on that of the North. Prominent Black leader Booker T. Washington supported the 'New South' as a practical replacement of the aristocracy of the antebellum plantation system. Every subsequent *Confederate Veteran* issue stated opposition to the terms 'Lost Cause' and 'New South' until Cunningham's death in 1913, at which point Edith

Pope of the United Daughters of the Confederacy took over. In 1914, the magazine's inside cover read, "The Veteran is the best advertising medium for the entire South," altogether avoiding any controversy over the terms and their unreconciled visions for the future of the South.

Cunningham himself had a history with reconciliation. In 1889, the same article which mentioned Cunningham at the Centennial Celebration mentioned a letter he had sent to President Benjamin Harrison, a Union veteran. Following the appointment of Harrison's brother to the United States Marshalship for Middle Tennessee, Tennessee democrats had "raised such a howl" over his appointment. Cunningham wrote instead "to let him know of the Confederate soldiers' kindly sentiment toward those who fought for the Union. I was a prisoner for six months in General Harrison's city, Indianapolis…where he was promoted for gallantry. I…said in my letter that I believed those who were acquainted with Carter Harrison in Tennessee, regardless of party, would be gratified if he would give him a good appointment." After all, Cunningham knew Carter Harrison well: "He is a worthy, good man," he wrote.

Looking at the bust of Richard Owen, we can see the rhetoric of reconciliation materialized in bronze, and in the creative rendering of the statue itself. When it came time to select an artist for the monument, Cunningham settled on Belle Kinney, a young woman who had recently earned fame in the newspapers for her statue erected in Nashville, Tennessee, on behalf of the U.D.C. commemorating the "women of the 'Lost Cause.'" Kinney was only twenty-two years old but after an Italian sculptor's proposed depiction of Southern women as "militant," "Amazon figures" sparked umbrage among the U.D.C., Kinney's soft "Goddess of Fame," depicted cradling a wounded Confederate soldier, provided a necessary balm. When she came to the bust of Richard Owen, Kinney, likewise, took conscious care in her representation: "I am anxious that it be handsome and unusually attractive," she said, "as it will be placed in a Northern city and must speak for us." In 1913, she informed the press that "it was my aim to portray such a man as he might look while pondering over the meaning of the great struggle […] his sympathetic heart touched by the suffering it caused, yet realizing its necessity." Kinney's conception of reconciliation betrays a similar sense of ambiguity to Cunningham's. Herself the daughter of a Confederate veteran, she desired to portray Owen in a way which both demonstrated the white South's ability to see a Union veteran as "handsome," at the same time as asserting the right of the Confederacy and its recognition of the war's "necessity." While Cunningham had returned to Nashville, Kinney, lived in New York as Cunningham once had. During the monument's creation, Kinney displayed the bust at her studio at 61 Fifth Avenue with help from the New York Chapter of the U.D.C. It was a

"brilliant success," declared Cunningham's magazine, and the bust was displayed again at an exhibition in Nashville later that May.

When the monument was unveiled in 1913, the photo of the bust of Richard Owen was featured on the front cover of the *Confederate Veteran*. It is impossible to know how Owen would have felt about becoming a symbol of northern kindness toward Confederates. Owen had worked at the Military Academy in Nashville in the years preceding the war but had left in 1859 following his objection to his colleagues' support of slavery. At the dedication ceremony, the monument was sometimes referred to as "a bond between North and South." Speeches were given by veterans of both sides, including Indiana native Vice President Thomas Marshall, who "dwelt upon the fact that it was the first time in history that a union soldier had been so honored by confederate veterans." To Cunningham, the monument was "the crowning act of his life."

Another surviving newspaper account published in Atlanta, Georgia, quotes from the speech given by General Bennett Young from Kentucky, a high-ranking Confederate veteran. "Gen. Young took occasion to defend the South against the misrepresentation of the treatment extended to Federal prisoners at Andersonville, Raleigh, Florence and Richmond," the newspaper reported. The newspaper then quoted General Young: "The history of the exchange of prisoners held on both sides shows that if the policy and wishes of Jefferson Davis, Alexander H. Stephens, Robert E. Lee and Mr. Ould," –all Confederates –"had been followed, no word of complaint could have arisen." Instead, according to Young, "It is now well known that Gen. B. F. Butler, commissioner of exchange [for the Union] admitted that he intentionally put matters offensively to prevent exchange or parole of prisoners." General Young was referencing the South's racist terms of exchanges for prisoners in camps. Declining to directly reference the policy's racial grounds, the speech constructed a narrative which recast the facts.

In the audience, "spectators thronged the rotunda of the Indiana capitol building [...] and listened to addresses typifying the best patriotic feeling of both the north and the south." Outside, "the stars and bars of the confederacy were afloat over the state capitol and the band alternately played 'Dixie' and the 'Star-Spangled Banner,'" reported "a special dispatch to the New York World" printed in Prescott, Arkansas. Ms. Nora Owen Armstrong, one of Owen's granddaughters, unveiled the bust. She was now "married to a Southerner." Horace P. Owen stood in the audience, the last surviving son of Richard Owen.

That day, the Presidents of Indiana University and Purdue University also stood in the audience. After the war ended in 1865, Richard Owen taught geology at the University of Indiana. He campaigned for better food and housing for his students and dedicated himself to improving the state's public education. In 1872 he was appointed president of the new Purdue University. Twenty years after the unveiling of the Owen bust, President William Bryan, along with Purdue President, Edward Elliot, reached out to Belle Kinney. They were constructing Memorial Union Buildings and wanted two bronze replicas of the bust for their schools. It was 1932 and the beginning of the Great Depression. Kinney readily obliged. Although the busts bore the same inscription, the replicas of the Richard Owen bust spoke of him as a teacher and scholar. As much as they were testaments to his time in war, they were also tributes to his life beyond it.

Despite the project of remembrance which animated commemorative efforts, the lives veterans lived outside of the narrative of war was also a part of the project of reconciliation. Although Archibald Cunningham made clear in his 1889 letter to President Harrison, concerning Carter Harrison's appointment to the Tennessee Marshalship, that he need not reply, President Harrison did. Printed in the newspaper in New York City, Harrison's letter read: "Though you have set me free from any obligation to acknowledge your letter, it is so generous that I cannot accept a discharge from the pleasant duty of telling you how highly I appreciate your friendly words in behalf of a brother whose plan of life was spoiled by the call of his country to military service." For a sitting president who was also a Union veteran to acknowledge the tragedy of military service and the lives it interrupted, in public correspondence with a Confederate veteran, is telling. The Civil War claimed many lives and shook a national system that was not yet one hundred years-old. It was fought over slavery and injustice, and called into question the republic's ability to change using the democratic process. It failed, and war broke out. Reconciliation was an attempt to heal the nation, at times at the cost of the memories and realities of its failures. The monuments that stand in the U.S. today all carry difficult legacies. More than anything, they reveal how much we still do not know about the past and the complicated cooperation between the North and the South in the project of forgetting, even as they constructed monuments to preserve its memory.

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