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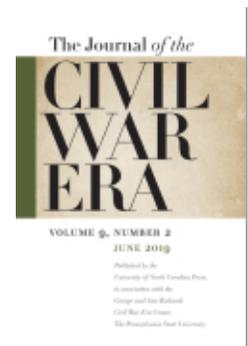
Beyond the Chessboard of War: Contingency, Command, and  
Generalship in Civil War Military History

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## Beyond the Chessboard of War

### Contingency, Command, and Generalship in Civil War Military History

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ANDREW S. BLEDSOE

*This essay encourages historians of the Civil War era to reimagine and reintegrate traditional military history into their scholarship by deepening their understanding of the role, importance, and consequences of Civil War command and generalship and their essential connection to historical contingency. It urges historians to adopt a holistic approach, considering the political, cultural, personal, and military contexts of command, generalship, and the decisions that shape contingency in war. This essay also suggests a practical interpretive framework for both specialists and nonspecialists in Civil War military history to help them integrate command and generalship into a broad spectrum of other histories in thoughtful ways.*

Traditional military history, while the most venerable approach to understanding the Civil War's martial past, remains somewhat controversial. Earl J. Hess describes the essence of traditional military history as works including "campaign and battle studies, tactical and strategic histories, studies of weapons, and biographies of major commanders."<sup>71</sup> In the last decade, Hess, George C. Rable, Gary W. Gallagher, Katherine Shively Meier, and many other distinguished Civil War historians have called, repeatedly, for an evolution of how we think about all aspects of traditional Civil War military history. Yet despite these warnings to adapt, some historians of the Civil War era remain unconvinced about the centrality, even relevance, of traditional military history to serious inquiry, with some not knowing—or caring—about battles, campaigns, and generals. Many seek to integrate traditional military history matters and concepts into social, cultural, political, gender, religious, and other histories, often with interesting and important results. Even so, others acknowledge the relevance of the war's military history to their own work, but are impatient with its

nature and application, and are therefore reluctant to explicitly integrate battles and leaders into their pedagogy or scholarship. The occasionally uneasy place of traditional military history subjects like command and generalship within the larger field of Civil War studies can leave some academic historians, otherwise interested in acquiring a deeper understanding of the war's military history, at a loss as to their pertinence beyond the profession of arms or the Civil War Round Table circuit. A common sentiment among many Civil War historians, military or otherwise, is that we should do *something* to reimagine and reintegrate the military history of the conflict across the broader field of Civil War studies; but what, precisely, we *should* do is still a question with multiple evolving answers.<sup>2</sup>

Hess's point that the "general and erroneous impression is that [traditional military history] studies are relatively limited in scope, quite popular among nonacademic audiences, and very old fashioned in their methodology and interpretation" is well-taken. The perception that traditional Civil War military history has calcified, or that it has nothing left to offer beyond popular or nonacademic appeal, is difficult to dispel. Still, military operations touched everything in the Civil War influencing important social transformation, including emancipation, national policy, religion, ideology, the home front, nationalism, gender, identity, and cultural changes. As Gallagher and Meier emphasize, the military history of the Civil War "investigates warfare and the relationship between military institutions and the societies from which they sprang," surely a valid conceptual approach worthy of consideration within a multitude of historical methodologies.<sup>3</sup> Still, Rable, though acknowledging that studies of Civil War campaigns and leaders are "indispensable for understanding the war itself, the meaning of the war for the Civil War generation, and even for broader studies of the era," worries that such traditional approaches threaten to become a "tired, stale, and overdone genre."<sup>4</sup> Hess goes further, warning that the larger field of Civil War studies has become "increasingly insular and one-dimensional and is in real danger of becoming sterile," and this looming "sterility that comes from atrophy" originates in historians' misconceptions about and divisions over the nature and importance of traditional military history, including such subjects as command and generalship.<sup>5</sup>

My purpose in this essay is twofold. First, I suggest a possible avenue for a reimagination and reintegration of traditional military history by urging historians of the Civil War to deepen their understanding of one particular aspect of that history; namely, the role, importance, and consequences of Civil War command and generalship and their essential connection to historical contingency. To accomplish this, historians must move beyond

a stultifying chessboard approach to the Civil War's military history and think holistically about the political, cultural, personal, and military contexts of command, generalship, and the decisions that shape contingency in war. Second, I will offer a practical interpretive framework for both specialists and nonspecialists in Civil War military history to begin integrating command and generalship into a broad spectrum of other histories in thoughtful ways. Thus, Civil War historians of all persuasions will recognize the relevance and utility of command and generalship studies and incorporate, in whole or in part, innovative and fruitful approaches to these subjects. An obvious assumption underlies this effort: that battles, campaigns, and the leaders who attempt to control them, the "great captains" and "men on horseback" of popular imagination, were and remain worthy subjects for serious historical inquiry and that penetrating assessments of their generalship, their strategy, their tactics, and their biography are suitable principal considerations for all scholars and students of the Civil War. Certainly, some historians of the Civil War era will question, even reject, that assumption from the outset. The "great man" theory of history has long been out of favor, with a bottom-up approach and an emphasis on the "common soldier" properly leading the historiography of the Civil War for decades.<sup>6</sup> Still, we should take care not to disregard or dehumanize the powerful and the privileged, particularly when considering military history and the decision makers who influence it. As Brooks Simpson observes, "the study of the art of command during the American Civil War remains undeveloped as a field of inquiry," and the community of academic Civil War historians certainly continues to misunderstand generals and generalship alike.<sup>7</sup>

Given the potential for confusion, some definitions of command and generalship are in order. In the context of the Civil War, command is the official responsibility and authority exerted by military leaders over subordinates by virtue of their rank and position. Generalship is the skill or set of skills necessary for a leader to effectively exercise of command, control, and management of a military force in war. As employed here, command is how leaders exercised generalship, or the control of military forces aimed at the accomplishment of a goal in accordance with that leader's intent. Put another way, "the classic challenge of command is in writing and issuing orders that strike a balance between clearly explaining what the senior officer wants accomplished," explains Ethan Rafuse, "and how he wants it done and granting subordinate officers sufficient discretion to react appropriately to circumstances."<sup>8</sup> Civil War volunteer armies sometimes showed a skeptical and resistant attitude toward authority, originating in the cultural and ideological traditions of nineteenth-century America.

Submission to authority, combat proficiency, obedience, and technical mastery of the military art were all challenging yet essential aspects of military service, complicated by the citizen-soldier ethos of Civil War volunteers. Consequently, commanders on both sides sometimes learned their craft with a minimum of professional guidance or institutional support, under intense pressure, and with very little margin for error.

In understanding the history of Civil War command and generalship, the chessboard mentality, with its emphasis on battles and campaigns and the strategic, operational, and tactical command decisions intrinsic to them, has defined the long sweep of traditional Civil War military history for more than a century and still influences the ways military historians approach the war. Consider the perspective of Bruce Catton, a journalist-historian writing during the Civil War's centennial years. Catton, among the most widely acclaimed, immensely influential and purely popular historians of the conflict, attained that lofty perch by dint of his storytelling prowess and lyrical prose. "None of them were what we would call sluggers," Catton reflected in 1958, writing on the command acumen of the Army of the Potomac's pre-1863 generals. "Until Grant came along, they seem to have looked on war as an elaborate game played by elaborate rules. . . . In some ways, war to them was like a game of chess. They seem to have looked upon it as something that was essentially bloodless."<sup>9</sup> It was Catton, lauded for his power of imagination and graceful, dark-limned language, who crafted generations of Americans' understanding of the Civil War and its course. The "Catton touch," according to David Blight, suffused twentieth-century readers' understanding of the war with a "sense of the epic, and of romance and an appeal to the nostalgic, as well as his own brand of realism."<sup>10</sup>

For all of Catton's narrative panache and mass appeal, his and other centennial-era Civil War historians' interpretations have distorted our collective history and memory in ways that still ripple through our understanding of the military history of the war. Catton's assertion, for instance, that prior to Ulysses S. Grant—by his lights, the most modern Civil War commander and a prophet of future war and its horrors—Civil War generals approached their war abstractly, whether instinctually or cerebrally, but certainly like a game of chess. This argument is, of course, debatable, and certainly far too sweeping a reduction to hold much weight in the modern historiography of the war. Yet in the sometimes-musty corridors of traditional Civil War military history, many Cattonesque midcentury modern assumptions, embedded into the strata of our collective understanding of what the war meant and how we should approach it, still resonate through our thinking. We tend to fall back on comfortable intellectual terrain—in

this case, that of the performance evaluation: weighing, assessing, and judging military commanders on their battlefield performance, branding them as “good” or “bad” generals, and endlessly reinforcing, arguing about, or revising received historical narratives to no greater purpose.

The chessboard approach also informs applied military history and professional military education. Military professionals’ interest in the history of war often derives from an underlying assumption that command and generalship are worthy of careful consideration. This, in some degree, depends on a military science approach, which emphasizes a commander’s effectiveness, goals, and intentions, while minimizing or even, at times, ignoring other considerations in the mission to understand and evaluate command performance. The impulse of applied military history and doctrine, whose practitioners seek to distill command decisions into historical case studies and provide object lessons for application in contemporary warfighting, encourages the perpetuation of performance-oriented traditional military history. Evaluations of generalship, leadership, command, or in the antiseptic jargon of modern military doctrine, concepts like command and control, or C<sup>2</sup>, C<sup>3</sup>, C<sup>2</sup>I, C<sup>3</sup>I<sup>2</sup>, C<sup>4</sup>, ISRW, OPCON, TACOM, and more, essential to the modern art and science of war and central to the applied analysis of military history, can seem alien to those unversed in this world.<sup>11</sup> The United States Army maintains the Center for Army Lessons Learned and the Center for Military History, for instance, relying on military history to enhance doctrine and professionalism, and to translate historical examples into the idiom of modern military application. “The applied literature” of military history, Wayne E. Lee explains, “derives from the now long-held conviction that understanding the wars of the past will help military leaders plan for, and succeed in, the future,” and many applied military historians produce rigorous and valuable scholarship, though with a prescriptive purpose.<sup>12</sup> A quick perusal of the repositories of the United States Army’s Combined Arms Research Library, where thousands of Command and General Staff College theses and School for Advanced Military Studies monographs are housed, reveals the scope and breadth of professional military education’s efforts to evaluate questions of command and incorporate lessons from the Civil War and other wars into current military practice, with an understandably heavy emphasis on performance-based analysis over other considerations.

Then, of course, there is the complication of Civil War buffs: the “stitch-counters,” reenactors, genealogists, and armchair enthusiasts whose zest for command analyses and the particulars of the war drives sales of narrative battle and campaign studies, generals’ biographies, and unit histories and whose appetite for works examining, debating, and critiquing tactics,

operations, strategy, and command decisions is seemingly inexhaustible. This is hardly news to anyone who has perused lists of bestselling Civil War books for the last half-century or more or for faculty who offer courses on Civil War and military history.<sup>13</sup> As Frank J. Wetta explains, members of this group, because of “their fascination with reenactment and antiquarianism, have given Civil War military history a bad name among academics,” particularly those who question the relevance of campaign histories or military leadership studies to their own work.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, some critics of “traditional” or “conventional” military history—the so-called drum-and-trumpet history, as Gallagher and Meier have suggested—complain that it is “too geared toward a popular audience and yet too technical and complex,” a logically inconsistent critique to be sure, but a conclusion seemingly supported by the common hyper-specialization, esoteric focus, or amateurishness in some of this annual output of traditional Civil War military history.<sup>15</sup>

■ A deep and thoughtful historical engagement with command and generalship promises to illuminate the interplay between war and the important historical concept of contingency, or how past events, circumstances, contexts, and outcomes influence possible futures. While shaped by prior conditions and connections, historical contingency emphasizes the uncertain and unpredictable nature of the future for the actors who experienced it. Therefore, the military history of the Civil War is not simply the “what” of the past; it does not merely chronicle campaigns and recount decisions, blunders, or master-strokes of tactical or strategic genius. The Civil War’s military history is, more importantly, the “why,” “how,” and, crucially, “what does it mean for what came after” the conflict, tempered by context and the understanding that things need not have turned out as they did.<sup>16</sup>

History is, after all, a story about people, and the past’s contingencies only become legible to us when we see connections, decisions, and agency among those people through both their experiences and their possibilities. As Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke remind us, contingency is a foundational, and difficult, concept in the discipline of history. “Every historical outcome depends upon a number of prior conditions; that each of these prior conditions depends, in turn, upon still other conditions; and so on,” they maintain. “The core insight of contingency is that the world is a magnificently interconnected place. Change a single prior condition, and any historical outcome could have turned out differently.”<sup>17</sup>

Careful consideration of decisions, alternatives, options, and the multiplicity of things that affect these factors requires meticulous evaluation and interpretation of evidence, curiosity, contextualization, and empathy—put

simply, the skills of historians. To acknowledge and incorporate contingency into our historical thinking may also help restrain the natural tendency to distort the past through hindsight, where “we upgrade the probability of events once they have occurred and generally tend to regard the past as overdetermined but the future as much more contingent.”<sup>18</sup> The dangers of hindsight and, worse, presentist thinking, resemble the problems arising from the chessboard mentality in the study of war. Interpreting the past through present values, complete information, and with full knowledge of actors’ decisions, possible outcomes, and long-term consequences, risks gross distortion of history, “temporal superiority,” cultural biases, and subversive closed-mindedness that deranges our understanding and can be difficult to detect and impossible to overcome. Still, simply recognizing the ways historians frame their questions and approach their interpretations can go some distance to providing a clearer picture of the past as it was.<sup>19</sup>

Military historians instinctively have long recognized how contingency, along with causation, influences the course of history. In war, military leaders primarily focus their efforts on shaping possible futures. Generals anticipate options, negotiate problems, and mold their armies, their circumstances, and their surroundings to fit their plans for the future, with death, disaster, and defeat or victory hanging in the balance. Given the limitations, perceptions, influences, experiences, and context of their time and place, generals usually attempt to behave rationally and within the realm of the possible. Historians who hope to understand military leaders and the contingencies of war must keep these considerations in mind, testing their own assumptions constantly, and questioning whether the conclusions they draw from evidence reinforce their own twenty-first-century priorities and preconceptions or are consistent with the clearest possible understanding we have of their nineteenth-century historical context. In other words, rather than using the actions and attitudes of past actors to validate our own conclusions about and understanding of history, we should, instead, attempt to remove ourselves as much as is possible from the equation and try to see the past through the eyes of those who experienced it—namely, as a shifting landscape of alternatives, decisions, potentialities, probabilities, and above all, uncertainty.<sup>20</sup>

The inextricable connections between contingency and war are especially suitable for thoughtful exploration of historical possibility. Battles and campaigns, while not sole determinants of outcomes, certainly influenced the Civil War in fundamental ways. Those military operations, subject to the friction or the physical impediments to military action and chance, the element of randomness inherent in war, along with an array of other dynamic factors, including central actors’ decisions, were key in

forging what followed. “Any exploration of the events of a war, in or around a battlefield, must surely remain an exploration of choices,” suggests Lee. “Even a focus on resources, human or material, must acknowledge that choices have defined their allocation and mobilization. Military historians have always believed that those choices (and therefore contingency) make a difference in the outcome.”<sup>21</sup> Where historians situate generals within that narrative shapes any understanding of their role and importance of contingency in war, but the notion that human intervention helped determine the course of the war is inescapable. And, per Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, one key to understanding the contingencies of the Civil War may be located in “the prodigal son of Civil War academe—‘drums and trumpets’ battle history,” and, implicit in that assumption, the actions and decisions of generals seeking, and often failing, to impose their will upon armies, in battles, on campaigns, and through policy and practice.<sup>22</sup>

What Civil War military historians offer to the profession, then, is the potential to uncover how generalship and command decisions created cascades of contingency. We know, for instance, that Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis decided to invade Maryland in 1862, and we can be fairly certain why they made this decision. Most fascinating, and potentially significant, however, are the contingent consequences of that decision; in their attempt to shift the center of gravity of the war in the East, the Confederate high command initiated the circumstances that led to the intersection of battle, politics, race, policy, and, ultimately, a major turning point in the Civil War itself. Contingency can also clarify the relative influence and importance of institutions like armies in affecting policy and cultural consequences. Gallagher, for instance, argues, “Without the United States Army, none of the other actors could have succeeded [with emancipation] on a broad scale . . . without the projection of United States military power, the Emancipation Proclamation and the Second Confiscation Act represented mere words on paper to both slaves and slaveholders in the Confederacy.”<sup>23</sup> And, as David Williams points out, self-emancipation represents an instance when enslaved people, exercising agency and making choices, arrived at Union army lines in such force that they pushed Abraham Lincoln and the U.S. government toward adoption of the Confiscation Acts and Militia Act.<sup>24</sup> The value of contingency in military studies, then, eclipses inevitability and determinism, highlighting as it does the nonlinear nature of historical processes, the dense complexity of causation, and the pull of chance and design. “Creeping determinism emerges as a key obstacle to the time-honored objective of historians to see the world as it appeared to the decision-makers of the day,” Philip E.

Tetlock and Geoffrey Parker postulate, and “not as it appears now with the benefits and curses of hindsight.”<sup>25</sup>

Naturally, there are pitfalls in overemphasizing the contingencies of war, particularly when viewed through the lens of command and generalship. As Cathal Nolan cautions, too much historical focus on generals can devolve into a “form of armchair idolatry divorced from real explanation of preparation and supporting resources and skill, which then meets with chance in battle.” Even worse, these “great captain” fantasies may obscure the complexity and true uncertainty of war, “which are its greater truths.” And, adds Nolan, “no one truly commands or ever controls such a complex and dynamic thing as battle, let alone war,” and overemphasizing command decisions risks simplifying or sanitizing issues of greater historical significance. Command decisions matter, but those choices are subject to a complicated array of influences, both internal and external, and military operations themselves are not always, or even usually, decisive.<sup>26</sup> A naive understanding of the nature and importance of command in war “upholds the imagined heroic over the brutally horrific, however just the cause and necessary the war may be or might have been.”<sup>27</sup> Moreover, fetishizing “great men” to the exclusion of other perspectives and voices privileges false hero narratives and the power structures that produce these figures and threatens to seriously distort our understanding of the past. To overstate the impact and import of command risks reductionism, determinism, and the deemphasis of the essence of war’s difficulty; specifically, as Eugenia C. Kiesling observes, “the physical difficulties of moving and fighting armies” and the “fear, physical hardship and problems of information,” or the Clausewitzian “friction” that “impedes the military commander’s mind” and, by implication, command and generalship in war.<sup>28</sup> And, as Richard Evans warns, historians “have always considered it their first task to find out what did happen, not to imagine what might have happened.” Relying too heavily on multiple-order conjectures, even if qualifying these forays with the language of possibility and uncertainty, risks abandoning the fundamental principles of the historian’s craft—namely, the interpretation of evidence—and devolves into ahistorical counterfactuals, quantitative determinism, and flights of speculative fantasy.<sup>29</sup>

Still, serious consideration of the contingencies of war has immense potential for historians. Contingency naturally leads us to agency, the notion that human actions can and do make a difference, despite those actions resulting in messy eventualities that do not neatly follow prescribed logical paths. Contingency also encourages an empathetic shift in perspective, encouraging historians to see the past as their subjects lived

it. “To understand why the South lost, in the end, we must turn from large generalizations that imply inevitability,” James McPherson writes, “and study instead the contingency that hung over each military campaign, each battle, each election, each decision during the war.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly, historical contingencies often result from an array of factors, including the agency and choices of military leaders and other actors; the constraints and cultural paradigms of armies and their societies; and the intervention of internal and external factors like weather, human frailty, flawed information and assumptions, institutional dysfunction, personality dynamics, or plain chance.<sup>31</sup>

According to Edward Ayers, historians’ primary use of contingency should not be as a means to simplify the complex. “Simple explanations that ignore complication in an impatient determination to get to a bottom line or root cause are worse than useless,” he explains. “They give the false impression that we have explained something when we have not.” Deep contingency, however, attempts to account for “people imaginatively constructing chains of action and reaction beyond the boundaries of their own time and space,” anticipating possible futures and potential courses of action, and making decisions within that array of influences and options.<sup>32</sup> Though formidably complicated and frustratingly imprecise to integrate, to dismiss contingency and surrender to historical inevitability is to deny human agency, to accept that individual choices play no important role in the future and that the past *was* as it *had* to be, and that the world as we now understand it *is* as it *must* be. Command and generalship offer a possible way to understand this complex process.

■ The structures, customs, behaviors, traditions, influences, and values that informed command decisions and shaped historical actors’ agency ought to occupy an important place in any examination of contingency. Politics mattered to generals, and so it should also matter to historians who study generals and their decisions and actions. Politics, therefore, represents the first component of an interpretive framework for integrating command and generalship into Civil War–era histories. Civil War military leaders operated within specific political contexts, subject to the orders and demands of their societies’ respective civilian authorities. Both Union and Confederate officers were deeply interested in, and bound by, political considerations as they conceived and attempted to implement their military plans. As instruments of national policy and agents of the state, Civil War commanders had to negotiate difficult political, moral, ideological, and cultural terrain in the execution of their military duties. As such, armies and the men who led them, buffeted by political forces sometimes beyond

their consciousness, played crucial roles in emancipation, slavery, occupation, irregular war, counterinsurgency, gender relations, law, economics, and, ultimately, victory and defeat. Military considerations drove President Abraham Lincoln's choice to issue the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, for instance, which was, in turn, a political consequence stemming from the Confederate invasion of Maryland, along with Union political and military leadership's reactions to those decisions. Politics also drove the formulation of Confederate national defensive strategy and its invasions of Kentucky and Pennsylvania; the Union's Anaconda Plan, "On to Richmond" appeals, and river incursions; both sides' occupation and irregular war practices; casualties and destructiveness; congressional and presidential elections; enlistment, conscription, and army administration; desertion, morale, and effectiveness; shifts in civilian-military relations; and more. For the Union army, Republicans in Congress and the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War forcibly injected partisan politics into the crucible of army command, often to great bitterness and resentment. Confederate politicians and high command also underwent their own internecine paroxysms of political infighting over the course of the conflict.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond politics, public policy, or political partisanship, Civil War army officer corps were vigorous, sometimes cutthroat, political arenas, with rivalries, power struggles, nepotism, favoritism, partisanship, and other political considerations informing command culture and decisions. Honor, manhood, ambition, ego, religion, and a host of other impulses guided command politics, influenced the command styles and decisions of commanders, and informed both action and experience in combat, on campaign, or in garrison. Command politics preoccupied armies, from the court martial of Fitz John Porter and the removal of Gouvenor K. Warren; the political relationships between Lincoln and McClellan, Hooker, and Grant; the Army of the Potomac's revolving door of commanders; John C. Frémont's preemptory emancipation policy; occupation efforts in southern territory; and feuds within the high commands of Confederate field armies and inside Jefferson Davis's administration. These essentially political interactions, of course, continued beyond the war's temporal boundaries, spilling over into postbellum literature and shaping the Lost Cause, memory, veterans' experiences, and generations of popular and historical thinking about the Civil War. If Carl von Clausewitz's oft-quoted aphorism that war is "a true political instrument" and "a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" applies to the Civil War, then politics ought to be a central consideration in the war's military history, particularly in any analysis of command and generalship.<sup>34</sup>

Personality, or more properly, personal dynamics within Civil War armies and among their leaders, and how commanders and subordinates related to one another at the interpersonal level, represents the second component of this interpretive framework. According to Steven E. Woodworth, “more than disputes about this or that strategy, defensive versus offensive operations, or allocation of troops to one front or another, the key questions in matters of high command during the Civil War were often ones pertaining to the personalities of those who exercised leadership and how those personalities interacted with each other.”<sup>35</sup> Both Union and Confederate command dysfunction often originated from simple personality clashes. Many clashes originated from substantive disagreements, command errors, misjudgments, enemy acumen, and plain bad luck, as well as toxic personal dynamics between generals who simply did not like one another and could not set aside their animus in common cause. A commander’s leadership style often depended greatly on his personality and character. Whether a general was inclined to rely on councils of war to make important command decisions, whether he leaned upon his staff to direct the details of operational planning, whether he sought unity of command or diffusion of responsibility within his force, whether he preferred a cloistered or transparent command climate—these are all questions of personal dynamics, essential to defining a general’s military authority and effectiveness, and important to historians, but still bound by the idiosyncrasies of individual personality.

Leadership of a Civil War army was often an extremely personal enterprise, depending as it did on the nature and effectiveness of the relationships within command structures. A commander’s lack of skill in managing interpersonal dynamics between superiors, peers, and among subordinates could sabotage important military operations, as generals sometimes discovered to their grief. Historians also have made much—and with good reason—of effective command teams like Grant and Sherman, Lee and Jackson, and others, crediting the important personal relationships between these leaders for their subsequent successes on the battlefield. The personal relationships that form command culture—or the leadership values, customs, expectations, and ethos largely defined by a commander and his staff—remain a crucial, yet still vaguely understood, component of the personal undercurrents of Civil War generalship. Military groups, like all groups of people, are originators of culture that vary from unit to unit and army to army. The command culture military leaders cultivate establishes the habitat of that commander’s authority. In other words, a Civil War soldier’s wartime experiences, along with the civilians, slaves, and enemies he encountered, were dictated, in overt and subtle ways, by the

personality and interpersonal relationships of military leaders. Historians seeking to understand personal dynamics in command and generalship as well as the sensibilities and interior worlds of these figures would be well served to adopt a biographer's mentality—for there, in the details and texture of individual lives are the patterns of behavior, tendencies, traits, and experiences that inform commanders' perceptions, mold their assumptions, and otherwise fill out the environment of deliberation and decision that comprise military operations.<sup>36</sup> While John Keegan emphasizes that "it is not through what armies *are* but by what they *do* that the lives of nations and of individuals are changed," the opposite is true of military commanders that lead those armies—who generals *are* informs what armies *do*.<sup>37</sup>

Whether one accepts war as essentially political, essentially cultural, or occupying another nuanced space, Keegan's assertion that war "reaches into the most secret places of the human heart, places where self dissolves rational purpose, where pride reigns, where emotion is paramount, where instinct is king," encourages historians to consider command as a product of cultural paradigms, subject to a rich and complicated array of internal and external influences.<sup>38</sup> These paradigms, as Wayne E. Lee writes, are "sets of behaviors deemed appropriate for those within an institutional military" and, among other things, define "how a set of senior political and military leaders possess a long-developed sense of what victory means and how one normally achieves it."<sup>39</sup> Culture defines context within military leadership structures, and that context informs the expected, accepted, and legitimated behaviors and choices of military commanders and their decisions. Paradigms of command, therefore, represent the third pillar of our interpretive framework.

Military culture is, according to Williamson Murray, "the ethos and professional attributes, both in terms of experience and intellectual study, that contribute to a common core understanding of war within military organizations."<sup>40</sup> Command culture, then, reveals more than just the personal dynamics within army leadership; it also illuminates the ways military leaders decide and act within the patterns and models formed by a common understanding of war and their place in it. Culture powerfully influences command decisions, but it does not ultimately eclipse the centrality of agency or the power of contingency influencing those decisions. Therefore, as Lee puts it, culture "leaves room for improvisation" and potentially "takes us closer to understanding the reasons why they were made and the limits on the perception of alternatives" commanders confront in war.<sup>41</sup> Command decisions, like all choices, do not occur in a vacuum, and historians' proclivity to periodize wars into episodes—battles, operations,

campaigns, and their denouements—risks overlooking the critical interstices where the connective tissues binding decision and action to outcome are cultivated.

A fresh emphasis on command culture also emphasizes the tenuous nature of Civil War command. Generalship and authority in the Civil War were fragile things, subject to the exigencies of war and the pressure and instinctive resistance and unwieldiness of massive volunteer armies, the parameters, language, and expectations of command, and the institutions that birthed and fielded these.<sup>42</sup> Civil War command involved improvisation and confusion as much as, perhaps even more than, design and intentionality. As war's friction increases, chaos and uncertainty overshadow, even usurp, planning, leadership, and the multiple other parameters that affect command and generalship.<sup>43</sup> When considering contingency, agency, and causation in Civil War military history, historians must engage in a careful evaluation of the full complement of constraints, experiences, and influences that inform commanders and their actions. How much—or how little—these influences shape command and generalship remains an open question, full of potential for exploration.

Battlefield performance, the ultimate metric of military success or failure, remains a useful tool for assessing command and represents the fourth and final component of our interpretive framework. As discussed at the outset of this essay, traditional Civil War military historians have long conceptualized the war as a chess match, and the central role of the historian is to analyze the command decisions of generals. Armed with hindsight and the leisure of reflection, campaign chroniclers pronounce the verdict of history on the players' performances and choices. This chessboard mentality derives from war itself. John Keegan argues that nineteenth-century commanders owed much to their Marlboroughian progenitors' precise approach to warfare, in which "good generals could 'play' a battle in a fashion not dissimilar from that by which a chessmaster plays his board," a model still in vogue, if not necessarily in practice, during the Civil War.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, Civil War generals operated according to contemporary standards of training, experience, and accepted professional practices and principles. War, however, is disruptive and untidy, and military historians would do well to recognize, as Steven E. Woodworth reminds us, that "the game of chess bears only the vaguest theoretical resemblance to the hard business of war" and "military command is not solely, or even mostly, a matter of strategy and tactics either."<sup>45</sup>

While battlefield performance is the traditional way historians evaluate command and generalship, it should not be the primary lens through

which we understand command and generalship. Preoccupation with command performance ignores essential issues of confusion, chaos, irrationality, morality, contingency, and complexity, issues that define war as much as victory and defeat. “All too often generals owe their rating in the popular mind to reputation and results,” explains Brooks Simpson, while “far less is made of the importance of working with subordinates and superiors, supervising logistics and training, and assembling a competent professional staff.”<sup>46</sup> Not only is the binary of success and failure simplistic, but in our rush to punish or reward generals’ reputations for these outcomes, we risk losing sight of larger, more significant truths. “The outcome of such critical battles and campaigns as the Seven Days’ battles in June–July 1862, Vicksburg and Gettysburg in 1863, and the Appomattox Campaign in 1865 often came down less to the skill and character of army commanders,” according to Ethan Rafuse, “than to the great good fortune of having the right corps commander in the right place at the right time—or lack thereof.”<sup>47</sup> Even the language of traditional Civil War military history works against these efforts. To ascribe the actions of a brigade, division, corps, or army primarily to one person, as in, “Gibbon’s division faced Martin and Colquitt across open ground strewn with corpses from Penrose’s, Cross’s, and Grant’s charges the afternoon of June 1,” is to engage in a form of rhetorical shorthand, elevating the individual over the group for simplicity’s sake.<sup>48</sup> This shorthand, however useful, is also reductive and glides past the reality that command is a multilayered process involving many disparate elements and actors. We must be careful not to overstate the power of personality when assessing military performance in the Civil War. Military organizations are greater than any single general—hero, villain, or otherwise. Command and generalship are ongoing, perpetual efforts to achieve mastery and control involving many people, often thousands, working together or at cross-purposes, under strain, and within specific internal and external constraints.<sup>49</sup> Military historians should resist the easy temptation to default to a performance-based evaluation mentality in assessing commanders’ choices and actions. The full import of Civil War generals’ decisions, whether correct or incorrect, brilliant or foolish, only become clear after weeks, months, years, or even centuries of hindsight, analysis, debate, and consensus. Thus, battles and campaigns, perhaps more than any other historical arena, illustrate the power of contingency and the influence of uncertainty in shaping human events.

Given this suggested interpretive framework, what would a historical approach that takes into account the intricate dynamics of contingency, politics, paradigms of culture and command, personality, and military

performance in a historical interpretation of command and generalship look like? Consider, for example, a particularly crucial moment in the history of emancipation—Union Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler’s evolving approach to confiscation, manumission, and emancipation from 1861 to 1862. In May 1861, while in command at Fort Monroe in Virginia, Butler granted refuge to a group of runaways who had escaped through Union lines. Butler, an antebellum Democratic lawyer who owed his general’s commission to extensive political connections to the Lincoln administration, had a keen eye for political opportunity and seized it here. Butler reasoned that the Confederates considered these refugees to be chattel, useful as military assets against the Union. He knew that depriving the enemy of these assets was a measure consistent with the principal Union war aim of dismantling the Confederacy’s war-making ability, and he therefore decided to seize the Fort Monroe runaways as “contraband of war,” subject to confiscation under his authority as a United States Army officer.

Lincoln, accepting both Butler’s legal interpretation and his supporting logic of military necessity as politically palatable, permitted the confiscation of contraband and later even saw it enshrined into law as the First Confiscation Act. It turned out that Butler’s command decision to locate confiscation within the legal constructs of military necessity and contrabands of war rather than in the idealistic political and moral landscape of emancipation was far more suitable to Lincoln’s thinking than the overtly abolitionist efforts of other officers, like David Hunter and John C. Frémont, had been. Only later, when political pressure and Union military disasters on the Peninsula compelled Lincoln to consider making emancipation a primary war aim, did the president begin to fully embrace the necessity of emancipation as a tool to preserve the Union.<sup>50</sup> This dawning realization did not elude the news media either; as a *New York Tribune* correspondent observed in the summer of 1862, “it is utterly impossible for us to subdue the rebels without an alliance with their slaves.”<sup>51</sup> The Second Confiscation and Militia Acts, adopted that same year, greatly expanded the scope of military emancipation and more closely reflected Hunter and Frémont’s rationale. Still, Butler’s 1861 actions at Fort Monroe, while political and military more than moral or humanitarian, helped shape the administration’s evolving position on the forfeiture of slaves and may have altered the timetable of its emancipation policy. The personal, political, and military considerations that defined Butler’s authority as an army officer and his approach to generalship and command restrained his stance on emancipation, confiscation, and slavery. As a general, he also bounded his actions within the requirements of military necessity above all. In turn, these considerations informed Butler’s interpretation of both the contours

and limits of his military authority as well as the exigent circumstances on the ground in 1861. The episode also created a well of experience to inform Butler's later decisions and actions.<sup>52</sup>

By the spring of 1862, when Butler assumed command of the occupation of New Orleans, his chief subordinate, the ardent abolitionist officer Brig. Gen. John W. Phelps, complicated Butler's thinking on the issue. On his own initiative, Phelps, who favored both emancipation and wholesale enlistment of freed slaves into the Union army rather than continuing the legal fiction of confiscation, began actively encouraging slaves to escape and seek refuge with the army. Phelps, a West Pointer from New England, considered slavery "a universally recognized social and moral evil" and declared slaves "ripe for manumission, and any measure to avert it may be put off, but cannot long prevent, a revolution—a revolution of that kind where men are restored to their original rights."<sup>53</sup> Butler sharply disagreed with Phelps's approach, not least because of the logistical problems an influx of refugees presented. Moreover, Butler could not restrain the zealous brigadier, which led to tension within the Union command culture in New Orleans. "I shall have trouble with Phelps," a frustrated Butler wrote to his wife that summer. "He is mad as a March Hare on the 'nigger question.' He is arming them against the law and refuses to have them work. My respect for him will lead me to treat him very tenderly but firmly, and I hope involve myself no more than is absolutely necessary for my duty."<sup>54</sup> Phelps continued to undermine Butler's authority by urging his troops to "range the countryside, insult the Planters and entice negroes away from their plantations," all of which eroded public order and led to widespread complaints from the local planters.<sup>55</sup>

Falling back on his previous experiences, Butler at first tried to replicate his Fort Monroe confiscation policy in New Orleans, but he soon realized that a moderate approach could not stem the tide of runaways encouraged by Phelps's actions. By mid-June 1862, nearly three hundred fugitive contrabands occupied Phelps's Camp Parapet; by November, that number had swelled throughout the region to, in Butler's estimate, "ten thousand negroes to feed . . . principally women & children."<sup>56</sup> Phelps's rampant abolitionism was troubling enough for Butler, but Phelps made things worse by going over Butler's head to the U.S. War Department, pressing Union leadership to declare a national emancipation policy and permit the widespread enlistment of black regiments. Butler found the latter proposition particularly objectionable, as he believed black men had "acquired a great horror of fire-arms, sometimes ludicrous in the extreme when the weapon is in his own hand."<sup>57</sup> When Butler complained to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, Chase sympathized: "It is quite plain that you do not

find it so easy to deal with the contraband question [in New Orleans] as at Fortress Monroe." Regrettably, Chase explained to Butler, the administration could provide no real guidance for him on the matter, at least not yet. "Of course until the Government shall adopt a settled policy," Chase confessed, "the commanding General will be greatly embarrassed by it." Still, Chase assured Butler, President Lincoln would decide on an emancipation policy "soon," and though his "mind is not finally decided," the president's language "points to a contingency in which he may recognize the same necessity."<sup>58</sup> By the end of the year, the troublesome Phelps had resigned under pressure; nevertheless, Butler, bowing to military necessity as well as the pragmatic need to fill manpower shortages, eventually gave up on his hopes of limiting the runaway exodus to Union lines and even went on to raise three regiments of black troops despite his earlier reservations.<sup>59</sup>

Certainly, Butler was slow to comprehend the enormous consequences of his 1861 and 1862 experiments with confiscation; he seemed to view the problem of emancipation as primarily military and political in nature, and his actions through 1862 reflect this pragmatic assumption. Still, the practical Butler, along with abolitionist-leaning Union officers like Phelps, Hunter, Frémont, and others, whether intentionally or not, all helped open the door to the broader national emancipation policy of 1863. Further, both Butler's moderate and Phelps's more radical approaches in New Orleans certainly induced hundreds, perhaps thousands of enslaved African Americans to exercise their agency to self-emancipate in 1862 on a scale that would have been unlikely, even impossible, had confiscation or emancipation in Louisiana unfolded differently or not at all. Slave agency worked in concert with military necessity in this process and, as Ira Berlin explains, "slaves were the prime movers in the emancipation drama, not the sole movers. They set others in motion, including many who never would have moved if left to their own devices."<sup>60</sup> Butler's political and military decision to encompass the confiscation of runaway slaves within his command authority influenced the profound national political and strategic consequences that followed. Those consequences helped create the conditions under which a fervent abolitionist like Phelps could, in turn, take local military actions that also shaped these important outcomes. Union military confiscation and army commanders' emancipation policies also influenced the Lincoln administration's development of its war aims, its timing of emancipation, and, ultimately, the very nature and purpose of the Civil War.<sup>61</sup> The unanticipated contingencies of war shaped all of this; runaways flooding Union lines, the Union's inability to defeat Confederate forces in 1861 and 1862, human agency and intervention, and

a growing realization that the preservation of slavery and the restoration of Union were incompatible outcomes. Far from inevitable or predetermined, emancipation unfolded in an uncertain, nonlinear progression of interconnected actions and choices, subject to politics, personality, law, custom, and chance. This is the very essence of contingency.

■ Beyond these suggestions, there are many other ways to reimagine and reinvigorate the study of command and generalship in Civil War history. We also ought to follow the lead of Carol Reardon, who encourages us to consider position and perspective and to apply the force of memory and the challenges of perception to our analysis of battles, and of Kenneth W. Noe, who urges historians to see war as a mosaic, demanding judicious skill and the historian's art in order to derive meaning and coherence from the variegated perspectives and fragmented recollections of its participants.<sup>62</sup> There is no better source to capture Reardon's notions of position and perspective, Noe's mosaic of meaning, and the overall complexity and disorderliness of Civil War command and generalship than the scriptorium of Civil War military operations; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. The orders, reports, maps, forms, diagrams, charts, and correspondence from both Union and Confederate armies, navies, and War Departments in the *Official Records'* 128 volumes (and 100 supplemental volumes), represent the most extensive collection of published sources in a single place, heavily relied upon by traditional Civil War military historians but too often eschewed by many other Civil War scholars as unwieldy or difficult, and even recently criticized as reconciliationistic and nationalistic in composition and purpose. The series of articles and firsthand accounts published between 1884 and 1887 in the *Century Magazine* and later compiled as *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, as well as the 52 volumes of the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, while subject to similar caveats about distortion as the *Official Records*, as well as to problems of memory and distance, are also essential sources on command and generalship.<sup>63</sup>

Recent outstanding unit histories and group studies by Lesley J. Gordon, Lorien Foote, and Susannah J. Ural also highlight the innovative ways historians can approach the study of groups; scholars of command and generalship, where individuals intersect with these kinds of military groups in significant ways, should take inspiration from these and other works. Such approaches translate well to analyses of command and generalship.<sup>64</sup> George C. Rable encourages us to consider "war news," emphasizing shifts in perspective and public perception in order to capture the

understanding and experiences of people at the time.<sup>65</sup> Civil War generals maintained active, occasionally contentious, relationships with embedded reporters and carefully cultivated their wartime reputations in the war news of major periodicals and through postwar memoirs, speeches, and writings. People constructed their understanding of armies, leaders, and the war itself from these military dispatches, correspondence, rumor, religion, and the journalism they inspired, without the benefit of retrospection or complete information. During and after the Civil War, they also carefully curated their reputations, the paper wars of these leaders is an important facet of the experience of command rich with possibility for historians.<sup>66</sup>

Thoughtful analysis of command and generalship ought not mire itself in minutiae, military pageantry, tragic-heroic-triumphalism, or a host of other temptations that have bedeviled traditional Civil War military historians for so long. Instead, command analysis should steer us toward a clearer understanding of contingency, context, and causality and their role in generalship and command, with performance just one arrow in the historian's analytical quiver. While evaluating performance and assigning blame or credit can be a useful exercise and bear important fruit, we should also remember to approach these figures with a degree of empathy, understanding that humans under pressure, working within the constraints of imperfect information and with flawed and troublesome subordinates, could not always overcome the difficulties and obstacles they faced. The *why* and *how* of these successes and failures matter very much indeed.

Historians must be willing to engage with Civil War generalship on its own terms, conscious of hindsight's potential to distort our collective understanding of the past. Selective recovery of the Civil War's military history risks disrupting that understanding. Certainly, contemporary concerns influence the questions historians ask, and the sensibility through which they seek answers to those questions. But, to disregard the study of command, generalship, battles, campaigns, and other traditional military subjects, is to make a value judgment about the purpose and practice of history, avoiding the whole picture of the past and interposing our own notions of what categories of study; what methodologies; and what voices and experiences ought to be emphasized, minimized, ignored, or integrated into our historical thinking. Eschewing the study of campaigns and generals because they do not fit into our conception of what is most important, most interesting, or most compatible with our own understanding of the Civil War's relevance to the questions and issues of today is to fail to accept the past on its own terms. Generals and command were important to the

Civil War in complex ways and ought to continue to occupy an important place in Civil War studies, military or otherwise.

Americans continue to disagree, often bitterly, over the import and memory of the Civil War, and as the war's legacy remains subject to confusion, politicization, and distortions of fact and memory, the central pieces on the dusty chessboard of war continue to occupy a contested space in our cultural memory and political sphere. Consequently, there is, or should be, a sense of import, even urgency, to the study of Civil War leaders, particularly military commanders. Civil War generals were, and continue to be, cultural symbols laden with deep and evolving meaning, much of it distorted by competing sectional, national, political, and racial narratives of intervening centuries. For all these reasons, historians, military or not, ought to be interested in clarifying their understanding of Civil War military leaders, their generalship, their command decisions, and the influences and processes molding their actions.

#### NOTES

1. Earl J. Hess, "Where Do We Stand? A Critical Assessment of Civil War Studies in the Sesquicentennial Era," *Civil War History* 60 (December 2014): 371–403. For a fuller discussion of the evolution of traditional military history and Civil War Studies, see Andrew S. Bledsoe and Andrew F. Lang, "Military History and the American Civil War," in *Upon the Fields of Battle: Essays on the Military History of America's Civil War*, ed. Andrew S. Bledsoe and Andrew F. Lang (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 3–19, 5–6.

2. Dennis E. Showalter, "A Modest Plea for Drums and Trumpets," *Military Affairs* 39 (April 1975): 73; Edward M. Coffman, "The New American Military History," *Military Affairs* 48 (January 1984): 1; Wayne E. Lee, "Mind and Matter—Cultural Analysis in American Military History: A Look at the State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 93 (March 2007): 1116; Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction," *American Historical Review* 112 (October 2007): 1070–90. For a fuller discussion of scholarly opinions about traditional military history in the field of Civil War Studies, see Hess, "Where Do We Stand?" 373–76; and Bledsoe and Lang, "Military History and the American Civil War," 3–9.

3. Gary W. Gallagher and Kathryn Shively Meier, "Coming to Terms with Civil War Military History," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (December 2014): 490.

4. George C. Rable, "The Battlefield and Beyond," *Civil War History* 53 (September 2007): 245.

5. Earl J. Hess, "Where Do We Stand?" 398.

6. For a survey of the immense historiography of common soldiers in the Civil War, see Aaron Sheehan-Dean, "The Blue and Gray in Black and White: Assessing the Scholarship on Civil War Soldiers," in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 9–30. Also see Peter S. Carmichael, *The War for the Common Soldier: How Men*

*Thought, Fought, and Survived in Civil War Armies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

7. Brooks D. Simpson, "Winfield Scott Hancock and the Overland Campaign," in *Corps Commanders in Blue: Union Major Generals in the Civil War*, ed. Ethan S. Rafuse (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 262.

8. Ethan S. Rafuse, introduction to Rafuse, *Corps Commanders in Blue*, 5.

9. Bruce Catton, *America Goes to War: The Civil War and Its Meaning in American Culture* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1958), 74.

10. David Blight, "Bruce Catton Tribute," *American Heritage* 62 (Winter–Spring 2012): 73.

11. On the inchoate nature of international command doctrine, see Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-Conceptualizing Command and Control," *Canadian Military Journal* 3 (Spring 2002): 53; Carol McCann and Ross Pigeau, "Taking Command of C<sup>2</sup>," in *Proceedings of Second International Command and Control Research and Technology Symposium* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995), 531–45.

12. Lee, "Mind and Matter," 1116.

13. Civil War military historians frequently emphasize and analyze command and generalship, often to popular acclaim. Even a modest sampling of these kinds of works is overwhelming, but it should include J. F. C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1929); Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942–44); T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Knopf, 1952); Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1950–56); J. F. C. Fuller, *Grant and Lee: A Study in Personality and Generalship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957); Thomas Lawrence Connelly, *Army of the Heartland: The Army of Tennessee, 1861–1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Thomas Lawrence Connelly, *Autumn of Glory: The Army of Tennessee, 1862–1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971); Thomas Lawrence Connelly and Archer Jones, *The Politics of Command: Factions and Ideas in Confederate Strategy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Archer Jones, *Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat* (New York: Free Press, 1997); W. J. Wood, *Civil War Generalship: The Art of Command* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Praeger, 1997); Edward Hagerman, *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Steven E. Woodworth, *No Band of Brothers: Problems in the Rebel High Command* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: The Relationships between Leaders in the Civil War* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Steven W. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

14. Frank J. Wetta, ed., "Battle Histories: Reflections on Civil War Military Studies," *Civil War History* 53 (September 2007): 231.

15. Gallagher and Meier, "Coming to Terms with Civil War Military History," 490.

16. See Maris A. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," *Journal of American History* 76 (June 1989): 34–58, urging military historians to expand their focus to include the effects of war on society rather than the narrower concerns of traditional military history.

17. Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke, "What Does It Mean to Think Historically?" *Perspectives on History*, January 2007, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2007/what-does-it-mean-to-think-historically>. In the context of the Civil War, James M. McPherson maintains that "at numerous critical points during the war things might have gone altogether differently." James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 858.

18. Richard Ned Lebow, "Learning from Contingency: The Case of World War I," *International Journal* 63 (June 2008): 449.

19. Lynn Hunt, "Against Presentism," *Perspectives on History*, May 1, 2002, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2002/against-presentism>.

20. Presentism in academic history has become a highly charged political issue, explored in Matthew A. Sears, "Partisans Assail Historians for Judging the Past by Today's Standards. Here's Why They're Wrong," *Washington Post*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/07/12/partisans-assail-historians-for-judging-the-past-by-todays-standards-heres-why-theyre-wrong/>.

21. Lee, "Mind and Matter," 1118; John Shy, "The Cultural Approach to the History of War," *Journal of Military History* 57 (October 1993): 13–26; John A. Lynn, "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History," *Journal of Military History* 61 (October 1997): 777–89; Jeremy Black, "Determinisms and Other Issues," *Journal of Military History* 68 (October 2004): 1217–32.

22. Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh, "Total War and the American Civil War Reconsidered: The End of an Outdated 'Master Narrative,'" *Journal of the Civil War Era* 1 (September 2011): 404.

23. Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 150.

24. David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 73–81, 91–94.

25. Philip E. Tetlock and Geoffrey Parker, "Counterfactual Thought Experiments," in *Unmaking the West: "What-If?" Scenarios that Rewrite World History*, ed. Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 25–26.

26. Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7; Russell F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), xii. In evaluating command and contingency in war, philosopher Kim Sterelny argues that "the stronger the constraints, the less the specific character of the occupant of the role matters and the more the flow of control

depends on office rather than occupant. But the character of the occupant is typically causally important.” Kim Sterelny, “Contingency and History,” *Philosophy of Science* 83 (October 2016): 535.

27. Nolan, *Allure of Battle*, 7.

28. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans., Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 101, 119–22; Eugenia C. Kiesling, “On War without the Fog,” *Military Review* 81 September–October 2001): 86–87.

29. Richard J. Evans, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2013), 23–24. Also see Niall Ferguson, ed. *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Macmillan, 1997); Robert W. Fogel, ed., *Railroads and American Economic Growth: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964).

30. James McPherson, “American Victory, American Defeat,” in *Why the Confederacy Lost*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York: Oxford, 1992), 42; Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 153, 117.

31. Kiesling, “On War without the Fog,” 86–87.

32. Contingency in military history is not new, and yet it remains an opaque concept within much of Civil War military historiography. Contingency is, however, central to McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 857–58; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: vol. 2, Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 531; and Gallagher, *Union War*, 88–92. Also see Sterelny, “Contingency and History,” 524–25; and Jeremy Black, “Counterfactualism and Its Discontents,” *History Today* 66 (August 2016): 7. For a nuanced approach to Civil War-era contingency, including the notion of “deep contingency,” see Edward L. Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War? Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York: Norton, 2005), 134–36, 141–43, and Jason Phillips, *Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 126–27, 145–46.

33. A sampling of the vibrant body of scholarship on political dimensions of Civil War armies includes Joseph Allan Frank, *With Ballot and Bayonet: The Political Socialization of Civil War Soldiers* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Thomas J. Goss, *The War within the Union High Command: Politics and Generalship during the Civil War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Stephen R. Taffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Steven J. Ramold, *Across the Divide: Union Soldiers View the Northern Home Front* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014); John H. Matsui, *The First Republican Army: The Army of Virginia and the Radicalization of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2016); Andrew F. Lang, *In the Wake of War: Military Occupation, Emancipation, and Civil War America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017); Kristopher A. Teters, *Practical Liberators: Union Officers in the Western Theater during the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018).

34. Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.
35. Steven E. Woodworth, *No Band of Brothers: Problems in the Rebel High Command* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), xii. Command conflicts and personality clashes occupy a prominent place in the historiography of Civil War generalship. See, for example, Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*; Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals*; Connelly and Jones, *Politics of Command*; Goss, *War within the Union High Command*; Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*.
36. For two outstanding examples of military biographies of Civil War generals that avoid the limits of both a chessboard mentality and a "great man" approach to command and generalship, see Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); and Earl J. Hess, *Braxton Bragg: The Most Hated Man in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).
37. John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), 30.
38. John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 3.
39. Wayne E. Lee, *Waging War: Conflict, Culture, and Innovation in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.
40. Williamson Murray, "Does Military Culture Matter?" *Orbis* 43 (Winter 1999): 27; Wayne E. Lee, "Warfare and Culture," in *Warfare and Culture in World History*, ed. Wayne E. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 2–3.
41. Lee, "Mind and Matter," 1119.
42. See, for example, Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 53–72; Perry D. Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics, 1865–1899* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 1–21; Hagerman, *American Civil War*, 39–41; Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).
43. William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784–1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 87–89; Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52, 158; Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 145–70; Andrew S. Bledsoe, *Citizen-Officers: The Union and Confederate Volunteer Junior Officer Corps in the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 62–101, 220–21.
44. John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Viking, 1987), 172.
45. Steven E. Woodworth, introduction to *The Art of the Command in the Civil War*, ed. Steven E. Woodworth (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), ix.
46. Simpson, "Winfield Scott Hancock and the Overland Campaign," 262.
47. Rafuse, introduction, 6.
48. Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 308.
49. Taffe, *Commanding the Army of the Potomac*, 215–18.

50. Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 123–24, 128–29.
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