Imagining the Enemy

Northern Views of the South in

John W. De Forest’s Miss Ravenel’s Conversion and

Albion W. Tourgée’s A Fool’s Errand

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Introduction

The relatively young American nation has, since the successful War of Independence against Great Britain, participated in several military conflicts; the First and Second World War, Vietnam, and the Gulf War, to name a few. Despite the scale of some of these international wars, the bloodiest conflict in the history of the United States was a war waged against itself, the American Civil War. This “war between brothers”, as prominent Union General and later President of the United States Ulysses S. Grant called it (U.S. Grant 80), cost the lives of approximately six hundred and twenty thousand Americans and another four hundred thousand returned from the battlefield wounded.

The question of what caused the Civil War has been the subject of a long, still continuing debate among historians. There seems to be a consensus that three somewhat interconnected factors, being economic rivalry, political disagreement about states’ rights and the issue of slavery, contributed most directly to the outbreak of America’s internal conflict. The dispute over slavery is often quoted as the core of the matter and indeed, many of the other causes can be interpreted as springing from this issue (Norton et al. 369). According to historian Susan-Mary Grant, the American Civil war can even be seen as a “conflict of ideals” (Grant x), the culmination of an ever growing ideological tension between the “free” North and the slaveholding South. The differences between these two regions in nineteenth-century America seemed so conspicuous that Albion W. Tourgée, one of the two authors I will be discussing, remarked that North and South could be considered two separate civilizations. Indeed, North and South were heading in different directions in the antebellum period. Broadly speaking, the early nineteenth century saw the North developing into a industrial, urban society based on a free labor economy, while the South remained rooted in the traditional agricultural way of life. In terms of ideology, the industrialized North began to define itself more and more as a free and egalitarian society in which antislavery sentiment proliferated. The southern States, on the other hand, evolved from
“societies with slaves into slave societies” (Grant 5), particularly because of the growing importance of the cotton production. (Grant 5-6; Norton et al. 232-233; 257)

With the two regions gradually drifting apart in terms of their economic, political and social beliefs and interests, the perceptions North and South had of each other became stereotyped. As William Robert Taylor states in authoritative work *Cavalier and Yankee. The Old South and American National Character*, “by 1860, most Americans had come to look upon their society and culture as divided between a North and a South, a democratic, commercial civilization and an aristocratic, agrarian one. Each section of the country, so it was believed, possessed its own ethic, its own historical traditions [...]. As Taylor shows in his work, in the eyes of the slaveholding South, northerners were weak, puritan moneygrubbers, jealous of the southern chivalric and masculine way of life. Northerners, on the other hand, viewed the South as a backward country, full of violent, intemperate and idle men. In the context of this ‘war of images’ between the North and the South in the antebellum period, an interesting phenomenon was the creation and development of the “southern Plantation Legend” in the minds of southerners and northerners alike. An important element in this myth was the figure of the southern gentleman, frequently termed “Cavalier”. This aristocratic southern man was the exemplar of masculinity, lived by a code of honor and protected the southern Belle. The blacks in the Plantation Legend were depicted as happy with their fate because they knew that the magnanimous plantation holder had taken it upon himself to civilize their inferior race. This legendary image of the Old South was cultivated in the antebellum South itself, but, for a variety of reasons, people in the North were also fascinated by the myth and they even contributed to its development and perpetuation (Taylor 132-133, 146, 302, 334-335). One of the ideas resulting from this myth, and which proved to be important for the Civil War and its aftermath, was the notion that the southern Cavalier, in his knightly way of life, was more manly than his urban, money-centered Yankee counterpart. The North openly challenged this claim, but, given the
grip the myth had on the northerners’ imagination, many of them secretly feared that the southern claim to superior manhood might be a reality. Their fear seemed to be confirmed by the southern victories in the early stages of the Civil War. However, following the Union victory in 1865 the tables seemed to have turned and the North was ready to claim its title as manliest region (Silber 18-22).

In the decades following the Civil War several novels appeared, mostly written by northerners, with the Civil War as their setting and with a marriage between a northern man and a southern woman as their main plot device. The key issue at play in most of these post-war novels is, as Nina Silber has pointed out in her influential work The Romance of Reunion: northerners and the South, the issue of gender. Silber demonstrates how in many of these novels, which she classifies as ‘romances of reunion’, the novelist adopts a rhetoric of reconciliation in which the South is cast in the submissive, feminine role (Silber 10, 40). Taking into account the crucial role of gender in the cultural imagination of antebellum and post-bellum America, I will try to examine the images of the South that emerge from two novels written by northern authors, as well as the images of the North that arises in relation to these views on ‘Dixie’, as the southern states that formed the Confederacy were also termed. The first novel under scrutiny is John William De Forest’s Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, published in 1867, only two years after the close of the Civil War. Mentioned by Nina Silber as one of the earliest examples of the romance of reunion, Miss Ravenel’s Conversion combines the soon-to-be stereotypical North-South marriage plot with a critical view of northern society and a hopeful but at the same time anxious perspective on post-war North-South relations. De Forest, a Civil War veteran, cautiously expresses his doubts as to whether the northern victory on the battlefield will be translated in the establishment of northern superiority over the South in intellectual and ideological terms, and, inevitably, in terms of manhood.
De Forest’s moderate skepticism is confirmed by Albion Winegar Tourgée in his novel/political tract *A Fool’s Errand. By One of the Fools* published in 1879, two years after the official ending of the Reconstruction Era. After the Civil War, Tourgée, like De Forest a Union veteran, decided to settle in North Carolina to participate in the reconstruction of the defeated South. Tourgée, a lawyer with outspoken abolitionist sympathies, belonged to the Radical Republicans, the section of the Republican party that fervently believed in the need to use the Union victory to install, or, if necessary to impose, the northern system of equality and democracy in the South (Norton et al. 418-419, Olenick 332-333). In this respect, the Radical Republicans diverged from the more moderate and forgiving policy that President Lincoln and his successor Andrew Johnson had in mind (Norton et al. 410-411). Tourgée’s experience in the South under Reconstruction, however, proved to be a disillusion and when he returned to the North in 1877, he dipped his pen in gall and wrote a critical account of the failure of the northern policy in the post-war South. In *A Fool’s Errand*, Tourgée reverses the stereotypical marriage formula which reigned among contemporary northern writers, most of whom had never set foot in the South, by portraying the romance between a southern man, reminiscent of the southern Cavalier, and a northern woman. The reversal of the major device used by northern novelists to underscore northern masculine superiority is one of the ways in which Tourgée, who lived among the ‘defeated’ southerners for over a decade, shows the possible falsity of this northern optimism. As a loyal and fervent believer in the Union cause, however, Tourgée cannot help but attenuate his critique by including a sense of hope that in the end the North and its democratic ideals will prevail and that the South, in the long run, will yet be converted.

In my discussion of *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* and *A Fool’s Errand* in terms of North-South imagery, I will mainly focus on the representation of gender and especially the rhetoric of manhood, which, as Nina Silber has thoroughly demonstrated, was a pivotal element in the American cultural imagination before, during and after the Civil War. Starting
from the central element of gender, I will examine the role attributed to the human components of the South's Peculiar institution, the blacks. I will also try to show how both John William De Forest and Albion Tourgée, though patriots and proud northerners, incorporate in their novels a sharp critique of their own region as well as a heartfelt respect for their 'enemies' of the South. Before analyzing both works in this manner, I will give a general outline of the situation in American society before, during and after the civil conflict, as the cultural images which developed in the antebellum period, particularly that of the southern Cavalier and northern Yankee continued to play a significant role in the imagination of both post-war North and South.
1. Politics and Legend in Antebellum America

After the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the newly formed American nation was confronted with the implications of its revolutionary ideology based on the Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality. In the years following the declaration African Americans pleaded that the existence of slavery in the United States was contradiction with the “unalienable rights” of “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence (US Declaration Ind.). As a result, several northern states adopted emancipation laws banning slavery from their territory. Thus, with the American War of Independence, the northern part of the United States witnessed the beginning of the gradual abolition of slavery and with it, the seeds of North-South divergence and antagonism began to ripen. In the following decades North and South continued to walk different paths driven by different social, political and economic interests. After the turn of the century, sectionalism became more and more visible in the United States. Two events which contributed to its development were the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and the War of 1812 with Great Britain (Norton et al. 160-163).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the progressive North was developing into an industrial, free labor society. At the same time, the economy of the South, which relied heavily on slave labor on its rice, tobacco and indigo plantations, seemed to be heading towards a crisis. However, the growth of the textile industry in Britain and, to a lesser extent, in North America because of the Industrial Revolution resulted in a drastic increase of the demand for raw cotton. The problem that remained for southern cotton planters was that the production of cotton was very labor-intensive. That situation changed in 1793 with the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney, a New Englander. His invention allowed a single slave to produce the same amount of cotton per day that before required fifty slaves, making the cultivation of cotton much more profitable. Moreover, with the increase of cotton fields throughout the South, the demand for slaves to work them soared as well. In
addition, the abolition of the international slave trade by the Slave Trade Act in 1808 resulted in an explosion of the value of the existing slaves (Grant 4, Norton et al. 208, 213-214). Thus, ironically, it was a northerner who found a way to make the system of slavery in the South an economically lucrative one. The importance of the cotton gin in the ‘revival’ and rise of slavery is stressed by the American essayist John Jay Chapman in his work on the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison:

There was never a moment when the slavery issue was not a sleeping serpent. That issue lay coiled up under the table during the deliberations of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. It was, owing to the cotton gin, more than half wake at the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803... Thereafter, slavery was on everyone's mind, though not always on his tongue. (Chapman 9)

The second element that contributed to the North-South divide in the early nineteenth century was the War of 1812, the second war of the United States with Great Britain. The war itself is less noteworthy than its aftermath. The end of the War of 1812 stimulated the development of three elements that would prove to be central to the future of the young nation and to its growing sectional divide: the growth of industry in the North, the consolidation of the institution of slavery in the South and the expansion to the West (Norton et al. 216-218, Grant 8-9).

Firstly, because of the Non-Importation Act and the Embargo Act of 1807, economic measures invoked to put pressure on Great Britain, merchants began to focus on manufacturing instead of shipping. In that way, these measures stimulated the textile industry in New England. The early industrial growth in the North was closely tied to the second crucial element cited above, the institution of slavery in the South. With the installation of new cotton mills, the North’s demand for raw cotton rose, boosting the southern cotton economy and the slavery system it was based on. Moreover, the industrial development in the North was mainly financed by merchants who had accumulated their
wealth at least partly through the slave trade. In other words, the industrial and increasingly free North both stimulated and was stimulated by the southern slave system; the sea of troubles it would take up arms against only a few decades later. Thirdly, the migration to the western territories acquired by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 accelerated immensely after the war. The creation of six new states which resulted from this massive westward migration would soon be the Civil War’s primary incentive, the issue of the expansion of slavery in the American West. (Norton et al. 213, 218, 223-224).

The United States averted its first major political crisis when the Missouri Compromise was passed in Congress in 1820. The compromise proposed by Henry Clay offered a solution to the problem of the admission to the Union of the Missouri Territory. The main point of contention was that Missouri applied to enter the Union with a constitution that permitted slavery. Given that the equilibrium in the United States Senate relied on an equal number of free states and slave states, the admission of Missouri would tip the balance in favor of the latter. By allowing Maine, formerly part of Massachusetts, to enter the Union as a free state, Henry Clay found a way to admit Missouri with its proposed proslavery constitution while also maintaining the dire power balance in the Senate. Clay’s compromise also prohibited slavery in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36°30' parallel, thus creating a physical line of demarcation between slavery and freedom. The Missouri compromise solved the issue, but it also laid bare the growing sectional divide between North and South, both morally and politically, over the question of slavery (Grant 10-11, Norton et al. 224). Thomas Jefferson, for one, realized that the Missouri Compromise was only a temporary solution and that “a geographical line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived and held up to the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.” (qtd. in Bober 273). The many heated discussions and events that followed proved him right (Grant 11).
The next stage on the road to war followed almost a decade later, when in 1828 Congress passed a protective tariff devised to support domestic, predominantly northern, industry. The agricultural South felt it was put at a disadvantage by the tariff. Southern discontent over the 1828 tariff led to the Nullification Crisis which exposed just how far North and South had drifted apart. The Nullification Controversy was, in its core, a debate on the constitutional legitimacy of states’ rights. The state of South Carolina attempted to block the protective tariffs by invoking the argument that states have the right to nullify any federal law they deem unconstitutional (Norton et al. 304-305, Grant 11). Feelings on both sides were running high, especially in the debate between South Carolina senator Robert Hayne and senator for Massachusetts Daniel Webster. As William Taylor notes, the Webster-Hayne debate placed a southern Cavalier against a northern Yankee. While Hayne “cast himself as a passionate Cavalier and slipped frequently into a military terminology of defense and attack”, Webster was the “peaceable, cool and deliberate” Yankee (Taylor 110). This political conflict between the cultural representatives of both regions seems to foreshadow a military one that was to follow more than 30 years later. Meanwhile, South Carolina continued to oppose federal policy and even threatened to leave the Union. It was again Henry Clay who averted further calamity by working out a compromise Tariff with John C. Calhoun, the influential states’ rights and slavery proponent who would become the fierce spokesman of southern interests in the following decades. The Nullification Crisis was, however, more than a debate about states’ rights. Behind the hostility of South Carolina’s response to the ‘northern’ tariffs lay the growing concern that the federal government in general and the North in particular might pose a threat to slavery, the backbone of the South’s economy, and therefore to its very way of life. As a result of this growing suspicion towards the North, the South became increasingly defensive of its lifestyle and grew paranoid on the issue of their dire institution of slavery. The South’s growing paranoia was, however, not completely without reason. At the time of the Nullification Controversy, the
North saw the reinvigoration of the abolitionist movement propelled by William Lloyd Garrison, the founder of the American Antislavery Society and the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. Not surprisingly, the South was far from overjoyed by the presence of this militant abolitionist group in the North which argued for immediate emancipation. Even more so because it managed to convince an increasing number of northerners of slavery’s sinfulness. Thus, in the 1830s, the downpour of abolitionist sentiments in the North and the growing suspicion in the South severely strengthened the current of sectional antagonism in American politics and cultural imagination, and led the nation swiftly to the waterfall that would be the Civil War (Norton et al. 297-299, 305; Grant 12-17).

What had been lurking under the surface in the preceding decades became fully exposed from the 1830s onwards. North and South were moving in opposite directions and had organized their respective societies in fundamentally different ways. This was perhaps most clear to the outside observer. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political philosopher who travelled through America to study American society, remarked that

> On the north bank of the Ohio, everything is activity, industry; labor is honored; there are no slaves. Pass to the south bank and the scene changes so suddenly that you think yourself on the other side of the world; the enterprising spirit is gone. There, work is not only painful: it’s shameful, and you degrade yourself in submitting yourself to it. (qtd. in Pierson 369)

As de Tocqueville points out, the North had established itself as an industrial, urbanized and free society based on free labor and oriented to progress and commerce, while the South had remained an agricultural society ruled by King Cotton and sustained by the institution of slavery (Norton et al. 232-234, 248, 263). Because of the different, if not opposing, ideologies in both sections, northerners and southerners had outspoken, stereotypical perceptions of each other. These perceptions tended to have negative connotations and soon developed into prejudice. When de Tocqueville, in one of his many interviews, asked
Mr. Latrobe, a “very distinguished Baltimore lawyer” what he thought were “the chief traits that distinguished the North and the South”, the Maryland inhabitant answered:

What distinguishes the North is its enterprising spirit, what distinguishes the South is *l'esprit aristocratique* [spirit of chivalry?] [sic]. The manners of the inhabitant of the South are frank, open; he is excitable, irritable even, exceedingly touchy of his honour. The New Englander is cold and calculating, patient. While you are with the southerner you are welcome, he shares with you all the pleasures of his house. The northerner, after having received you, begins to wonder whether he couldn't do some business with you. (qtd. in Pierson 496)

Thus, from Mr. Latrobe’s description it seems some of the main cultural oppositions between northerners and southerners were, at least in the American perception, an enterprising middle class versus a plantation aristocracy, a chivalric code of honor versus puritan moneygrubbing practicality and southern warmth versus northern chilliness. As appears from William Taylor’s *Cavalier and Yankee*, the Baltimore lawyer was quite accurate in his observations. However, while certainly rooted in truth, the perceptions that North and South had of themselves and each other were often exaggerations and, especially with regard to the (self-)image of the South, even tended towards legend. The conception of the South that started to dominate the southern and northern cultural imagination during the last four decades prior to the Civil War was that of the southern Plantation Legend (Taylor 146). This mythological construct of the South offered a romantic depiction of America’s slaveholding region. In *Cavalier and Yankee*, William Taylor argues that the Plantation Legend proliferated in fiction and consequently in the cultural imagination in the period from the 1830s until the mid-1850s (Taylor 67, 148). As Taylor shows, antebellum plantation novels belonging to the genre of historical romance popularized by Sir Walter Scott such as John Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* (1832), William Alexander Caruthers’ *The Cavaliers of Virginia* (1834) and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker’s *George Balcombe* (1836) depicted the Old South as a stable, semi-feudal land dominated by the class of the genteel “Cavalier gentleman” (Taylor
In his most idealized form the mythical southern gentleman planter had an aristocratic ancestry. Often, he was believed to be descended from the royalist English Cavaliers who had migrated to the New World in the wake of the English Civil War (Taylor 15). The southern Cavalier was characterized by his infinite “wit and charm” and his “extravagant hospitality” (Taylor 294, 243). In addition, he was gracious and refined, and he “possessed a natural dignity which was partly the result of exercising from childhood the habit of command and partly a trait inherited from [his European aristocratic ancestors]” (Taylor 152). Furthermore, the Cavalier preferred to occupy himself with “planting, politics and military service” (Taylor 153). In short, the southern gentleman possessed an innate capacity for leadership and a “characteristic habit of command” (Taylor 198). Another essential quality of the Cavalier was his sheer “indifference to money and business” (Taylor 96). Because of his characteristic disinterestedness with regard to material matters, a quality admired both North and South, the Cavalier distinguished himself from the Yankee, an equally legendary figure who also dominated the American imagination from the 1820s onwards (Taylor 101). The main characteristic of the Yankee, especially as seen through southern eyes, was his acquisitiveness, his “overt and unabashed love of money” (Taylor 103). Furthermore, the “predatory Yankee” (146), as Taylor labels him, was opportunistic, greedy and hypocritical (Taylor 103, 108). In contrast to the predatory Yankee who “values the dollar above everything else” (Taylor 109), the chivalrous southern Cavalier was unaffected by materialism. Instead, he valued integrity and lived by a “gentlemanly code of honor” and by the “Code Duello”, which entailed that a respectable man should defend his

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1 However, as Taylor demonstrates at length in his book, the plantation novels written in the antebellum period not merely offered an idealized depiction of plantation life and the southern planter. In fact, often the Cavalier figure was seen in a critical or even satirical light. The plantation literature becomes more idyllic after the Civil War, in what Taylor considers the second fertile period of this genre, that is the period from about 1880 to 1900 (Taylor 148).

2 Taylor also distinguishes a second, idealized type of Yankee figure, the “transcendent Yankee”, who stands in stark contrast to his amoral “hellish twin” (108). Behind his mask of materiality, the transcendent Yankee was selfless, self-sufficient and even generous (Taylor 108-109). Moreover, in his more exemplary form, the Yankee was praised for “his thrift, “industriousness, and his asceticism” (21). However, as Taylor argues, the second type of Yankee was only “the ideal that a Yankee nation wanted, in fact needed, to believe in – and to convince others to believe in” (108).
honor violently when insulted (Norton et al. 247; Taylor 96, 196). Another important duty of the virile southern knight was to protect the innocent (white) women from danger, or to avenge her honor when it had been offended. The young women of the South were depicted as beautiful, charming ‘Belles’ who were courted into marriage by honorable gentlemen, after which they became respectable, obedient ladies.\(^3\) Southern society was represented as governed by a paternalistic system that was characterized by strict hierarchical relations between men, women and slaves. The aristocratic planters ruled with patriarchal authority and acted as kind custodians of the poor black slaves, who, in turn, were content with their situation and keen to bring their benevolent masters economic prosperity (Norton et al. 234, 248; Taylor 173-174, 302). While the idea of the planters as patriarchs of an inferior race did correspond to how southern slaveholders viewed their practice, the image of the happy slave was far less true to life. Nonetheless, given the natural leadership and authority attributed to him, the southern Cavalier, in his ideal form, was an incarnation of masculinity and “in every way [...] characterized by virility and by a mastery of his environment” (Taylor 153).

This romantic image of Dixie, although to some extent rooted in reality, was an oversimplification based on the lifestyle of the southern slaveholding aristocracy. In reality, the aristocratic planter class only constituted a small minority of the South’s population and was therefore far from representative for the southern way of life. The vast majority of the white southern population did not own slaves, most of them were independent yeoman farmers or frontiersmen. However, the planter class owned more than ninety percent of the wealth and dominated state legislatures. As a consequence of their political domination, the planter elite controlled the South’s political and ideological discourse, one that focused on the defense and justification of slavery. As their voice virtually eclipsed that of the other

\(^3\) Taylor, however, argues that in many antebellum plantation novels the southern woman “only pretends to yield to her husband”. The ‘southern matriarch’, as Taylor labels her, was “the heart and soul of [the plantation system]” (Taylor 162-163). However, in spite of the woman’s position in the Plantation Legend as the one who is “in charge of the household”, the predominant view on women in the antebellum South was that they were “by nature passive and yielding” (Taylor 172).
classes, the southern elite’s aristocratic values such as honor, gentility, the importance of tradition and manners, dominated the image of southern life in the cultural imagination of both North and South (Norton et al. 242-247; Taylor 335).

In the North, most people willingly accepted this romantic notion of the South, mostly because of the fascinating attraction that the southern Plantation Legend, with its aristocratic Cavaliers and stunning Belles, had on the industrial North. In fact, some northerners even contributed to the development of the Plantation Legend. As Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Chords demonstrate in their article “Northern Origins of Southern Mythology”, the North’s cultural contribution to southern legend should not be underestimated. Among the examples of Yankee contributors mentioned by Gerster and Chords, Harriet Beecher Stowe especially strikes the eye. With her immensely popular novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Stowe, in spite of her antislavery intentions, confirmed several mythological southern symbols, such as that of the loyal slave, the mammy figure and, be it in a less obvious way, of the Cavaliers and Belles (Gerster and Chords 569). More interesting, however, is the explanation as to why northerners were so fascinated by the Plantation Myth. Gerster and Chords present four main reasons for this northern fascination. Firstly, the northern Yankee had a sort of hidden romantic craving for a feudal-like aristocratic class society, a desire they saw fulfilled in the idealized image of the southern planter class. Although fervent believers in progress and modernity, northerners were also displeased with some of the side effects of their industrialized society. In other words, the Yankee “liked to fancy himself a Cavalier at heart” (Gerster and Chords 572). The second factor, for which Gerster and Chords draw on Taylor’s *Cavalier and Yankee*, can be seen as resulting from these negative side effects of the North’s egalitarian society. Northerners, made anxious by the uncertainty of a fluctuating market economy and by what they perceived as the loss of social standards in a modern democratic society, identified in the romanticized South a system of social stability and clear hierarchy which they found lacking in their own society.
(Gerster and Chords 573). Thirdly, the North, itself cruising on the highway of industrialization and urbanization, saw in the southern Plantation Legend a remnant of the agricultural origins of the American nation (Gerster and Chords 574). The final reason has more to do with the North’s self-interested motivation of establishing its moral superiority. The North needed the Plantation Myth, or at least its implication that the South was a land almost entirely populated by white supremacist slaveholders, to be able to uphold its own image as a free, antislavery society. In that way, the North contributed to the Plantation Myth to fuel the perception that the borderline between North and South was a physical and ideological line of demarcation between total freedom and total bondsmanship, thus camouflaging its own racial attitudes (Gerster and Chords 574-576). As Nina Silber demonstrates in *The Romance of Reunion*, many of these elements cited by Gerster and Chords with regard to the antebellum period still hold true after the Civil War. For the postbellum northerner living in a society characterized by industry, immigration, corruption and reform movements, the Old South represented a stable counterpoint (Silber 122).

In spite of the attraction the idyllic southern plantation world exerted on the northern mind, this remained an undercurrent in Yankee imagination, and the North increasingly deemed itself superior, especially in moral terms. As Gerster and Chords state, the antebellum North responded to the southern Plantation Myth with what the prominent historian Comer Vann Woodward termed “the Antislavery Myth”, “the legend that the Mason and Dixon Line [...] set apart racial inhumanity in the South from benevolence, liberality and tolerance in the North” (Van Woodward 316). The truth was of course much more nuanced. As Jacque Voegeli, with Vann Woodward’s thesis in mind, argues, in spite of the growing antislavery sentiment in the North, many northerners combined their conviction of the wrongfulness of slavery with a belief in the superiority of the white race. Northerners often looked with suspicion towards the free blacks that dwelled among them, not in the least because they saw them as rivals for the same job in the North’s ruthless market
economy (Voegeli 235-236). They also viewed the many immigrants that entered northern society as economic competitors, but at least they were white. Therefore, for many people in the ‘free’ North, ending slavery did not necessarily mean looking upon blacks as equals or giving them equal rights (Voegeli 235-236).

That the North’s self-image of being a tolerant, egalitarian society was an exercise in stretching the truth did not withhold it from defining itself as such in the face of the South, and they had, all things considered, valid reasons to do so. The North, in fact, was the birthplace of several reform movements, which not only sought to promote improvement of society as a whole. The North of the first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of reform organizations including the Female Moral Reform Society and the temperance movement. The mission of these movements was to battle the social evils, such as debauchery and excessive drinking, which their modern industrialized society brought along. However, the principal social sin of antebellum America that the moral crusaders of the North sought to eradicate lay outside of their own society; or at least mostly. As mentioned before, the abolitionist movement received a new impulse by the zeal of William Lloyd Garrison. Garrisonian abolitionists, influenced by the evangelical creed, fervently believed that slavery was not merely a social evil, but also a deep moral sin. Because of the often religious conviction with which these radical abolitionists spread their antislavery message and considering the persuasiveness of some of its proponents, such as Theodore Weld, Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass, more and more northerners were becoming convinced of the sinfulness of slavery (Norton et al. 290-294, 296-299).

Consequently, the slaveholding South was cast in the role of the nation’s shame, sinners against God and against the values of the Republic. Because of their Puritan heritage, northerners, and especially New Englanders, had an additional reason to look upon the South as a sinful region. In the Puritan creed, hard work and industriousness were key values, as working hard was seen as part of the true Christian’s personal calling. In his
sermon *A Christian At His Calling*, Cotton Mather, an influential puritan minister from the early eighteenth century, warns his fellow believers that “the Sin of Sodom was, Abundance of Idleness. All the Sins of Sodom will abound, where Idleness is countenanced.” (qtd. in Bushman 23). Not surprisingly then, the people from the Puritan North looked upon southerners as guilty of the sin of sloth, relying as they did on the work of others (Silber 9). Armed with this powerful, God-given ammunition, the North launched a moral attack on Sodom South in the decades leading up to the Civil War, while simultaneously proclaiming its own moral superiority (Silber 8-9).

The sinners of the South desperately tried to defend slavery against the northern attacks. Southern politicians such as John C. Calhoun offered political, economic and moral arguments in favor of the South’s Peculiar Institution. In a speech to the U.S. Senate in 1837, Calhoun declared that “the relation now existing in the slaveholding States between the two [races], is, instead of an evil, a good – a positive good.” (qtd. in Polin and Polin 372). To defend this seemingly absurd claim, Calhoun relied on the ideology of paternalism and on the notion of the racial inferiority of the blacks. According to Calhoun, slaveholders are not inhumane oppressors as abolitionists portray them. Rather, they are fatherly educators of the blacks. “Never before”, Calhoun argues in his speech, “has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn of history to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically, but morally and intellectually” (qtd. in Polin and Polin 372). Proslavery advocates even resorted to the Bible, the very word of God, to underpin their claim. The Virginia minister Thornton Stringfellow, himself the son of a plantation owner, developed an elaborate proslavery argument founded on Scripture in his *Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery*. Stringfellow cited passages from the Old Testament to show that God had ordained slavery and that, as many other biblical figures, Abraham had held slaves (Junius 615). In addition, Stringfellow argues, a study of the New Testament shows that “Jesus Christ has not abolished slavery by a prohibitory command”
(qtd. in Faust 156). Thus, while the proliferation of evangelical Christianity in antebellum America gave rise to the creation of reform movements in the North, it was used to enforce the proslavery argument in the South (Norton et al. 233). However, the South could not bring the steady growth of antislavery sentiment in the North to a halt. From the 1830s onwards, the Yankees were becoming increasingly convinced that, on the issue of slavery, the moral compass was pointing North (Grant 17, Norton et al. 299).

While the North was firmly convinced that it had emerged as victors from the slavery debate, the opposite seemed to be true with regard to another issue that dominated the antebellum sectional rhetoric, that is the issue of manhood. As Nina Silber suggests in The Romance of Reunion, North and South were engaged in a conflict over the title of ‘manliest region’, an argument which many of them believed the Civil War would settle once and for all. The southern ideal of manhood was, at least in the cultural imagination, the knightly southern gentleman who organized his life around a “code of honor” (Silber 8). This code required the Cavalier to use violence, physical or via duel, in order to defend his own honor or that of a woman.4 Thus, the image of southern manhood that emerged in the antebellum period was that of a virile, masterful man who managed to combine chivalry and grace with passion and who asserted his masculinity via the protection of women, but also via “dueling, drinking or gambling” (Silber 8).5

The northern view on manhood was very different. As Nina Silber and Thomas Fick have argued, northerners hailed respectability, temperance and self-restraint as manly virtues, rather than passion and outward manifestation of physical strength (Silber 20-22; Fick 478-479). Both Silber and Fick connect this appreciation of self-control to the free labor system the northern economy was based on. In the northern system, economic and social progress were the goals of the individual and success in achieving them depended on “the

4 Although Nina Silber herself does not use the term ‘Cavalier’, the description of ideal southern manhood she gives in the introduction and first chapter of her work corresponds to the image of the Cavalier figure as described by William Taylor in Cavalier and Yankee, a work which Silber also consulted.

5 For an elaborate discussion of the southern code of honor see Bertram Wyatt-Brown: Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
ability to discipline instinctual drives” (Fick 478). In their respective claim to masculine superiority, the North and the South tried to undercut each other’s idea of manhood. The North, especially antislavery proponents, challenged the southern masculine ideal for its inclination to vice and its celebration of violence (Silber 9). As William Taylor remarks, “the most striking characteristic of the southern gentleman in fiction [...] is his remoteness from [his ideal form]” (153). In his ideal form, the Cavalier was a “more balanced individual [...] than his Yankee counterpart”, who held high the value of honor and who did not care for money. However, the image of southern planter that emerged from antebellum plantation novels and that dominated the American imagination tended to deviate from this ideal (Taylor 152-153). Often, the Cavalier’s generous hospitality and disinterestedness with regard to money, values which were supposed to be part of his attraction, lead him to become a figure of vice. In antebellum fiction, Taylor states, the planter is frequently portrayed as “a spendthrift, a gambler or a dueler”, the latter being a role which even southern novelists “frowned upon” (153). Moreover, instead of a ‘balanced individual’, northerners often considered the southerner, to use the rather unflattering description of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “as ignorant as a bear, as irascible and nettled as any porcupine, as polite as a troubadour, and a very John Randolph in character and address” (qtd. in Taylor 238). Randolph was an eccentric Virginia congressman known for his unyielding belief in state sovereignty and his aggressive behavior in defending his stance and his state. Randolph became the prototype of what Taylor terms the “southern Hothead”, that is the southern gentleman characterized by his courteousness as well as “arrogant aristocratic manner” and by his “touchy pride and aggressiveness” (Taylor 158-159). The northern view on the southern male is powerfully summed by the writer Henry Adams, who stated that “strictly, the southerner had no mind; he had temperament” (qtd. in Taylor 239). Furthermore, Adams described the southerner as a notorious consumer of alcohol, which made him a

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6 Fink identifies sexuality as the main instinct that the middle-class northerner needed to control. In the slave society of the South, in which stability rather than progress was the creed, there was no need for such sexual restraint.
hazard and a particularly proud man, who did not hesitate to use violence when he felt he had been insulted (Taylor 239).

Next to their objection to the southerner’s impetuousness, northerners, permeated by the Puritan work ethic, reproached southern men of being idle and lazy for relying on slavery, an argument they also used to portray southerners as sinners (Silber 9). As Taylor indicates, even for Sarah Hale, a northerner writer who admired the southerner’s sense of honor, “the greatest liability of southern character was its tendency towards idleness and self-indulgence, the cult of pleasure” (qtd. in Taylor 133). The most important element of the antebellum northern attack on the southern manhood model was the abolitionists’ fervent attempts to feminize Dixie by depicting the South as a “land of women and blacks” (Silber 7). In spite of these efforts to downgrade the virile image of southern men, many northerners secretly feared that the southerners outshone the money-centered Yankee in vigor and military skill. This makes Silber, drawing on the observations of the historian Michael C.C. Adams in *Our Masters the Rebels*, conclude that many northerners went into the Civil War secretly fostering the thought that the fighting abilities and military prowess of the rebels might be superior to theirs, a fear they saw confirmed when the Confederates emerged victorious from the war’s early battles (Silber 18).

As the cultural conflict between North and South grew grimmer as the years progressed, sectional antagonism likewise became increasingly heated in the political realm. From the middle of the 1840s onwards, events which painfully revealed the wide ideological gap between the two sections followed each at a steady pace. Not surprisingly, most of these incidents were related to the issue that was at the forefront of every American politician’s mind: slavery.

What set off this chain reaction of sectionally charged events which would ultimately lead to America’s internal conflict was a war against an external foe, Mexico. As a result of the Mexican-American War of 1846, the United States gained the territories of California and
New Mexico. Opinions on the war differed throughout the nation, but striking differences in view were noticeable along sectional and also political lines. While in general southerners and democrats supported the war, the majority of Whigs and northerners condemned it. Behind the northern opposition lay the conviction that the war’s hidden agenda was to expand slavery in the West. Northerners saw the war against Mexico as part of the so-called Slave Power Conspiracy, the assumed plan of the unified slaveholding South to expand slavery to the free North by gaining political control of the federal government and its policies. If the argument of the South’s cruel treatment of the blacks was not strong enough to win northerners for the abolitionist cause, the idea that it also threatened the freedom and civil liberties in the North certainly was (Norton et al. 348-350, Grant 20).7

While North and South already quarreled over the legitimacy of the Mexican-American War, it was mostly the outcome of the conflict that stirred up a fiery political debate. As in 1820, the question was whether slavery would be allowed in the newly acquired territories. In the mid-1840s, the spokesman for the slaveholding states was still John C. Calhoun. In his notorious “Positive Good” speech of 1837, Calhoun had already demonstrated the radicality of his proslavery defense. A decade later, the years had not softened his resolve. When David Wilmot proposed to ban slavery from the new territories, Calhoun and other proslavery advocates protested heavily. Although the Wilmot Proviso failed to pass the Senate, the strong support it elicited in the North was indicative of the growing opposition against slavery above the Mason-Dixon line. However, it was not mainly abolitionist sentiment that urged most northerners to back the Wilmot Proviso, nor did Wilmot himself harbor particular anti-slavery sentiments. Ironically, it was a kind of anti-black sentiment that motivated the desire of Wilmot and others to bring slavery’s expansion to a halt. The presence of slave labor in the West, Wilmot and many like-minded northerners reasoned, would inevitably threaten the viability of free white labor in these territories

Thus, the primary concern for white northerners as Wilmot was to protect the white freemen against “the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor” (qtd. in Richards 152). Despite that the motivations of many northerners to oppose slavery were not always philanthropic in nature, it was crucial that they now opposed it en masse. As Mary-Susan Grant points out, “the South united around slavery; that was its strength. The North did not unite around antislavery; that was its weakness – until the 1850s” (23).

In 1849, the application of California for admission to the Union with a constitution prohibiting slavery stirred up the debate yet again. While northerners were glad to receive California in the Union as a free state, southern politicians objected. As both sides were unwilling to yield, the debate over slavery had once again reached a total deadlock. Once again it was Henry Clay who would lead the nation out of it. Or at least temporarily. Together with democratic senator Stephen Douglas, Clay worked out the Compromise of 1850. The compromise entailed the admission of California as a free state as a concession to the North and the strengthening of the Fugitive Slave Act to appease the South. With regard to the issue of slavery in the new territories, Clay and Douglas resorted to the idea of “popular sovereignty”, the concept devised by senator Lewis Cass that allowed the people of the territories to decide for themselves whether they would ban or permit slavery (Norton et al. 351-353, Grant 21). The problem seemed to be solved for the time being, but, given that the compromise rested on a very shaky foundation, not much was needed to cause its collapse.

The first cracks in the fragile compromise were soon exposed. The Fugitive Slave Act obliged citizens to help slave catchers in their hunt and provided a fine for those who were caught helping runaway slaves. The new law caused great consternation among abolitionists in the North, and some of them called on their fellow citizens to resist the slave catchers, violently if needed. Several abolitionists heeded the call and tried to aid runaways to escape
by creating a network of smuggling routes which came to be known as the Underground Railroad. Down South, the slaveholding class was getting more and more irritated by and worried over the northern acts of defiance against the law. Their hostility towards the North certainly did not improve when Harriet Beecher Stowe opened the eyes of millions of northerners to the evils of the South’s institution with her novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin. These various ominous signs that opposition to slavery in the North was getting more serious every day deepened the fear harbored by many southern slaveholders that the North posed a serious threat to the existence of slavery in the South (Norton et al. 354-355, Grant 22-23).

With fear and distrust reaching a new high every issue was interpreted in sectional terms and gave rise to new sectional conflicts. If the issue involved slavery, feelings ran even higher, and when in 1854 Stephen Douglas promoted his bill to organize the territories of Nebraska and Kansas in the Midwest, politicians on both sides were ready to draw their knives. The most controversial aspect of Douglas’s bill was the proposal to extend the application of popular sovereignty to these territories. The Kansas and Nebraska territories, however, were part of the Louisiana Purchase area north of the 36°30’ parallel, and should therefore, in accordance with the Missouri Compromise, automatically be free. Consequently, passing the bill would mean undermining the authority of the compromise made in 1820. Despite widespread opposition against Douglas’s proposal, the bill was passed, but its adoption came at a price. The vote on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill revealed that the sympathies of the democratic and especially the Whigs congressmen lay with their sections rather than their parties. Southern Democrats and Whigs had almost unanimously voted in favor of the act, while all the northern Whigs and a little over half of the northern Democrats opposed it. The Kansas-Nebraska Act thus signed the death warrant for the Second Party System, the traditional political opposition between Whigs and Democrats established under the presidency of Andrew Jackson in the late 1820s. But one person’s loss is another person’s gain and the new Republican party was quick to leap into the political
void left by the Whigs. With their slogan “Free Soil, Free labor, Free men”, the Republican Party spoke to the interests of a wide variety of northerners, and to northerners exclusively. Their moral condemnation of slavery secured them the vote of northerners who opposed the institution because of its inhumanity while their insistence on free labor in a free West and on the importance of the self-reliant individual for the nation’s progress appealed to northerners whose objections to slavery were less conscientious but more economic in nature (Norton et al. 356-361, Grant 24-25).

While the new Republican Party catered to the needs of the North, the Democrats started to turn their eyes South. Traditionally the primary pool of voters for the Democrats in the South consisted of yeoman farmers, not slave owners. With the disappearance of the Whigs and the unappealing ideology of the Republican Party, however, the southern wing of the Democratic Party seized the opportunity to secure the votes of the slaveholding class. By combining their defense of slavery with a racist rhetoric that exploited the racial fears that dominated the South, the Democrats managed to attract the slaveholding class while also maintaining support among the common southerners (Norton et al. 361, Grant 24-25).

Until the middle of the 1850s, sectional conflicts had been largely constricted to fiery debates in Congress and inimical newspaper articles, the most dangerous weapons of both sides being sharp words and cutting insults. But, as sectional hostility reached its climax, the encounters between the opposing sides became more grim and violent. Following the Kansas-Nebraska Act, settlers from both sides of the conflict rushed to Kansas to establish their system. The act, Mary-Susan Grant notes, had turned Kansas into “the battleground between North and South, slave and free” (Grant 25). The confrontations between proslavery southerners and abolitionist northerners were violent and often bloody. The New York Tribune tellingly referred to the new territory as “Bleeding Kansas” (Norton et al. 361-366).
But the blood and violence were not constricted to the plains of Kansas. Washington D.C. also witnessed its share when in 1856 South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks beat abolitionist senator Charles Sumner on the head with his cane after having read a speech in which Sumner had insulted the South and Andrew P. Butler, Brooks’ cousin. While northerners were shocked when they received word of the incident, southerners hailed it and sent Brooks new canes to replace his broken one (Norton et al. 362, Grant 25). The physical encounter between Sumner and Brooks seems to serve as a nice illustration of the cultural clash between the antebellum northern Yankee and southern Cavalier. In his speech, Sumner mocked the stereotypical image of the aristocratic southern planter class and the values they held high.

The Senator from South Carolina [Butler] has read many books of chivalry, and believes himself a chivalrous knight with sentiments of honor and courage. Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight -- I mean the harlot, slavery. (qtd. in Green 93)

Brooks, following the southern code of honor, deemed that he could not let the insults against his kin and his people pass unpunished. Since the southern Code Duello stated that a duel should be between equals, Brooks, who considered the abolitionist Sumner his inferior, decided that a couple of strokes with a cane would be more appropriate a punishment than challenging the Yankee to a duel (Green 93-94). Thus, the Sumner-Brooks affair solidified the conception North and South had of each other. To southerners, Sumner showed himself an unmannered, vulgar Yankee. Brooks’ reaction confirmed the northern view of southerners as violent brutes who resorted to violence, justified in the name of honor, to make their point (Grant 25). Furthermore, northerners also saw the incident as proving that southern slaveholders were intolerant of divergent opinions and that they intended on subjecting the
free North to their will. In an editorial, William Cullen Bryant, a poet and editor of the *New York Evening Post*, summed up the North’s indignation when he asked himself

Has it come to this, that we must speak with bated breath in the presence of our southern masters; that even their follies are too sacred a subject of ridicule; that we must not deny the consistency of their principles or the accuracy of their statements? If we venture to laugh at them, or question their logic, or dispute their facts, are we to be chastised as they chastise their slaves? Are we, too, slaves, slaves for life, a target for their brutal blows, when we do not comport ourselves to please them? (Bryant 290)

The North received another blow, a symbolical one this time, when Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Roger Taney decided the long-debated slavery in the South’s favor when he ruled on the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case. Dred Scott, a slave from Missouri, applied for his freedom arguing that he had spent years living in free states such as Illinois and that therefore, he should be free. Taney, after careful examination of the Constitution rejected Scott’s claim. Furthermore, he ruled that Congress had no authority to ban slavery and that therefore provisions such as the Missouri Compromise and popular sovereignty were unconstitutional. The decision caused despair and outrage in the North, not only among African Americans, but also among white northerners, who saw the Dred Scott Decision as a sinister confirmation of the Slave Power menace and as an attack on the very foundation upon which their claim to moral superiority was built (Norton et al. 362-363, Grant 26).

The growing fear in the North that the Slave Power would take over the whole nation was, in a perverse way, a blessing for the new Republican party as they saw support for their cause rise exponentially. Republican politicians such as Abraham Lincoln eagerly responded to their electorate’s fears and used their rhetorical skills and eloquent speeches to combat the slavery threat from the South (Norton et al. 364, Grant 26). For radical abolitionists, however, big words alone did not suffice and they called for action. William Lloyd Garrison,
for one, provocatively asked his fellow northerners “where is our northern manhood? Do we always mean to cower under the southern lash?” (William Lloyd Garrison, “Disunion”).

In 1859, one man more than heeded Garrison’s call for manly action. John Brown, an idealistic abolitionist who had already been involved in the bloodshed in Kansas, was determined to defeat “Satan and his legions” (qtd in W.E.B. Dubois 60). In October 1859, Brown assembled a group of kindred spirits, blacks and whites, and together they launched an attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in Virginia, expecting local slaves to rebel. They did not, and a wounded Brown was arrested, imprisoned and executed. However, in spite of its failure, Brown’s action, and even more so his execution resonated throughout the country. In the North, Brown’s recourse to violence was disapproved of by some, but he was seen as a martyr by many. Especially for northern anti-slavery proponents, who were often ridiculed by their southern opponents as “men of talk and not of action”, John Brown’s raid had great significance (Silber 22). As Silber states, Brown’s ‘masculine’ action had “reinvigorat[ed] [the abolitionist] cause with a spirit of manly vitality” (22). Southerners on the other hand cheered at Brown’s death. At the same time, Brown’s enterprise strengthened the southern fear of a slavery rebellion and confirmed their suspicion that the North’s objective was to destroy their precious institution and their whole way of life (Norton et al. 365, Grant 26-27). More and more southerners saw secession as the only way to preserve their lifestyle. Secession was in the southern air, and Lincoln’s victory in the 1860 presidential election only precipitated its spread. When Lincoln refused to make concessions on the Republican stance on the expansion of slavery, South Carolina, which had always stood on the barricades on the slavery issue, passed an ordinance of secession from the Union on December 20, 1860. Soon six more states followed South Carolina’s example and together they formed the Confederates States of America with Jefferson Davis as its president (Norton et al 365-367, Grant 34-43).8

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8 Four more states, Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, joined the Confederacy after the war had begun.
On April 12, 1861, less than four months after the first southern state seceded, the Civil War broke out when Confederate canons shelled the federal fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. After the fiery debate between Hayne and Webster in 1830 and the caning of Sumner by Brooks, the Cavalier and the Yankee were ready to take up their muskets to settle the issue once and for all.
2. The American Civil War

Although the rapidity with which the six states of the Deep South joined South Carolina in her break-away from the Union (Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas all passed ordinances of secession between the ninth of January and the first of February) might suggest that there was a popular consensus about secession, in reality the southern population was far from united. As the principal motivator for secession had been the preservation of slavery, logic obliges that most slaveholding southerners were in favor of seceding from the conspiring North. The common, non-slaveholding southerners, however, were less convinced of the benefits of disunion. Despite that the majority of southerners had voted against leaving the Union, proponents of secession managed to impose their will because they were more united in their objective, more ardent in their speeches and, most importantly, more potent in politics (Norton et al. 367-368; Grant 42; Brock 136; Bolton 10).

In spite of this looming internal division, most southerners carried away by the strong sense of patriotism that prevailed in the South and were more than willing to defend their region against the northern Yankee (Grant 59-60, Taylor 327). This eagerness of many southerners, even of those who owned no slaves, to combat the North derived from the southern nationalism that had been forming since the 1830s (Taylor 329). As William Taylor argues, since that turbulent decade which opened with the Nullification Crisis, the “idea of a coherent South, of a distinct and different southern civilization” with “an exclusively southern historical, and even racial, heritage”, to wit the South’s supposed Norman ancestry, had started to take root in the popular imagination of many southerners, and by 1861 it was in full bloom (Taylor 333). Going into the Civil War, the South was permeated by the idea that they were defending their agrarian ‘nation’ against the money-centered, hypocritical Yankee race (Taylor 335).

The southern soldiers, nicknamed ‘greybacks’ or ‘butternuts’ after the color of their uniforms, entered the war overly confident that they would beat the Yankees in no time. The
confidence of the Confederates was inspired by “the myth of southern invincibility”, the idea that the South cannot be defeated and certainly not by the Yankees, who they deemed their inferiors in military skill (Norton et al. 375; Taylor 327, 338). As Taylor states, in the eyes of the South, the Yankee was “a conspirator and a hypocrite, but he was also a coward. He would never fight, and he could certainly never win” (332). Susan Mary-Grant notes that this ultimately ungrounded notion of “southern military superiority”, which partly derived from the presumed Cavalier heritage of the South, was widespread in the South as well as in the North (57-58). Indeed, going into the war, many Yankees were wary of the superior military skills that “the masterful southern soldier” supposedly possessed (Silber 18). Nonetheless, the prospect of war also stirred up patriotism in the North. Thousands of young men throughout the North heeded President Lincoln’s call for troops and enlisted in one of the many local regiments and companies eager to fight for the Union or, for those not affected by abstract ideological causes, to teach the southerners a lesson (Norton 375; Grant 58-61). Among these men were John William De Forest, a captain of the Twelfth Connecticut Volunteers, and Albion Winegar Tourgé, who joined the Twenty-seventh New York Infantry. The Union army recruited volunteers with a wide variety of regional (city and countryside, East and West) and ethnic (Irish, Germans, Italians, amongst others) backgrounds (Grant 61). One group conspicuously absent from the volunteer armies, however, were the coloreds. The reason for their absence was not that they did not want to fight. Quite the contrary, “northern blacks”, as Joseph T. Glatthaar writes in Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers, “flooded the War Department and Lincoln with offers to serve in the Union army” (3). The federal government, however, did not allow those colored volunteers to enlist, much to the dismay of the blacks who were eager to “strike a blow at prejudice and prove their worth an loyalty the Union” (Glatthaar 3). Frederick Douglass

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summed up the feeling of his people when he wrote in his abolitionist newspaper in May 1861 that

We are often asked by persons in the street as well as by letter, what our people will do in the present solemn crisis in the affairs of the country. Our answer is, would to God you would let us do something! We lack nothing but your consent. We are ready and would go, counting ourselves happy in being permitted to serve and suffer for the cause of freedom and free institutions. But you won’t let us go... (Douglass 448)

For Douglass, things were clear. In his article tellingly titled “How To End The War”, Douglass asserts that if the Union hoped to win the war, it had “make the cause of their country the cause of freedom” and they had to allow blacks fight for this freedom (Douglass 449; Grant 62). Both of these issues would be addressed by Lincoln in 1862, and the black regiments contributed immensely to the victory of the North (Glatthaar 9; Norton et al. 391).10

Both sides of the conflict had initially expected the war to be brief. The North could boast an advantage in industrial and agricultural production, manpower and ships. The South had the benefit that it did not have to attack or conquer the North to achieve its objective, southern independence. It could just stay on the defensive. The North, on the other hand, was obliged to invade the South and achieve complete conquest if it were to attain its aim of preserving the Union. Southerners believed that if they could gain one or two decisive victories over the Yankees, the North would realize that the war was futile. Given the South’s belief in its superiority in combat, they were optimistic about their

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10 However, as Glatthaar points out, both emancipation and the deployment of blacks in the context of the war were anticipated by the Confiscation Acts of 1861, which “confiscated property used for insurrectionary purposes” (Confiscation Act of 1861, qtd in Glatthaar 4). Thus, like any other Confederate good, slaves could be confiscated by the Union army. As a result of this act, Glatthaar states, runaway slaves were emancipated (5). A great amount of slaves, therefore, fled to the Union lines as the northern army advanced, and many of these newly freed blacks given a task in the Union army. The influx of runaway slaves from the southern areas, however, was immense and far exceeded the number the army could employ (Glatthaar 4-6). As De Forest, who had a black servant himself, remarks in a letter to his wife about camp life in Camp Parapet, “they [the blacks] straggle into camp daily, more than we know what to do with” (A Volunteer’s Adventures 22). I will henceforth refer to A Volunteer’s Adventures, a compilation of letters written by de Forest during the Civil War, as VA.
The southerner attitude at the start of the war is expressed quite nicely by Stuart Tarleton, a minor southern character in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, who confidently boasts that “we could lick them in a month! Gentlemen always fight better than rabble. A month - why, one battle -” (*Gone with the Wind*, Part 1 Chapter VI). The reaction of Rhett Butler, the novel’s male protagonist, who points the group of confident southern gentlemen to the North’s industrial, demographic and naval superiority, probably represents a more realistic outlook on the situation. Nonetheless, the South had one more major trump, that is the competence and tactical genius of its generals and especially of its commander, General Robert E. Lee. In various respects, Lee, a Virginian aristocrat, seems to fit the description of the Cavalier figure. When, in January 1861, he was asked to become the commander of the Union armies, Lee, who originally had been against secession and who believed slavery was “a moral and political evil” (qtd in Brock 140), refused after careful deliberation. He decided he could not abandon his loyalty to Virginia and joined the Confederate army instead (Norton et al. 378; Brock 140-141).11

If North and South were both hoping for a short war, the first battle between Johnny Reb and Billy Yank exposed the naivety of such view. The first battle, referred to as the First Battle of Bull Run by the North and as First Manassas by the South, was won by the Confederacy, but the battle showed both sides the fallacy of their initial optimism. First Manassas made the Confederate leaders realize that it would take more than a few decisive battles to win the war. First Bull Run showed the resourceful North that they should not underestimate their southern counterparts (Grant 73-75; Norton et al. 375-376). For both, Mary-Susan Grant notes, came the realization that they were facing “a war more brutal, more destructive, and certainly of far longer duration than anyone had conceived of in the spring of 1861” (75).

11 For a brief discussion of Robert E. Lee’s character, see the short autobiography by Nancy Nahra and Willard Sterne Randall, tellingly titled *Robert E. Lee: The Last Cavalier*. 
The Confederacy won the first major land battles until the Battle of Antietam. After Antietam, however, the North took full advantage of its naval power to raise blockades, got hold of the South’s major port, New Orleans, in 1862 and ultimately managed to control the Mississippi river the following year, thus “cutting the Confederacy in two” (Norton et al. 377-379, 393). By 1862, the myth of the invincible Cavalier and the cowardly Yankee had already started to crumble. As William Taylor states, Mary Boykin Chesnut, a member of the Confederate high society who kept a diary throughout the Civil War, realized the falsity of the idea of the spineless Yankee (161). Furthermore, she also expresses her doubts about the abilities of the southern Cavalier. She pointed, for example, to the planter’s laziness and indolence, less favorable characteristics which northerners, especially anti-slavery proponents, had been reproaching the southerner for decades (Taylor 161-162).

Meanwhile in the North, the predatory Yankee was trying his best to live up to his stereotype. In spite of an economic setback in some sectors, several northern businesses managed to profit from or even shamelessly exploit the war situation. Given that the North had to feed, clothe and equip its army and navy, government expenses soared to an unseen high. The government issued more than a billion dollars worth of contracts to businesses from various industrial branches. In some cases the relation between government and business was a mutually beneficial one. However, certain lewd businessmen saw the government as an easy prey and the carelessly issued federal contracts as the contemporary equivalent of a cash dispenser. The quality of the products, such as shoes, blankets, gun or food, these greedy businessmen sold the government was often as worthless as their sense of patriotism (Norton et al. 382-384). Thus, what the South had been reproving the North in

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12 Crucial for northern control of the Mississippi River was the siege and capture of Port Hudson, a campaign in which De Forest took part and which he describes in detail in A Volunteers Adventures and in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty.
13 Taylor quotes a passage from Chesnut’s diary entry of June 5, 1862: “Our planters are nice fellows, but slow to move; impulsive but hard to keep moving. They are wonderful for a spurt, but with all their strength, they like to rest” (qtd. in Taylor 161).
the antebellum decades, the Yankee’s acquisitiveness and amoral love of money, likewise showed its face in the wartime years.

Despite that what lead up to the war was mainly a fundamental difference in view between North and South on the future of the peculiar institution, neither side was willing to invoke slavery as their true casus belli. In the South, president Jefferson Davis realized that, since only a small percentage of the southern population were slaveholders, not everyone would be swooned into sacrificing their lives for the institution of slavery. Therefore, Davis referred to the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence to formulate the Confederate cause. In his Second Inaugural Address on February 22, 1862, Davis told his compatriots that “we are in arms to renew such sacrifices as our fathers made to the holy cause of constitutional liberty” (qtd. in Alfriend 353). The South, in order words, fought for constitutional liberty and states’ rights (Norton et al. 387).

In the early stages of the war, the North’s official cause to wage war on the South was the preservation of the Union. In his First Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, the new president of the United States Abraham Lincoln already made it manifest that if civil war were to come, he would see it as his duty to “preserve, protect, and defend” the government and the Union (qtd. in Basler 4: 271). That his principal preoccupation lay with the Union, Lincoln expressed even more clearly on August 22, 1862 in a letter in which he responds to the editor of the New York Tribune, Horace Greeley, who condemned Lincoln’s passive attitude on the slavery issue in an editorial titled “The Prayer of Twenty Millions” (Norton 385-389). Lincoln’s reply seems unambiguous:

"If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it,
and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that (qtd. in Basler 5: 388).

However, when Lincoln wrote his response to Horace Greeley, the decision that he would issue the Emancipation Proclamation had already been made. But as his political instinct told Lincoln that the conditions were not yet right, the president kept playing the Union-card until success on the battlefield would create a climate of victory in which he could announce this radical move (Norton et al. 389).

The reasons why Lincoln was so careful to answer the pressing calls of anti-slavery proponents to make the war against the Confederacy a war for freedom were manifold. Lincoln did not want to risk losing the loyalty of the four slaveholding border states or the support of southern Unionists in the Confederate states. Moreover, in his own region and even in his own party popular opinion about slavery was divided. The Republican party included racist members as well as staunch abolitionists, who strove to make ending slavery a genuine war aim. Among the latter was a group called the ‘Radical Republicans’, who criticized Lincoln’s plan of a gradual and voluntary emancipation in the border states and who would play a significant role in the Reconstruction of the South after the Civil War (Norton et al. 387-388; Brock 148-149).

When the timing was right, after the pyrrhic victory of General George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac over Lee’s Army of northern Virginia at the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln officially issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862 (Norton et al. 389: Grant 127). Interesting is the passage in which Lincoln states that

On the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free. (qtd. in Basler 5: 434)
The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation caused a lot of controversy, if not for what it did do, then especially for what it did not do. As Mary-Susan Grant formulates it, “Lincoln was criticized for, in effect, freeing the slaves in those parts of the nation over which he had no control and leaving the states he did have authority over to retain slavery” (127). However, historians such as Norton et al., William R. Brock and Mary-Susan Grant agree that the Proclamation was essential in “defining the war as a war against slavery” (Norton et al. 389).

Moreover, the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863, defined the first day of 1863 as the first day on which blacks could be “received into the armed service of the United States” (qtd. in Basler 6: 30). There was, however, a difference between theory and practice, and it would take until the spring of 1863 before the government and the army were convinced of the benefit and value of black troops. While the condition of the blacks in the Union army was certainly not enviable, as they were given menial jobs and were confronted racism from the white soldiers and civilians, the colored troops proved their worth on the battlefield which gradually earned them respect and disproved racist prejudice. With reference to the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers led by Jim Lane, who had already seen combat on October 1862, a northern journalist of the Chicago Tribune reported that it was “useless to talk any more of negro courage. The men fight like tigers, each and every one of them” (qtd. in Grant 132). Nonetheless, discrimination and racial prejudice remained elements which blacks in the Union army had to reckon with (Norton et al. 392; Grant 130-136). And they would be challenged with such forms of racism and racial inequality for many years to come, as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom precisely “five score years” after the Emancipation Proclamation painfully underlined (qtd. in Carson 223). In June 1864, the first major step in the long road towards the ending of racial inequality was taken when, as a result of Lincoln’s efforts, the Thirteenth Amendment that officially abolished slavery was passed in the House of Representatives in January 1865 and was officially adopted by the end of the same year.
(Norton et al. 390). The Great Emancipation himself, however, would not live to see its ratification.

While none of the war years were exactly a picnic, 1863-1864 proved to be an especially turbulent period for President Lincoln. In December 1863, when final victory was still far from a certainty, Lincoln already issued his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, in which he expounds his view on how the southern states were to be readmitted into the Union after the war. This plan is striking for its forgiving tone and its aim for a “swift and moderate” Reconstruction process (Norton et al. 411-412). Lincoln’s optimism about a Union victory is startling given the unrest that characterized the period. Like in the South, where massive desertion seemed to disprove the myth of unrelenting southern courage, opposition against the war also grew in the North. Especially the introduction of the national conscription law in 1863 caused major unrest and even riots in the Northern cities. As the poor northern whites blamed the blacks for the civil conflict and all of its undesired side effects, a lot of the violence was direct at the coloreds. Moreover, the Democrats, tried to capitalize on the growing dissatisfaction. The Democrats fiercely attacked the Republican Party in general and Lincoln in particular. Among the accusations were the growing power of the federal government, the war’s death toll and the abolitionist war aim of the Republicans. The Democratic Party tried hard to turn the racial fears and prejudices that increasingly existed in the North, especially among the white workers who feared the influx of freed blacks, to their political advantage. The presidential election of 1864 seemed to come at a bad time for Lincoln and many expected a victory for Democratic nominee George B. McClellan. However, as Susan-Mary Grant states, “much depended on events on the battlefield”, and Lincoln profited from the growing military successes of the Union army since 1863. The victories in the Battle of Vicksburg under General Ulysses S. Grant, which gained the North complete control over the Mississippi, and in the Battle of Gettysburg, where Lincoln gave his famous “Gettysburg Address”, both in July 1863, were
major boosts for the Union morale. In addition, General William Tecumseh Sherman’s capture of Atlanta and the General Phillip H. Sheridan’s successful campaign in the Shenandoah valley in Virginia provided Lincoln with a solid military basis for political victory. The boost in morale resulting from these military successes also made sure that Lincoln could count on the support of the soldiers, who, thanks to Republican legislation, could cast their vote for the first time. By the end of 1864, Lincoln was re-elected and the Union army, with Grant as its commander, made its final destructive push (Grant 140-141, 170-177, 215; Norton et al. 393, 396-401).

The word ‘destructive’ can be taken quite literally. In consultation with Sherman, Grant devised a strategy aimed at driving the Confederacy to despair through the seizure of food supplies and the destruction of railroads, plantations, cotton stocks and other resources. Sherman wanted to march his army to Savannah, Georgia, in the belief that “the utter destruction of its roads, houses and people will cripple their military resources” (qtd. in Grant 216). With General Grant’s approval, Sherman started his devastating ‘March to the Sea’ in November 1864, destroying everything that lay between him and the city of Savannah. On his way back North, Sherman took a detour through the Carolinas, where his troops wreaked havoc and left behind a trail of destruction. Finally, on April 9, 1865, a week after the long siege of Petersburg which can only be described as a carnage, Confederate commander Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House. Although minor fights still continued until May, Lee’s surrender symbolically marked the end of the Civil War. The Union’s commander-in-chief, President Lincoln, however, was shot five days after Appomattox in the Ford’s Theatre in Washington by a southerner sympathizer named John Wilkes Booth. He died the following day, on April 15, 1865. The news of Lincoln’s assassination shocked the whole nation and abruptly threw the jubilant North into a state of grief. The defeated South, had its own dead to mourn, both the death of their relatives and their ideology. The latter, however, they managed to resuscitate in the form of
the “Lost Cause”, the quasi-religious commemoration and romantic re-interpretation of the Civil War, the Confederacy and Reconstruction. Moreover, while General Grant, after having accepted Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, optimistically announced to the Union soldiers that “the war is over; the rebels are our countrymen again” (quoted in Brock 152), the rebels themselves, surrounded by a land in ruin, were not so eager to just forget the past years, or even decades, and embrace their lost Yankee brethren. In fact, after the war, the Yankee seemed more hated then ever below the Mason-Dixon line.\(^{14}\) Thus, in a way, for the devastated South, the ninth of April 1865 did not so much mark the end of their war, but the beginning (Norton et al. 401-403, 413, 436; Grant 214-216, 223-225).

\(^{14}\) William Taylor cites the example of Edmund Ruffin, a plantation owner, notorious Yankee-hater and ardent believer in the Confederate cause. Two months after Lee’s surrender, Ruffin wrote a passage in his diary in which he fulminates against the Yankee for the last time:

I here declare my unmitigated hatred to Yankee rule -- to all political, social and business connection with the Yankees and to the Yankee race. Would that I could impress these sentiments, in their full force, on every living Southerner and bequeath them to every one yet to be born! May such sentiments be held universally in the outraged and down-trodden South, though in silence and stillness, until the now far-distant day shall arrive for just retribution for Yankee usurpation, oppression and atrocious outrages, and for deliverance and vengeance for the now ruined, subjugated and enslaved Southern States! (qtd. in Taylor 339).
3. Reconstruction

Like the Civil War, Reconstruction is a complex and multi-facetted episode in American history which has stirred a debate among historians that is far from concluded. Historian Eric Foner tellingly opens his article “Reconstruction Revisited”, in which he gives an outline of the evolution of Reconstruction historiography, with the remark that “few periods of American history have seen the subject of so thoroughgoing a re-evaluation as Reconstruction” (82). Without trying to involve myself in this historical debate, which is clearly work for specialists, I will give a general outline of this turbulent period, thus furnishing the context in which both John William De Forest, employed as a sub-assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and Albion Winegar Tourgée, actively involved in the Reconstruction of the South as an idealistic Radical Republican, worked and lived after their military service.¹⁶

As remarked in the previous chapter, President Lincoln had already defined his position with regard to the Reconstruction process in his Proclamation of Amnesty and

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¹⁵ Foner makes a distinction between the ‘traditionalists’, the revisionists and the postrevisionists. According to the traditional interpretation in vogue for the greater part of the twentieth century, “vindictive Radical Republicans fastened black supremacy upon the defeated South, unleashing an orgy of corruption presided over by unscrupulous carpetbaggers, traitorous scalawags, and ignorant freedmen” (Foner 82). In the 1960s, several historians discarded the prevailing interpretation and substituted it for a revisionist one. These revisionists offered a view of Reconstruction that “placed the activities and aspirations of blacks at the center stage of the drama in the South” (Foner 83). As opposed to the traditional interpretation, which disparaged Republicans and martyred President Johnson, the Democrats and the southern whites, the revisionists reversed this evaluation in favor of the Radical Republicans. The Radical Republicans were no longer viewed as greedy opportunists but as “idealists” who genuinely wanted to bring reform to the South. The freedmen, instead of being portrayed as black supremacists, were now the heroes of Reconstructions, while their former victims, the southern whites, were now cast in the role of the racist “villains”, as were President Johnson and the democrats (Foner 83). For revisionists, Reconstruction was “a revolutionary impulse thwarted” (Foner 84). In the 1970s, a group of historians labeled “postrevisionists” stressed, as historian C. Vann Woodward formulates it, “how essentially nonrevolutionary and conservative Reconstruction really was” (qtd. in Foner 84). In short, postrevisionists, stressed “continuity rather than change”, and insisted on “the moderate character of Republican policies”, rather than viewing it in revolutionary terms (Foner 85). Foner, himself, however, raises doubt about the postrevisionist interpretation and stresses that Reconstruction was “a unique episode in a prolonged process of adjustment to emancipation”, rather than a “conservative interlude” as postrevisionist view the period (91-94).

¹⁶ For the historical outline, I will primarily rely on the chapter “Reconstruction: An Unfinished Revolution, 1865-1877” in A People and a Nation by Norton et al., which seems to adopt a revisionist perspective though without ignoring the darker sides of the Republicans, and on William R. Brock’s treatment of the Reconstruction period in his work The Character of American History. In comparison to Norton et al. Brock seems to view President Johnson in a more positive light and to offer a more critical picture of the Republicans.
Reconstruction, issued in December 1863. Lincoln’s moderate plan was referred to as the ‘Ten Percent Plan’, because it stated that if 10 percent of the voters in a state, drawn from the pool of eligible voters who had participated in the general election of 1860, had taken an oath of allegiance and were willing to create a Unionist government which accepted the Emancipation Proclamation, then that state could rejoin the Union (Norton et al. 412; Brock 158). Lincoln also demonstrated his forgiving attitude by proposing to “pardon ex-Confederates except the highest-ranking military and civilians officers” (Norton et al. 412). In fact, as William Brock stresses on various occasions, for Lincoln “secession had been void, [...] the states had never been out of the Union, [...] and only individuals had rebelled (Brock 157-158). Congress, particularly the Radical Republicans, however, was far less convinced of virtues of a “swift and moderate Reconstruction process” (Norton et al. 412). They wanted Reconstruction to be more gradual and tied to stricter conditions, mostly aimed at politically sidelining as many high positioned ex-Confederates. Thus, Lincoln and the Radical Republicans clashed on the meaning and nature of Reconstruction: “Lincoln saw Reconstruction as a means of weakening the Confederacy and winning the war; Radicals saw it as a transformation of the nation’s political and racial order” (Norton et al. 412). However, before the battle for the nature of the post-war Reconstruction policy had actually begun, the president was assassinated. As Walt Whitman wrote in his famous poem eulogizing the assassinated president, the ship of the United States had to go on without its captain. The ship’s second-in-command, however, proved incapable of managing the boisterous crew. Mutiny was inevitable.

Lincoln was succeeded by his Vice-President, Andrew Johnson, a former Democrat senator for Tennessee whose strong Union sympathies convinced him not to follow his native state into secession. Johnson was a man of humble birth who thoroughly disliked the well-to-do and privileged planter class. In this, Johnson seemed compatible with the Radical Republicans. Unfortunately, as Brock notes, Johnson was “equally hostile to southern
aristocrats and to northern Negrophiles” (158). Indeed, in terms of racial views, Johnson was a white supremacist who seemed to laugh at the mere idea of black equality. Johnson’s Reconstruction policy resembled that of his deceased predecessor. Like Lincoln, Johnson aimed at a swift Reconstruction in the South, and like Lincoln, he was willing to grant amnesty to ex-Confederates if they took an oath of allegiance. From the possibility of amnesty, however, Johnson not only excluded the politically and military powerful but also the wealthy, which reflects his aversion to the planter class. These high placed and moneyed southerners, however, could receive a presidential pardon (Norton et al. 416-417).

Johnson was able to determine the course of Reconstruction from April to December 1865 because Congress did not sit for the duration of that period. Johnson took full advantage of the opportunity and by December 1865, he considered his Presidential Reconstruction accomplished. In less than eight months time, Johnson had appointed provisional governors for the eleven ex-Confederate states, who were instructed to call constitutional conventions for their respective states. The delegates elected for these conventions had to frame new constitutions which incorporated the abolition of slavery and the invalidation of secession. When these constitutions had been ratified, elections were held to establish new loyal governments. However, Johnson made sure that both the powerful ex-Confederates who had not received a presidential pardon and the former slaves were not entitled to vote, as he stipulated that only those southerners were allowed to cast their vote, “who had taken the oath of amnesty [which was most of the common white southerners] and were eligible to vote on the day the state seceded” (Norton et al. 417). In practice, Johnson had pardoned many members of the old ruling class. Consequently many southerners who had held positions of power under the Confederacy less than a year before, now took up their seats in the new ‘loyal’ state governments and were ready to represent their states in the United States Congress, the legislative heart of their former enemy. While the re-emergence of these leading figures was already a thorn in the eye of the Radical
Republicans, the racial policy pursued in the ‘reconstructed’ South probably made their blood boil. Given that the men who dominated the legislatures were mostly former slaveholders, men who had only just fought a war to defend slavery, they were not particularly keen on granting their former slaves any rights. In fact, despite that their state constitutions contained the Thirteenth Amendment, they enacted laws known as the ‘Black Codes’, a series of restrictions imposed on the freedmen which reduced them to a condition which can hardly be called ‘emancipated’. Not surprisingly, when Congress reconvened, the Republicans challenged President Johnson’s program and his claim that the Reconstruction process had been completed.\(^{17}\) While the Democrats supported the President, the Republicans, spurred on by the Radical minority who wanted to establish “racial equality, representative democracy and the overthrow of privilege” in the South, tried to ‘convince’ Johnson to radicalize his plan. Johnson, however, held on to his view that Reconstruction had been completed. In June 1866, Republican moderates and radicals decided to use their congressional power to its full extent and they proposed the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, making clear their policy on Reconstruction. Briefly stated, the Fourteenth Amendment gave “all persons born or naturalized in the United States” citizenship, protected the civil rights of African Americans and “barred Confederate leaders from holding state and federal office” (qtd. in Norton et al. 420). The Fourteenth Amendment was sent to the states for ratification but was rejected in every southern state except for Tennessee. However, in the congressional elections of 1866, the Republican Party obtained a two-thirds majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. In that way, the Northern voter gave the Republicans a chance to actively impose their Reconstruction on the South. However, because most members of the Republican party were moderates, the Reconstruction policy Congress ultimately devised was less drastic than some of the Radicals

\(^{17}\) Brock’s stance on Johnson’s policy of pardoning ex-Confederate leaders is more positive. In Brock’s view, antebellum southern leadership in public affairs had, in spite of its flaws, demonstrates itself to be “dignified” and marked by “integrity” (155). Therefore, Brock argues, Johnson’s “desire to attach southern leaders to the Union” was “laudable” (159).
had in mind (Norton et al. 417-421; Brock 157, 159-160). Albion Tourgée, for one, deemed the moderate plan destined to fail (cfr. infra).

Congressional Reconstruction, took shape in the Reconsuctions Act of 1867-1868. The First Reconstruction Act, titled “an act to provide for the more efficient Government of the Rebel States”, declared that the governments of the southern states established under the Presidential Reconstruction were not legal. Therefore, new loyal state governments had to be instituted in the former rebel states before they could be readmitted. For that purpose, the ten states were divided into five military districts controlled by a Union general and Union forces. These generals, called military governors, had to call and supervise the election of constitutional conventions in which new state constitutions had to be adopted. These constitutions had to contain the principle of male suffrage, regardless of that person’s race. However, the male citizens who were disqualified under the Fourteenth Amendment, that is the former rebel leaders, could not participate in this election. The newly drafted state constitutions guarantying black suffrage then had to be ratified by the qualified voters. Then, if the constitution of a given southern state was approved by Congress and if its new government ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, that state could again be admitted to the Union, provided that the amendment had been ratified by enough states, that is three-fourths, to be formally adopted (Norton et al. 421; Brock 160-161). Meanwhile, President Johnson kept using his power to resist the plans of the Republicans. Under the impetus of the Radicals, Congress responded by trying to impeach Johnson thrice between 1867 and 1868, failing to do so each time. In 1868, former Union commander Ulysses S. Grant, a moderate Republican, was elected president. (Norton et al. 423-424). Under Grant’s presidency, the Radical Republicans round off their democratization of the South with the adoption in 1870 of the Fifteenth Amendment, consisting of two sections, which states that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the
United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (qtd. in Norton et al. Appendix A-14, emphasis added).

From all the ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ contained in the Congressional Reconstruction plan, it would appear that the Republicans ensured that they had a firm hold on the rebel states. On the long run, however, southern resilience proved to be stronger than conditions and measures only recorded in ink. As William Brock notes, the goal of “these ingenious measures” was to ensure “that Negro suffrage was the only road to reunion” (161). The southerners, however, were determined to create an alternative path with force in order to circumvent this main road leading to black equality. Even if by 1870 the ten remaining ex-confederate states had been restored to the Union, making Congressional Reconstruction to seem as “a complete success” (Brock 161), in reality the South fought hard to preserve its own identity and to resist the progressive changes imposed by the North.

Both the former slaveholders and the poor southern whites opposed Reconstruction and especially the freedom and rights of the blacks, who they refused to see as their equals. Under the Presidential Reconstruction, white southerners had already sought to curtail the rights of the freedmen via the adoption of the black codes. However, the strict Reconstruction policy of the Republicans, which nullified these codes with the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment, incited conservative southern whites to resort to force. The violence, verbal as well as physical, was directed at black freedmen who wanted to exert their political rights, but also at whites, that is to say at southern Unionists and northern ‘immigrants’, who came to the South for economic and/or political reasons. These three groups particularly aroused hostility because they acted as Republican delegates at the constitutional conventions, disdainfully termed “black and tan conventions”, called into existence by the Reconstruction acts (Hume 313). Obviously, that they dominated the newly formed Republican state governments which often pursued progressive policies, such as the promotion of education for blacks, did not increase their popularity (Norton et al. 425-426).
Responding to the growing feelings of racism that loomed in the South during Reconstruction, white supremacists stirred up the population by claiming that they had fallen under the domination of the inferior blacks, an idea which was largely a myth (Norton et al. 427; Brock 162). Moreover, the northern immigrants and southern Unionists, who received the unflattering epithets of ‘carpetbaggers’ and ‘scalawags’, likewise received their portion of slander and accusations, though not always without reason. Carpetbaggers, defined by Richard L. Hume as “northern whites who migrated to the South after 1860 and became active in the Republican party during Reconstruction” (315), received their nickname because of their supposed financial and political opportunism which led them South to fill their “bags made of carpet material” (Norton et al. 428). Indeed, the figure of the carpetbagger, who seems to be related to the predatory Yankee, was associated with corruption and other schemes such as “manipulat[ing] the freedmen to gain votes needed to secure their convention seats (and other offices) and enrich[ing] themselves at the expense of native white taxpayer” (Hume 316). Although the opportunistic carpetbagger certainly existed and although corruption was a phenomenon that indeed thoroughly affected some Republican-dominated state governments, it would be wrong to see it as representative for and restricted to the Republicans. Rather, it was a malpractice characteristic of the time and the nation (Norton et al. 428-429).

As has been stressed by revisionists since the 1960s, the picture of the northerner who came to the South was actually much more nuanced. First of all, it should be noted that, while most northerners who crossed the Mason-Dixon line did so hoping to find an opportunity of some kind, for relatively few that (initial) desired opportunity was political in nature. Hume states that, among the “variety of nonpolitical reasons” which enticed northerners to settle in the impoverished South were business opportunities, cheap land, and, as was the case for Albion Tourgée, “the region’s mild climate” (320). Therefore, Hume

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18 Foner defines scalawags as “predominantly small farmers, whose loyalty to the Republican party rested on a combination of prewar hostility to the planter regime, persistent intra-state sectionalism, and wartime Unionism” (93).
argues, “few of [these young northerners] evidently realized that they would soon embark upon controversial political careers” (320). Moreover, many of the ‘carpetbaggers’ in the strict, political sense of the term were “reform-oriented leaders in the South’s new Republicans party” driven by a strong sense of idealism (316-317).19 Many of the northern reformers who occupied important political positions in the southern states sought to “infuse a new spirit of egalitarianism”, “extend the franchise”, and “advance political democracy in the post-war South” (Hume 325). In this way, the politically active northern immigrants contributed to the Republican aim to “remake the South in the image of the North” (Hume 325). To this purpose, they also strove to “encourage industrial development, and to promote public education” (Hume 325-326). In the development of public education, especially for blacks, the Freedmen’s Bureau was of particular importance (Norton et al. 415). As John William De Forest served as an sub-assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau for fifteen months, this federal institution deserves a brief introduction.

Established by Congress on March 3, 1865 and extended by the third Freedmen’s Bureau bill in July 1866, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was responsible for the “supervision and management of all abandoned lands, and the control of all subject relating to refugees [that is, Unionist refugees] and freedmen” (qtd. in Croushore and Potter xiii). Concretely, the Bureau officials had to handle a great variety of tasks such as “supervise labor contracts between employers and freedmen, [...] administer rations and clothing to the destitute freedmen, [...] promote and supervise schools for the Negroes, [...] and to forestall any acts of violence against the Negroes” (Croushore and Potter xvi). In 1866, the Bureau was charged with the additional duty of “extend[ing] military protection and hav[ing] military jurisdiction over all cases and questions concerning the free enjoyment of [...] rights and immunities” (qtd. in Croushore and Potter xv). However, due to

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19 According to Hume, the main factors which inspired these northern settlers to become politically active in the South during Reconstruction, were “a desire to preserve the fruits of military victory, a feeling of post-war idealism, a wish to remake the South in the image of the more “progressive” North, and a commitment to protect their own lives and property”. Especially the first three elements are particularly relevant with regard to Albion Tourgée.
understaffing, incompetence and corruption, the federal institution established to bring about social reform in the post-war South did not “become in practice what it was intended to be in theory” (Croushore and Potter xvi; xxi).

If the Union established a federal agency for the promotion social reform and the protection of the rights of the freedmen, the South developed its own local ‘institution’ to combat those reforms and challenge those rights. This ‘institution’, better known as the Ku Klux Klan, originated in the state of Tennessee in 1866. Given that the South during Reconstruction offered a fertile soil for white supremacist ideas, the organization rapidly spread throughout the former Confederate states. According to Herbert Shapiro, who studied the role of the Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina, “the objectives of the Klan were clearly political” (36). In his article “The Ku Klux Klan During Reconstruction: The South Carolina Episode”, Shapiro states that the Klan managed to create “a virtual reign of terror” via economic pressure, intimidation, physical violence and even murder (48). In order to achieve their ultimate goal, “the restoration of political rule based on white supremacy”, the Klansmen, often associated with the Democratic Party, tried to ‘discourage’ the freedmen from using their newly acquired right to vote (Shapiro 54). They disrupted Union Leagues, harassed Republicans and black schools and schoolteachers (Shapiro 36, 43).20 In terms of social composition, not only members of the lower classes were hidden under the white costumes and masks. Men of standing and respectability also constituted a significant part of the Klan and often took “a major role in the leadership of the Klan” (Shapiro 48-50). As Shapiro argues for South Carolina, what enticed these reputable members of society to join this organization was mostly “the realization [...] that Reconstruction might not be a merely temporary nuisance” (43). In other words, they wanted to regain the control over their region as they had in the days of the Old South. The Ku Klux Klan’s ruthless intimidation campaigns certainly did not fail to achieve its purpose. The Klan managed to scare a

20 Union Leagues or Loyal Leagues were organizations aimed at spreading Unionism amongst southern whites during the war. In the post-war period, they focused on the blacks, striving to “train freedmen for political activity and to bind them to the Republican party” (Croushore and Potter 99).
significant number of freedmen out of voting in the 1868 elections in several South Carolina counties, much to the advantage of the Democrats (Shapiro 38). Their intimidation and violence also speeded the journey back North of some Republican carpetbaggers (Hume 328-329). In general, the Klan seriously hindered Radical Reconstruction and contributed the return to power of the Democrats’ and the old ruling class in the 1870s (Norton et al 429).  

Indeed, in the course of the 1870s, the Republicans lost control over the state governments in all former Confederate states because of Klan violence, factionalism within the Republican party and, most importantly, because the industrial North had its own economic and social problems, such as immigrations and growing social inequality, to worry about. The Democrats regained power both on state and federal level. Thus, they managed to erode the Radical’s policy in the South until Reconstruction was officially over in 1877. (Norton et al. 429-434). As Foner concludes, Reconstruction was a process inspired by “the vision of a society freed from the dominance of the plantation, in which social advancement would be open to all on the basis of individual merit, not inherited caste distinctions. […] a vision which was not to be” (95).

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21 Even if federal action against the Klan under President Grant seriously weakened the organization, only few arrested Klan members were actually convicted. Moreover, their activities were taken over by similar organizations (Shapiro 45-16; Norton et al. 429).
4. De Forest’s *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*

4.1. Situation in the Reunion Culture

When sectional tensions were running high and the threat of secession was becoming more and more tangible in the years leading up to the Civil War, an image that often returned was that of divorce or “a marriage gone bad” (Taylor 332). In one of his most famous speeches, Abraham Lincoln referred to the condition of the nation plagued by the issue of slavery as “a house divided against itself” (qtd. in Grant 26). Similarly, in February 1861, Lincoln somewhat jokingly remarked of secessionists that “in their view, the Union, as a family relation, would not be anything like a regular marriage at all, but only as a sort of free-love arrangement” (qtd. in Basler 4: 195). On the fourteenth of March of that same year, Mary Boykin Chesnut also commented on the growing hostilities and impending secession. Her diary entry for that day reads:

> We separated North and South because of incompatibility of temper; we are divorced because we have hated each other so. If we could only separate, a ‘separation à l’agréable,’ as the French say it, and not have a horrid fight for divorce (qtd. in Taylor 332).

Unfortunately, it became the most violent separation in American history.

If divorce was the most adequate metaphor to capture the North-South relationship in the years leading up to the civil conflict, then the image of marriage served the same purpose in the decades after the war. In *The Romance of Reunion*, Nina Silber argues that in the post-bellum era, and especially in the Gilded Age decades following the Reconstruction period, the North saw the development of a reunion culture in which a “sentimental vision of reconciliation” was central (55). As the title of Silber’s second chapter, “A Reconstruction of the Heart”, suggests, this late nineteenth-century culture of sentimental reconciliation aimed to accomplish “through love” what “could not be accomplished through investments or through constitutional amendments” (Silber 40). An important image in this reunion
discourse characterized by sentimentality and forgiveness was the “inter-sectional romance” between a northern man, often a Union soldier, and a southern woman, the ravenous ‘Belle’, which inevitably resulted in a marital bond (Silber 40). The North-South marriage soon developed into a stereotypical formula in post-war cultural products such as reunion dramas and novels (Silber 109-114). However, such sentimental portrayals of a symbolical reconciliation between the two regions did not just arise from selfless magnanimity on the victor’s part. Quite the contrary, the depiction of a northern suitor’s successful courting of an initially rebellious southern girl served a clear ideological purpose. As Silber points out, the post-war marriage metaphor offered a thoroughly “gendered view of reunion” (10). By casting the South in the position of the obedient woman, the North “enshrined the image of their victory in this [marriage] metaphor” (Silber 9-10). Thus, “the image of marriage between northern men and southern women [...] became a symbol which defined and justified the northern view of the power relations in the reunified nation” (Silber 6-7). It is interesting to note that this “gendered metaphor of power” (Silber 7), especially came into vogue from the 1870s onwards, when the North’s political and military grip on the South started to loosen. Through the image of the North-South matrimonial union, the North “metaphorically [...] perpetuated their power and influence over Dixie” (Silber 64-65).

Among the numerous post-war novels which made use of this popular plot device, was John William De Forest’s Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty (1867). What makes the story of De Forest interesting is that in the early post-war period in which De Forest published his reunion novel, such stories of sentimental conciliation were still very much uncommon (Silber 40). In fact, the years following the end of the Civil War were still characterized by the sectional hostility that had marked the war and the antebellum period. The images of the South that dominated the popular imagination in the 1860s were those of the “intemperate men” and “the spiteful women” (Silber 13). However, if the marriage metaphor that would come to characterize the “late-nineteenth century culture of
conciliation” was not yet widely adopted early post-war years, the gendered view of the North-South relation certainly was. As Silber argues, the gendered discourse of the 1860s was in many ways a continuation of the ideological conflict between North and South that raged in the antebellum period. As remarked in the first chapter of this thesis, in the decades prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, both regions had their specific model of manhood. In the South, there was a “code of honor” or “code of masculinity” (Silber 20) which inspired southern men to cultivate “both chivalry and violence, both deferential respect to southern womanhood and the forceful passions and energies that shaped their social power” (Silber 8). In other words, the southern manhood ideal, incarnated, as William Taylor has shown, by the Cavalier figure, was characterized by grace as well as physicality. The northern view of masculinity, by contrast, shied away from such physical display of passions and force. The “watchword” for the northern gentleman, or better, the northern businessman, was “respectability” (Silber 20). The South prided itself on the “highly touted fighting abilities” of its men, which they contrasted to the North’s “apparent lack of virility” (Silber 22). The North struck back by feminizing the South and by claiming that what Southerners deemed manly virtues, were actually despicable vices (Silber 8). The leisure valued by the slaveholding planter was, in Northern eyes, an illustration of Southern indolence, and his passionate nature made him licentious and aggressive, or in Taylor’s terms, a ‘Southern Hothead’ (Silber 22; Taylor 159, 210).

After the bloody physical clash between the chivalrous southern gentleman and the greedy northern Yankee, this gender-loaded debate continued. A significant difference, however, was that while the Yankee went into the war with a hidden fear of inferiority in comparison with his soldierly southern counterpart, he came out of it victorious and convinced of his “moral righteousness and superior civilization”, but also of his superiority in terms of manhood (Silber 18-19). Moreover, the Union victory over the ‘knights’ of the South not only led northerners to “declare that the manlier men had won the contest”
(Silber 19), but also allowed them to claim that the antebellum “talk about the southern gentleman’s strength and chivalry had been mere bravado” (Silber 23). Thus, in the early post-war years, the North, now with more confidence than before, continued the deconstruction of the southern model of masculinity it had begun in the 1850s. The notions of southern heroic courage, chivalry and the almost sacred code of honor got the full blast of the victor’s contempt. Instead, southerners were depicted as weaklings and cowards, whose self-proclaimed chivalry was exposed as “lazy, idle and generally useless” (Silber 18–23). At the core of the northern critique, Silber argues, lay the idea that “southern masculinity lacked the restraint” of the northern model (19). As the North had exposed southern manhood to be mere empty posing, it was only a small step to portray southern men as ultimately lacking manhood and thus as feminine (Silber 29). Furthermore, while the North emasculated southern men, it assailed southern women for their excess of masculinity. In the 1860s, northerners saw southern women as “the most resolute advocates of sectionalism” (Silber 26). Ironically, the fierce and stubborn resistance of these “spiteful women” served as a confirmation of the southern men’s lack of masculinity as they failed “to assert control over their womenfolk” (Silber 27). It was in this atmosphere of sectional hostility that De Forest wrote his Civil War novel that features the romance between a rebellious southern girl and a young Union soldier, making him somewhat of a cultural maverick. What makes De Forest’s choice for a story of reconciliation perhaps even more peculiar is that he started writing it during the first months of 1865, when the armed conflict between North and South, though on its last legs, was still going on.

However, as much as the sentimental reunion story line differs from the sectional antagonism that dominated northern mainstream discourse, his novel is still permeated by the triumphant and patriotic spirit of the early post-war North. Indeed, as a former Union soldier who saw more than his portion of action in the field, De Forest seizes the opportunity to disprove the antebellum stereotype of the weak and spineless Yankee and to criticize the
defiant slaveholding South and deconstruct its representative male figure, the Cavalier. The apex of De Forest’s patriotic discourse is of course the ideological implication of the long-anticipated marriage, the post-war northern conviction that in the relationship between North and South, it is the Yankee that wears the pants. Nonetheless, De Forest, a critical mind, is not blinded by the omnipresent patriotic jubilation. Passages hailing the northern values and condemning southern vices are alternated by episodes exposing the flaws in Yankee society and expressing genuine respect for the South’s better qualities. Thus, although the novel describes how the South is conquered on the battlefield and subdued on the social field, the question that remains is whether this confident view of the power relations was not overly optimistic, and whether De Forest, having witnessed the southern resilience and will power first hand, truly believed in it.22

4.2. Gender Transformation: Northern Redemption, Southern Deconstruction

4.2.1. The Reinvigorated Yankee

Although John William De Forest situates the beginning of Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty just after the capitulation of Fort Sumter, thus letting his novel’s opening chapter virtually coincide with the first chapter of the Civil War, he does not offer the reader a description of a military but of a social encounter between the two warring regions. In a hotel in ‘New Boston’, the fictionalized version of New Haven, Connecticut, where the author himself lived, Mr. Edward Colburne, a “martially disposed young lawyer and wrathful patriot” meets Dr. Ravenel and his daughter Miss Lillie Ravenel (Miss Ravenel’s Conversion 8). The Ravenels are introduced as southerners who left Louisiana as exiles just before the attack on Fort Sumter. The sympathies of father and daughter, however, lie in

22 Although in her book, Nina Silber offers an analysis of Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, her discussion of the novel is very brief and, in my opinion, worth elaborating. Moreover, given that Silber misspells the name of the novel’s female protagonist (she speaks of Miss Ravenal instead of Miss Ravenel), it appears that her examination of the novel was not very extensive, which, given the scope of her work as a whole, is of course logical. Therefore I think it could be interesting to offer an in-depth analysis of De Forest’s novel with Silber’s observation about the gendered sectional debate and the reunion culture in mind.
opposite camps. While Dr. Ravenel is a staunch Unionist and abolitionist who does not let an opportunity go by to express his indignation at the “stupid, barbarous Ashantee rebellion” and at the vices of the southern “Sodom” (10), his daughter is presented as “rebel” (17) and a true “advocate of secession” (18). However, despite that she defends her native region and her compatriots against the continuous rants of her “much adored papa” (145), Miss Ravenel’s devotion to the Confederacy and its cause is more of a pretentious, youthful defiance of authority than a heartfelt insurgency. The narrator points to the harmlessness of her rebellion by condescendingly comparing Lillie’s reaction to her father’s condemnation of the South with “the counterfeit spittings of a kitten playing anger” (17). Thus, if Nina Silber in her brief analysis of De Forest’s reconciliation novel insists on the fierce secessionism of the rebellious female protagonist, almost fitting her into the image of the spiteful southern woman, this seems a considerable overestimation of the young woman’s resolve. It certainly does not take, as Silber claims, “a considerable amount of coaxing” before the promise of novel’s title is fulfilled (110). Admittedly, for narrative purposes, the process of conversion is spun out over the entire story and the narrator officially declares Lillie’s patriotic rehabilitation “complete” only in the penultimate chapter (507), but the truth is that her feeble love for the Confederacy is already exposed as insincere before the tale and the war are half-way. The shallowness of the rebellion of the in many respects childlike Lillie is hinted at, for example, when she cuts a patriotic hymn written by Mr. Colburne to attract recruits for his New Boston volunteer company “the Putnam Rangers” out of a pro-Union paper because she finds the verses “pretty” (94). If a secessionist fury got her Confederate hands on such a hymn, her reaction would have undoubtedly been quite different. Moreover, Lillie already abandons her secessionist sympathies to a large extent when she is confronted with true Confederate spirits in the captured Louisiana city of New Orleans. As voluntary exiles, Dr. Ravenel and his daughter, who returned to the South’s commercial centre near the

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23 The Ashantee rebellion was a rebellion of the West African Ashanti tribe against the British colonizer in 1863 (Scharnhorst 472). Dr. Ravenel frequently compares the South and its inhabitants with primitive peoples to underscore what he considers their barbaric nature.
Mississippi to visit Colburne, at this point of the story no longer a lawyer but a Captain in the Union army, are despised as Unionists by the local southern population. The hostility Lillie encounters in her native city affects her to such an extent that “if it continued long she should turn loyal for very spite” (146). It did not, however, have to continue for very long to shatter Lillie’s superficial affection for the South. When her father, who is much dearer to this devoted practitioner of “papa-worship” than her motherland (229), is carried home by Captain Colburne after having been struck on the head with a bludgeon by a southern “blackguard” because of his federal sympathies (156), the bulk of the conversion has already been achieved. By portraying his female southern protagonist not as a fierce and spiteful secessionist but as an innocent, pretentious young lady who defies the North merely in an “angry pussy-cat fashion” (124), De Forest seems to anticipate the image of the southern Belle whose “rebellious spirit” was essentially “a cute and flirtatious pretense”, an image which Nina Silber identifies as emblematic for the reconciliation literature of the last two decades of the nineteenth century (Silber 112). In this way, the South is not only feminized but also portrayed as harmless.

However, given that De Forest, who was encamped near New Orleans from April until October 1862, experienced the rancor of the secessionists inhabitants of the conquered city first hand, he also included some more fierce examples of daughters of the South in his narrative. While in a letter about camp life in Louisiana, De Forest remains rather mild in his portrayal of the New Orleans secessionists, describing them as “a bad-looking set [...] to my patriotic eyes” (VA 30), the characterization of the women of the South in the chapter of his novel titled “New Orleans Life and New Orleans Ladies” is much more unflattering, to say the least. De Forest, in accordance with the general northern view of southern women in the 1860s, emphasizes the barbarous and unwomanly nature of the Confederate dames. Mrs. Larue, Lillie’s Louisiana aunt descended from an “old French Creole family” (144) remarks to her niece who has just arrived in New Orleans and who weeps over the sorrow state of the
once blossoming city, that she should not shed any more tears because “we have given over that feminine weakness” (143). Moreover, at her aunt’s house, Lillie is confronted with Mrs. and Miss Langdon, two “highly aristocratic and inexorably rebellious” women (143) whose Yankee hatred and “squaw-like fury for revenge [...] shocked and rather disgusted” the moderate secessionist heroine (145). The two southern ladies relate the story, for which De Forest drew on one of his own adventures “with one of the heroines of secession (VA 51), “with a species of solemn ferocity” of how they had “snubbed a Yankee officer” who offered them his seat on a street car (145). The most powerful condemnation of these southern “creatures in the disguise of womanhood” is made by De Forest himself, via an unambiguously indignant narrative comment (298). When Captain Colburne, wounded at the failed assault of Port Hudson in May 1863, is transferred, along with other injured soldiers to a hospital set up in and around a confiscated plantation house, the proprietress and her grown up daughters are portrayed by the outraged narrator as

So unwomanly, so unimaginably savage in conversation and soul that no novelist would dare to invent such characters; nothing but real life could justify him in painting them. They seemed to be actually intoxicated with the malignant strength of a malice, passionate enough to dethrone the reason of any being not aboriginally brutal. They laughed like demons to see the wounds and hear the groans of the sufferers. (296)

Thus, by staging both ferocious southern Xanthippes and a harmless female protagonist who will, in the end, become the loving wife of a Union officer, De Forest contributed to the feminization of Dixie that was, as Nina Silber has pointed out, characteristic of the gendered discourse in the early post-war North. Moreover, the two prominent male characters associated with the South, Dr. Ravenel and Colonel Carter, can both be identified as ‘northern’. Dr. Ravenel because of his thoroughly northern and anti-slavery convictions and Colonel Carter because of his position as an officer in the federal army. Thus, strictly speaking, Miss Ravenel’s Conversion does not feature a single distinctively southern male
character, undoubtedly a reference to the northern tendency to emasculate their former enemies in the years of the war.

It would, however, be an error to classify Colonel Carter as a ‘northerner’ merely on the basis of his profession. It would probably be more appropriate to say that apart from his blue uniform, Carter has nothing in common with his Yankee brothers in arms. Indeed, the narrator repeatedly stresses the southern roots and characteristics of the Union colonel. The reader is informed that Carter stems from a Virginia family that could boast of the “[purest] strain of old colonial blue blood” and that there was “a cavalier dash in [his] tone and manner” (29). Moreover, Carter combines the southern gentility and social graces with a masculine physical appearance, “a full chest, broad shoulders and muscular arms” (26). As such, Carter, in his double shape of a “great, brawny, boisterous, domineering, heroic fighter” and honorable gentleman (376), serves as the personification of the southern model of manhood, the Cavalier figure. The Yankee officer Carter serves as a veiled substitute for the Confederate soldier who, as Nina Silber indicates, is normally cast in the role of “chief villain” and rival in the Union soldier’s quest to conquer the southern Belle in northern reunion stories (Silber 120). De Forest’s choice for a southerner who does not believe in the sacred “State Right of secession” (37) instead of a fierce butternut to represent the male part of the South may well be seen as part of the emasculation of the Confederacy typical of the North. Likewise in keeping with the early post-bellum northern derision of the defeated southern manhood, this strong, imposing Cavalier figure will be deconstructed in the course of the story and, as Thomas Fick states, the “ignoble nature of the South’s cavalier gentleman” will be exposed (482).24 As Fick argues, the Cavalier’s admirable qualities will be

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24 In his article Genre Wars and the Rhetoric of Manhood in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, Thomas Fick main contention is that the De Forest’s combination of two genres, realism (associated with the North) and the historical romance (typical of the Southern plantation novel), in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, can be seen as a ‘Genre War’. “[T]he realistic elements of the novel”, Fick argues, are “specific and therefore occasional weapons in a literary and cultural battle between North and South” (474). In Fick’s eyes, “Miss Ravenel’s Conversion does away with Southern claims to cultural superiority by demolishing the historical romance and its hero the cavalier gentleman, and realism is a means to this end, rather than an end in itself” (474). In my discussion of Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, I will often refer to Fick’s analysis of the demolition of the
pitted against “a triumvirate of moral shortcomings: intemperance, sexual misconduct, and fiscal irresponsibility” (482). In the end, these moral flaws will far outweigh the physical and social capacities of the novel’s representative southerner.

At the same time, the representative figure of northern manhood, Colburne, will evolve in the opposite direction. Colburne is portrayed as the ideal northerner, unaffected by the depravity of the predatory Yankee but endowed with the thrift, “industriousness, and [...] asceticism” of William Taylor’s transcendent Yankee (21). Colburne is “a true born, industrious Yankee” (79), a religious abolitionist and “representative of a staid puritanical aristocracy” (16). Furthermore, he is “the embodiment of frankness and good nature” (25). Thus, in terms of moral character, Mr. Colburne seems to be flawless. In terms of physical posture, Colburne is no less impressive. Like Carter, he is “strongly built” and has “firm white arms [...] set on broad shoulders and a full chest” (26). However, in contrast with the southerner, who derived his masculine strength from the southern soil in which he was nurtured and from the masculine practice of sword fighting, Colburne owes his muscular physique to “systematic exercise” and gymnastics (26). Thus, Mr. Colburne, despite his many social and physical assets, feels inferior in comparison with the commanding masculine presence of the southerner Carter. When first confronted with Carter at a dinner party held by professor Whitewood, a prominent figure in the conservative puritan New Boston community, Colburne “felt himself shrink to a grasshopper mediocrity” in comparison with both the “gigantic social stature” and the physical presence of the Cavalier (36). The feeling of inferiority in terms of masculinity that Colburne feels towards his southern rival at their first encounter seems to mirror the northern soldiers’ fear of the “superior pluck and warlike skill of the rebels at the outset of the Civil War” (69). That this first encounter between Colburne and Carter takes place not long after the First Battle of Bull Run, an early rebel Cavalier figure, but instead of connecting this act of deconstruction to a ‘genre war’, I will try to examine this process in the context of Nina Silber’s discussion of the North-South gender debate.
victory which, as we have seen, strengthened the northern fear of military inferiority, is certainly not without significance.

In *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, the Yankee inferiority complex is not so much connected to the Civil War fought on the military as on the social battlefield. Both the Cavalier and the Yankee are attracted to the young female protagonist Miss Ravenel, who embodies the southern Belle. Though she is not stunningly beautiful as the typical southern Belle featured in the late nineteenth-century reunion culture (Silber 76, Fick), Lillie Ravenel was still “very fair, with lively blue eyes and exceedingly handsome hair” and she possessed a “graceful cordiality and consequent charm of manner” (12-13). Though Miss Ravenel is certainly not indifferent to the virtuous Mr. Colburne, it is the Cavalier Colonel Carter who particularly manages to stir up her womanly interest, because “after the fashion of most southern women, [Lillie] believed in fighting, and respected a man the more for drawing the sword” (91). Therefore, Lillie saw “something powerfully magnetic in the ardent nature which found its physical expression in [Carter’s] robust frame” (243). By contrast, the northerner Mr. Colburne, though morally impeccable and physically robust, is still “only half developed” in terms of character “in consequence of youth, modesty, and Puritan education” (243). That the Puritan environment characteristic of New England, the region which both the author and his northern protagonist call their home, is not conductive to the development of manly men is apparent from the characterization of the “slender and beardless” young gentlemen, the “beaux”, of New Boston (23). As Thomas Fick argues, the representative of this New Boston stock is the son of professor Whitewood, John Whitewood Junior, who is “narrow-chested and fragile in form, shy, silent, and pure as the timidiest of girls (26) (Fick 480). At the narrator, who is not sparing in his critique of the feminine young New Bostonians, Whitewood Junior was “an example of what can be

25 With regard to De Forest’s stance on the feminine nature of the young gentlemen of New England, Fick quotes an interesting passage from *A Union Officer in the Reconstruction*: “the good young man, as pure as a young girl, whom one finds in the Abrahamic bosom of northern Puritanism, would not be made a Grand Lama of in Dixie. The chivalrous Souther would unite with the aristocracy of Europe in regarding him as a sort of monster of neutral insipidity” (185).
done with youthful blood, muscle, mind and feeling by the studious severities of a puritan university” (26). It seems that Mr. Colburne, whom Miss Ravenel calls “the only man in New Boston” (52), managed to become manly in spite of his Puritan environment. He will, however, have to break free from the shackles of New England conservatism to attain full manhood. Despite that Mr. Colburne seems to be the manliest specimen that New Boston has to offer, in the social battle for the heart of the Belle, the northern still falls short in comparison to Carter. As Fick points out, in the eyes of Miss Ravenel, Colburne was “very pleasant, lively and good” but, as opposed to the figure of southern masculinity, the Yankee hero was “not magnetic” (159) (Fick 486). To attain that ‘magnetism’ and come to full manhood, the good-natured and modest lawyer will have to go through a sort of reinvigorating transition ritual. For De Forest, a man who participated in hard-fought battle such as Port Hudson and Cedar Creek and who saw his Connecticut greenhorns develop into tough veterans, the war could serve that purpose for Colburne, and for the entire nation. In a narrative aside, De Forest remarks that

>a man learns a vast deal of stoical virtue in field service. He learns courage, too, against sickness as well as against bullets. I believe the war will give a manlier, nobler tone to the character of our nation. The school of suffering teaches grand lessons. (487)

De Forest expresses the general view of the effects of the war on northern manhood. As Silber remarks, “middle- and upper class northern men emerged from the war with a new regard for manly and vigorous action and a waning interest in intellectual and humanitarian objectives” (24). In addition, “the war gave some northern men a new appreciation for athletic prowess and discipline; to some extent, it made them appreciative of certain ‘manly’ qualities which they once believed to be monopolized by southerners” (Silber 24). To win the social battle for Miss Ravenel, Colburne will have to supplement his moral righteousness and his typical Yankee quality of “know[ing] a little of the ways of business” (37) with values
typically associated with southern manhood, such as dominance and assertiveness, in military as well as social matters.

The evolution of the modest lawyer Mr. Colburne into the courageous Captain Colburne through war experience is evident. When Dr. Ravenel, who, like the subjective narrator, never makes a secret of his preference for Colburne as a partner for Miss Ravenel, visits the young Union officer in New Orleans, he “noticed with interest the authoritative demeanor which had usurped the place of the old New Boston innocence” (134). For the reader, it is made abundantly clear that the many hardship of army life, the daily drill, the heavy marches, the scantiness in food and comfort, and of course, the bloody encounters with the rebels have transformed Colburne into a more ‘manly’ man than he was as a citizen. Captain Colburne himself, who, like De Forest with his Twelfth Connecticut, drilled his Tenth Barataria to become the most disciplined company in his regiment, notices similar evolution in his veteran men:

The old innocence of the peaceable New England farmer and mechanic had disappeared from these war-seared visages, and had been succeeded by an expression of hardened combativeness [...] they were better men than when he first knew them. (279)

In the army, Captain Colburne not only develops and displays the military virtues of courage and heroism, but he also manages to retain his northern moral uprightness. Given that, as De Forest knew from his own experience, vices such as swearing, visiting brothels and especially alcoholism were rampant in the army, Colburne’s success at maintaining his moral purity can be considered quite an achievement.26 As we will see, the southerner Colonel Carter is far less successful at resisting these temptations. Even when Colburne does

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26 In *A Volunteer’s Adventures*, the religiously raised and temperate De Forest, often comments on the drunkenness of the “bacchanals” in his regiment (VA 41). De Forest adds that “intoxication is not confined to the soldiers. The officers are nearly as miserable, and are tempted to seek the same consolation” (VA 41). On the profanity of the army, De Forest comments that “officers who are member of the church, officers who once would not even play a game of cards, have learned to rip out oaths when the drill goes badly” (VA 43).
consume alcohol, he does so for purposes which can be termed honorable. When “for the first time in his life”, Colburne drinks “freely of strong liquors”, he does so to ease the pain in his wounded arm, a memento of the battle of Port Hudson (299). As opposed to second-lieutenant Van Zandt, a caricatural Union soldier, Colburne does not view his wound as a pass to an unlimited supply of alcohol. Furthermore, Colburne's practical use of strong liquors also stands in sharp contrast with Carter’s frequent drinking sprees.

At the time of the siege of Port Hudson, the wounded Captain Colburne gets the chance to demonstrate his courage and his newly found masculinity to Miss Ravenel. In the field hospital, Captain Colburne is visited by the Ravenels who convince him to continue his revalidation in the plantation house near New Orleans which they refurbished by government order to conduct a humanitarian free labor experiment (cfr. infra). When the Union army decides to diminish the troops in New Orleans in order to reinforce the siege of Port Hudson, the Ravenels’ plantation is threatened by a group of Texan raiders. Thanks to the courage and military contrivance of Colburne, aided by one of Dr. Ravenel’s black laborers named Major Scott, Miss Ravenel, at this points already Mrs. Carter, and her father manage to escape to Fort Winthrop. By defending the southern Belle, who thanks her savior with “a sweet smile” (340), Colburne takes over the role of the absent southern Cavalier. Carter himself is engaged in the battle of Port Hudson, in itself an honorable excuse for not being there to defend his wife. His subsequent drinking and adultery in celebration of the capitulation of Port Hudson is far less honorable. Indeed, as the story progresses, Colburne rather than Carter assumes the role of the valiant Cavalier. He is described as a “chevalier sans peur” (299) and “a knight-errant” (304), epithets which are normally attributed to the manly gentleman of the South, but which now give evidence of Colburne’s transformation to a type of northern knight. As Thomas Fick remarks, Colburne becomes a kind of “composite of the best from each culture” (485).
In the subsequent encounters between Colburne and Carter, it is clear that the tables have turned. At the Whitewood’s dinner party at the start of the story and, therefore, at the start of the war, the northerner looked with a mixture of envy and reverence at Carter. Now, the reinvigorated Colburne knows himself superior to the externally impressive but morally depraved southerner. Illustrative of the inverted power relation is the scene following Colburne’s heroic defense of Miss Ravenel against the Texan cavalymen. When Colburne returns to Port Hudson, it has already capitulated and the Yankee soldiers are celebrating their victory with an appropriate amount of alcohol.27 Among the merrymakers is Colonel Carter, whom Colburne sees in an advanced state of intoxication with two giggling southern “Secession lasses” as his ‘guests’ (348). In the interview which follows between the two Union officers, the difference between the noble Colburne and the drunk, morally depraved Carter is striking. While Carter tries his best to keep up his honorable appearance, Colburne, in full realization that the man he once envied is actually his moral and even manly inferior, decides to “cut short the interview” because it “was so painful to see him struggle in that *humiliating manner* to appear sober” (349, *my emphasis*). To Colburne, the model of southern manhood has been exposed as an empty shell. Perhaps it is interesting to examine how De Forest, in line with the contemporary northern disdain for the pompous “assertions of antebellum southern men” (Silber 23), systematically deconstructs the Cavalier and his sacred values.

### 4.2.2. Death of a Cavalier

Given that De Forest knew from his real-life encounters with the ‘butternuts’ that southerners were courageous and skillful soldiers, his attack on southern manhood is not so much aimed at the notion of southern courage. Rather, as Thomas Fick argues, De Forest tries to discredit the Cavalier by waylaying the antebellum southern claims to “moral

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27 Historically, Port Hudson capitulated on the 9th of July, 1863, after a siege lasting more than 3 months, which started on the 7\(^{th}\) of May.
superiority” which was seen as “announce[d] [by] the Cavalier's heroic appearance” (482). Indeed, in his portrayal of the South, De Forest concentrates on exposing the hypocrisy of southern values such as chivalry, exemplary moral conduct and the sacred code of honor.

Carter, in spite of his affiliation with the North via his position as a Union officer, serves as main representative of the male southerner in the novel. The narrator offers a very rich and useful summary of Carter’s character:

it was only in political matters that he was false to his birth-place. In his strong passions, his capacity for domestic sympathies, his strange conscience (as sensitive on some points as callous on others), his spendthrift habits, his inclination to swearing and drinking, his mixture in short of gentility and barbarism, he was a true child of his class and State. He was a Virginian in his vacillation previous to a decision, and in the vigor which he could exhibit after having once decided (164).

From the description cited above it is clear that Carter fits the composite image of the William Taylor’s southern Hothead as embodied by John Randolph, that is a “curious blend of wildness and courtliness” (252). It is the ‘wildness’ in Carter’s character that De Forest will emphasize. From this succinct character sketch offered by the narrator, also emerge what Thomas Fick identifies as Carter’s, and by extension the Cavalier’s, main weaknesses: “sexual misconduct” (his strong passions and callous conscience), “intemperance” (swearing and drinking) and “fiscal irresponsibility (spendthrift habits) (Fick 482). While the first two failings can be seen as violations against the southern code of honor and chivalry, the Cavalier’s carelessness with money is a flaw which goes against the Yankee value of thrift (Fick 483). The northerner Colburne, by contrast, succeeds where the Cavalier fails: he is chaste, temperate and possesses the typical Yankee business skills which he will perfect after the war (cfr. infra).

The depraved moral nature of the outwardly honorable Carter is made manifest to the reader from the very beginning. For Carter, the flirtation with Lillie, who takes his ‘loving’ gestures all too seriously, is initially a mere distraction. He tells himself she is only a serious
candidate for marriage “if they ever get back their southern property” (111), an opportunism which one would rather expect to hear from a predatory Yankee than from an honorable Cavalier. Even though, when he eventually marries Miss Ravenel, he does so out of genuine love for the young girl, he keeps betraying his southern honor, in spite of the many attempts to mend his ways for his wife’s sake. He does this in the three ways Fick has identified. He eagerly indulges in the vices of swearing and drinking, old ways he continues to relapse into despite his resolve to return to “temperate ways” after his marriage and after Lillie’s pregnancy (358). The consummation of alcohol also leads him into adultery, with the two Confederate girls after the victory at Port Hudson, and, perhaps more importantly with Lillie’s aunt, Mrs. Larue. Colonel Carter encounters the Louisianan, a somewhat enigmatic, double-faced femme fatale, on a boat heading to New York where Carter will try to obtain a promotion to replenish his squandered finances. Before he boards the ship, Carter re-embraces his old love, whiskey, after a separation of three months in consequence of his wife’s pregnancy. This relapse will prove fatal for the chivalrous Colonel’s commitment to his code of honor. While Carter would have avoided Mrs. Larue in a sober state, “in the fearlessness of plain whiskey, he shook both her hands with impetuous warmth” (373). The dialogue which ensues between the two native southerners illustrates De Forest’s subtle deconstruction of the southern code of honor:

“Pon honor, Mrs. Larue, perfectly delighted to see you.”

“And so am I delighted,” she answered with a flash of unfeigned pleasure in her eyes, which might have alarmed the Carter of yesterday but which gratified the Carter of today.

“Now I shall have a cavalier,” she continued, allowing him to pull her down on a seat by his side (373, my emphasis)

Given the context of the dialogue (Carter and Mrs. Larue commence an adulterous affair on the boat which will last until the birth of Carter’s son Ravvie), one cannot help but noticing the irony of De Forest’s use of the italicized expressions. As Fick phrases it, “Carter's sexual
license further supports Dr. Ravenel’s hyperbolic assertion that for the southern aristocrat ‘sacred honor [...] is a pure figment of ignorant imagination made delirious by bad whiskey’ (49) (483).

Carter’s typical southern disinterestedness with regard to money, a characteristic seen as a virtue in comparison with the Yankee avarice, is also exposed as a flaw. Carter’s southern “tendency to extravagance” and his lack of a “faculty for making money” (397) means that he is constantly running up debt, which ultimately leads him to get involved in an economic scam. As chief-quartermaster of the Union army, a position which involves handling large sums of money, which “made [Carter] feel as if he were a great capitalist” (397), he is approached by a typical predatory Yankee who convinces him to use government funds to speculate on the cotton that will be confiscated if the Red River expedition of General Banks is a success. As ‘the great capitalist’ has run up considerable debts and as success in the campaign seems certain, the honorable Carter decides to jump on the wagon and swindle the government. Again, De Forest points to the artificiality of the southern code of honor and disinterestedness, whilst also not sparing the rampant corruption of northern officials:

Other officials quartermasters, paymasters, etc. were going in for cotton on the strength of Government deposits. The influenza had caught the Colonel; indeed it was enough to corrupt any man’s honesty to breathe the moral atmosphere of New Orleans at that time; it could taint the honor derived from blue ancestral blood and West Point professional (417)

Evidently, the Red River expedition turns out to be a failure, and Carter, desperate to repay his now astronomic debt, engages in a larger business scam involving government steamboats. After this (successful) second swindle, Carter has hit moral rock bottom: he has

28 De Forest even suggests that adultery was a quite common practice in the South. After the Doctor has found out that Carter has cheated on Lillie, he thinks to himself:

There were fathers in Louisiana who did not mind this sort of thing ; but he could not understand those father; he minded it. There were fathers who would simply say to an erring son-in- law over a glass of wine, ‘Now look here, my dear sir, you must be cautious about publicity’ (439).
betrayed his honor as a gentleman by cheating on his wife and by swindling the Union. After the completion of the fraudulent transaction, Carter is an “unfortunate, unhappy, degraded officer and gentleman” (426). The southern gentleman, torn by shame and guilt, resigns his quartermastership and requests to be once again deployed as a field officer. In his final days, the Cavalier clings to his sacred ‘honor’: “I must show myself a man [...]. My honor demands it” (428). Underlining the emptiness of such a statement, the narrator adds, “he talked of his honor from long habit; conscious, however, that the word stung him (428). As a form of poetic justice, the Cavalier Carter dies in the next battle he takes part in.

An important medium via which De Forest deconstructs the South and its values about which I have hitherto said little is the figure of Dr. Ravenel. The most striking condemnations of the South and laudations of the North come from the mouth of the female protagonist’s father. Dr. Ravenel can be described as a fervently religious moralist and abolitionist. If he had been born in the North, he would probably have been a leading figure in one of the many nineteenth-century reform movements. Though, as Lillie reproaching reminds him, he “didn’t use to be so violent against slavery” (74), Dr. Ravenel shows himself a true Garrisonian in his condemnation of the Peculiar Institution. With a reference to the abolitionists’ system to defy the Fugitive Slave Act, Ravenel proudly states that “my body was born amidst slavery, but my conscience soon found the underground railroad” (60). For their reliance on slavery, Dr. Ravenel frequently refers to the people of his native region as ignorant. In his view, the South is filled with drunkards and barbarians:

They couldn’t wait for whiskey to finish them, as it does other barbarous races. They must call on the political mountains to crush them. Their slaveholding Sodom will perish for the lack of five just men, or a single just idea. It must be razed and got out of the way, like any other obstacle to the progress of humanity. (58-59)

As a staunch Unionist, Dr. Ravenel sees the free, industrial North with its free labor economy and its orientation to material progress as the ideal model for the South. The much hated
“slaveholding Sodom”, Dr. Ravenel argues, “must make room for something more consonant with the railroad, electric-telegraph, printing-press, inductive philosophy, and practical Christianity” (58-59). In short, the South has to be ‘Northernized’. However, as will appear from the discussion of Albion Tourgée’s Reconstruction novel A Fool’s Errand, the ‘Northernization’ of the South hoped for by the idealistic Doctor will prove to be far from unproblematic.

Though he does not believe in the puritan “doctrine of election” (470), Dr. Ravenel does share the evangelicals’ view that slavery is a deep moral sin that needs to be eradicated. Using one of his numerous biblical references, the abolitionist exile compares himself to Lot who escaped the burning city of Sodom with his family. Moreover, the South-Carolina born Doctor frequently adopts a rhetoric of evil when talking about the South and its slaveholding inhabitants. In his view, the Confederacy’s fight restore the malicious practice of slavery is “the foolishest, wickedest, most demoniacal infatuation that ever possessed humanity” (309). However, Dr. Ravenel is confident that for their “compact with the devil”, the earthly servants of Satan will be punished by the “Divine Ruler” (135), as the ruined condition of the once flourishing city of New Orleans illustrates. Like many nineteenth-century abolitionists, Dr. Ravenel seems to view the war as a fight between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between Satan and God. “I can now understand the Paradise Lost, Dr. Ravenel philosophizes after the war, “for I have beheld Heaven fighting with Hell.” (496).

Although he worked in the South, Dr. Ravenel was educated in the North. Consequently, he cultivates the typical northern virtue of industriousness. In his medical profession as well as in his scientific hobby, mineralogy, he shows himself extremely diligent. When Lillie, who is far more drenched in southern ways than her father, disturbs him in his mineralogical research, the southern moralist lectures her by saying that the scientific world “makes no allowance for Louisiana ideas of leisure” (64). Like many northerner who were
brought up on the Puritan work ethic, the southern-born Doctor condemns the slaveholders’ precious leisure, considered positive in the South, as idleness. After the Civil War’s close, Ravenel contentedly states that

It is a great comfort to think that the evil spirit of no-work is pretty much exorcised from our nation. The victory of the North is at bottom the triumph of laboring men living by their own industry, over non-laboring men who wanted to live by the industry of others. [...] Slavery meant in reality to create an idle nobility. Liberty has established an industrious democracy. [...] Yes, we must all go to work. That is, we must be useful and respectable. (499-500)

Not surprisingly, the novel’s representative northerner and southerner follow the dichotomy between southern idleness and northern work. Carter, born of “a family of the southern oligarchy”, had owned “human property” via his first wife (119). And, although Carter dissolved his human property after his wife’s death, “it was reasonable to suppose that [his deceased wife and former slaves] exercised an establishing influence on his character” (119). Indeed, Carter, though extremely diligent in his occupation as an officer, is not infrequently associated with laziness when not commanding his regiment.29 Colburne, by contrast, is equally industrious in his life as a soldier as in his life as a citizen. Three months after the war, he shows himself a true child of his region declaring that

I must go to work, [...] I shall get so decayed with laziness that I shan’t be able to pick myself up. I shall cease to be respectable if I lounge any longer than is absolutely necessary to restore my health. (499)

Dr. Ravenel also attacks southerners for their violent behavior and their intolerance of divergent opinions, characteristics which his compatriots see as part of their passionate nature and their code of honor. When Dr. Ravenel and Mr. Colburne are first acquainted in

29 When Carter is appointed major of the occupied New Orleans, he indulges in luxury and gives “himself up to lazy pleasures” (126). Similarly, the description of Carter in his position as the army’s chief quartermaster suggests his proclivity towards indolence: “With his aristocratic face, his lazy pride of expression, his bran-new citizen’s suit, his boots and his Havana, he looked immensely rich and superbly indifferent to all pecuniary chances” (415).
the New Boston Hotel, the South-Carolinian relates an anecdote to the young lawyer which illustrates the hot-headed temper of the inhabitants of Dixie. In a bar in Georgia a drunk southerner offered Dr. Ravenel a drink, but when the Doctor, a sworn enemy of alcohol, kindly declined, the “red-nosed, tobacco-drizzling, whiskey-perfumed giant” got furious and wanted to fight [him]. According to Dr. Ravenel, this violent reaction derives from the southerner’s incapacity to accept that others might disagree with their beliefs. For this fervent southern drinker, Dr. Ravenel explains, “a man who refused whiskey was a contradiction, a reproach to his personality: such a man he could not suffer to live” (14-15). This hostility towards dissenting views particularly applies when slavery is involved. Indeed, as Dr. Ravenel concludes his tale about the violent southern character: “it was the Brooks and Sumner affair over again. Brooks says, Fact is I believe in slavery, and immediately hits Sumner over the head for not believing in it” (15). After he has been struck on the head for his Unionist sympathies himself, the Doctor again refers to the Sumner-Brooks affair. With irony, he emphasizes the difference between the aggressive southern nature and the Yankee’s cool rationality:

They are awfully behind-hand at the North, Mrs. Larue, in those social graces. The mudsill Sumner was too unpolished to think of clubbing the brains out of the gentleman Brooks. He boorishly undertook to settle a question of right and justice by argument.

According to the pacifist Ravenel, the southern practice of dueling, the Cavalier’s way of settling disagreements or avenging his insulted honor, is likewise illustrative of their primitive and violent character:

I suppose duelling has something to do with the superficial good manners current down there. But just consider what an impolite thing shooting is in itself. To knock and jam and violently push a man into the other world is one of the most boorish and barbarous discourtesies that I can imagine. (65)
The notion of southern intolerance and, related to that, the southern code of honor, will be interpreted in rather different light by Tourgée.

Dr. Ravenel also partly deconstructs the myth of southern hospitality and politeness, as opposed to the uncordial North. Even though Miss and Mrs. Langdon, both ardent secessionists, refuse to greet Dr. Ravenel because of his Union sympathies, he still sees them to the door. When Lillie asks him why he remained so civil, the sly Doctor answers:

My dear, I am merely following the Christian example set me by these low Yankees whom we all hate so, [...] I have seen a couple of officers shamefully insulted today by a woman who calls herself a lady. They returned not a word, not even a look of retaliation. (147)

The main target of Dr. Ravenel’s wrath is, however the South’s Peculiar Institution. For the humanitarian Unionist, there is no mistaking that the Civil War is a fought with the purpose of “giving freedom to slaves” (73). Whether Dr. Ravenel’s literary creator, John De Forest, shared these abolitionist views is a point of discussion worth examining.

4.3. The Blacks’ Rise to Manhood

There seems to be a general consensus among critics that, although De Forest certainly did not approve of slavery, he can hardly be classified as an abolitionist. In his introduction to the Penguin Edition of Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, Gary Scharnhorst argues that in spite of the abundance of abolitionist rhetoric in the novel, “[De Forest] was in truth not very advanced on the race question” (xiii). James H. Croushore and David Morris Potter likewise refuse to attribute particular abolitionist sympathies to De Forest. In fact, in their

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30 However, De Forest mostly confirms the idea of southern warmth versus northern chilliness in his novel.
31 For the model behavior of the Yankee officers in the face of the many offenses they had to take from the hostile New Orleans ladies, De Forest drew on his knowledge of the fact that the Union soldiers in the captured Louisiana city had been ordered to ignore all insults and to “abstain from violence and verbal squabbling” (VA 19-20).
introduction to *A Union Officer in the Reconstruction*, the two editors quote a passage from a letter written by De Forest to his brother Andrew in 1855 stating that the southern blacks are not worth all the hul[l]abaloo that is made about them. They are kept ignorant and animal, say the abolitionist. Granted. But their great, great grandfathers in Africa were four times as ignorant and at least twice as animal. [...] So much for my present feeling and ideas with regard to slavery. They may change on further observation. (qtd. in Croushore and Potter xxiv)

As Croushore and Potter affirm, De Forest’s attitude towards slavery did change as he became more sympathetic of the condition of the blacks and more convinced of their possibilities. Ultimately, he abandoned this belief again due to his experience as a sub-assistant commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau (Croushore and Potter xxiv). When one examines the way in which the blacks are depicted in *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, the conclusion is indeed that De Forest’s racial views are ambiguous, to say the least. Concretely, De Forest seems to combine a hope of the progress of the freed blacks with a fear that they might not live up to the expectations, either because of their own incapabilities or the racism of their former masters.

The question I want to address first, is that if De Forest never shared the extreme views of northern abolitionists, then why did he introduce a character who is quasi Garrisonian in his opinions? Dr. Ravenel could of course be seen as a caricature of the nineteenth-century moralist, but the answer might also be found in the context of the gender debate that dominated the early post-war period. As Nina Silber points out, southern planters who “ruled supreme over house and field, over black men and women as well as white women” also “needed” their slaves “to be men” (8). Thus, an attack on slavery can also be seen as an attack on the masculinity of the slothful southern gentlemen. As I have shown earlier, De Forest, especially via the voice of Dr. Ravenel, denounces the slaveholding men of the South for their reliance on the work of others, as opposed to the spirit of
industry in the North. In addition, their support for the ‘devilish’ system of slavery exposes the southern men as sinners and subjects of Satan.

If the Negro’s condition of bondsmanship in the novel is part of De Forest’s deconstruction of the southern manhood model, then their status as freedmen is a building brick in the construction of black manhood. As Silber argues, “in the early years of the war, Republicans had often defined the black struggle as one for attaining human citizenship, even manhood” (25). In this respect, she notes that “many saw the enlistment of African Americans in the Union army as another step on the road to black manhood” and that the courage displayed by these black soldiers had impressed many northerners, even nonabolitionists (Silber 25). Furthermore, in the 1860s, northerners still believed that the blacks had potential and that “at least the freedmen could learn the northern habits of the northern system [...] thus providing hope for southern progress (Silber 43). In his novel, De Forest imagines both of these wartime northern hopes for the blacks, that is their rise to manhood and their potential to become ‘Northernized’. However, as his feelings about the blacks were mixed, he does so with some degree of reserve and ambiguity.

In the chapter titled “Doctor Ravenel commences the Reorganization of southern Labor”, De Forest lets the most humanitarian of his characters undertake a “philanthropic experiment” (252). On a plantation assigned to him by the indefinite character “Authority” Dr. Ravenel tries “inducing” the newly emancipated blacks (this episode is set in the spring of 1863) to “work as freemen” (247). The Doctor’s free labor experiment, based on similar projects actually undertaken on Louisiana plantations during the war (Croushore and Potter xiv), seems to anticipate some of the aims of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Besides trying to impart to the blacks typical northern values such as “ideas of industry and other social virtues” (252), Dr. Ravenel also aims to ‘elevate’ the ignorant freedmen by educating them. Because of her prejudices against the Negroes, the former secessionist Lillie, who is entrusted with the task of teaching the blacks to read, is initially reluctant to accept her role.
However, “astonished and delighted” by “the rapidity of their progress” she soon abandons her former preconceptions (266-267). The Doctor himself initially encounters some difficulties to kindle enthusiasm in the freedmen for the northern model of laboring for wages. On the first day of work, the blacks, who are used to forced labor, oversleep. Moreover, Major Scott, the ‘head man’ of the blacks, informs his employer Dr. Ravenel that one former slave even left the plantation during the night and has not returned because “he foun’ a gal down thar that he’s a co’ting” (262). Dismayed by their lack of self-discipline, the Doctor convenes the blacks and impresses on them the Yankee credo that “the true dignity of freedom does not consist in laziness” (263). Moreover, besides the work ethic, he also urges them to cultivate the northern values of being “orderly, honest, virtuous and respectable” (265). That the blacks heed the Doctor’s appeal and do “more work that summer than the Robertsons [the former owners of the plantation] had ever got from double their number by the agency of a white overseer, drivers, whips and paddles” seems to bode well for the future of the blacks (265). However, this optimism about the freedmen is attenuated by some of the reflections of Dr. Ravenel as well as De Forest himself. Although Dr. Ravenel is presented as a humanitarian, he also seems to deem the blacks inherently inferior to the white race. One can remark a dash of white supremacism, however unintentional, in the benevolent Doctor’s statement that “we must civilize and Christianize them” (250). Furthermore, though Ravenel rebukes Lillie for her prejudices by saying that “Negro children are just as intelligent as white children until they find out that they are black”, he somewhat awkwardly adds “now we will never tell them that they are black; we will never hint to them that they are born our inferiors” (257). Via authorial comments, the Forest himself keeps referring to the black race as a “barbarous stock” (267). Ultimately, even an eternal optimist like Dr. Ravenel is forced to admit that his initial hope that “the mere gift of freedom had exalted and purified the negro character” was naive (268). To an army chaplain, he remarks that Harriet Beecher’s Stowe’s Uncle Tom is “a moral miracle”
and “a pure fiction” (269). In truth, the former slaves are morally flawed, as Major Scott, who is in need of “illumination concerning the binding nature of the marriage contract” demonstrates (268). The blame, however, lies not with the blacks but with their former masters and the system they imposed on the slaves. “A man educated under the degrading influences of bondage”, Dr. Ravenel states, “must always have some taint of uncommon grossness and lowness” (269). Though his optimism in this respect never reached the same heights as that of Dr. Ravenel, De Forest also mitigates his cautious wartime belief in the possibilities of the blacks. Croushore and Potter point out that, as an officer of the Freedman’s Bureau, De Forest “was forced to abandon [his] expectation of Negro progress when he observed what he saw as the freedman’s shiftlessness, his lack of responsibility, and his failure to conform to the moral code of the white race” (xxiv). That De Forest had doubts about the success of the Northernization of the South in general and the southern blacks seems in particular to be suggested by the fact that Dr. Ravenel’s free labor experiment ultimately fails (cfr. infra).

Besides imagining the possibility (and potential failure) of the free labor experiment and the Northernization of the freedmen, De Forest also depicts the wartime rise to manhood of the blacks in his novel. When the plundering Texan cavalrymen are approaching Dr. Ravenel’s plantation and Colburne decides to distract the Confederates to cover the escape of the Ravenels to Fort Winthrop, two of the freedmen offer to stay with the Captain. These two blacks are Major Scott and Jim, a lazy freedmen who was previously referred to as a “sort of no ‘count nigger” (262). Initially, Colburne has no faith in the fighting abilities of the former slaves and even distrust them. He refuses to give them a rifle and as he has no confidence that they will take their tasks as look-outs seriously, he checks on the two blacks every hour to see if they are still awake. When the Texans arrive, Colburne abandons his prejudices and acknowledge the blacks’ courage. When Colburne finally yields to Major Scott’s supplications to give him a gun so he can “fight for [...] liberty an for Mars
Ravenel an for Miss Lillie”, the Union Captain, himself reinvigorated by the war, impresses on his black “comrade” that “we must show ourselves men now” (314). And showing himself a man is exactly what Major Scott does. Regardless of his own life, Major Scott courageously intervenes when Colburne is attacked by two Confederates, and, “shout[ing] like a lion”, he kills one of the rebels. The fallen greyback, however, fires his gun at the same time and seals the martyrdom of the black hero.\(^3\) After the heroic death of Major Scott, Colburne manages to rejoin the Ravenels in Fort Winthrop, a fictitious name for Fort Butler. When the fort is attacked by the Texans, Dr. Ravenel’s black laborers also display their heroism in its defense. Historically, the Battle of Fort Butler, fought during the night of June 27, 1863, was known for the heroic participation of black soldiers.\(^3\) De Forest, however, fictionalizes the battle by exaggerating the number of casualties and ignoring the vital role that the Union gunboats played in the real battle (Scharnhorst 488). De Forest’s stretching of the truth seems to underscore the rise to manhood of both Colburne and the blacks.

In the fall 1862, De Forest himself considered applying for the colonelcy of one of the colored regiments that General Butler had raised out of volunteers from the freed blacks of Louisiana (Scharnhorst xv, 481). Eventually he declined after the acting mayor of New Orleans, Colonel Deming, had advised him against it. The main argument that convinced De Forest to abandon his plan was “the nature of the service that [would] be assigned to the Negro troops” (VA 51). The principal tasks of the colored regiments, De Forest heard, would be “making roads, building bridges and draining marches” (VA 51). In Miss Ravenel’s Conversion Captain Colburne refuses the colonelcy of a Louisiana colored regiment for similar reasons. In the novel, it is the Virginian Carter, also in the function as military Major

\(^3\) In the description of this heroic scene, De Forest underlines that the rebels are aligned with the devil while those who fight for the noble cause of freedom are on God’s side: “Both fired at the same instant, and both fell together, probably alike lifeless. The last prayer of the negro was, " My God!" and the last curse of the rebel was "Damnation!" (316, my emphasis).” This can also be seen as an ironic reversal roles between the Christian white master and the heather black savage who was supposedly Christianized by the slaveholders.

of New Orleans, who convinces Colburne to decline the offer. Carter, who harbors the resentment, felt in the South as well as the North, to seeing “the low brute [...] in uniform” impresses on his young Captain that

If you take a command of niggers, you will find yourself put into Fort Pike or some such place, among the mosquitoes and fever and ague, where white men can’t live. Or your regiment will be made road-builders, and scavengers, and baggage guards, to do the dirty work of white regiments. (190)

Carter’s final argument to dissuade Colburne from accepting the command of a Freedmen’s regiment is that “they are not acknowledged by the government yet” (190). While Scharnhorst uses De Forest’s refusal of the colonelcy as an example in the argument that he was not exactly a champion of the black cause (xiv-xv), he overlooks the fact that in his real life as well as in his fiction, De Forest expressed his regret over his decision (VA 170). In Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, the narrator remarks that he “consider[s] it worthwhile to mention here that Colburne committed a great mistake about this time in declining [the black regiment] regiment” (189).

All things considered, one can argue that, in his novel, De Forest incorporated the “mixed assessment of southern blacks” that was typical for the North immediately after the Civil War (Silber 25). Most northerners believed in the “capacity for labor” of the freedmen, but at the same time they expressed their doubts about the black character (Silber 25). “Northern whites”, Silber argues, “suspected that former slaves still bore sign of slavery - especially a weak character and a degraded sense of morality - which ran counter to a proper code of manliness” (25). Indeed, De Forest, who combines his description of the freedmen’s industriousness and rise to manhood with the failure of Dr. Ravenel’s social experiment, suggests hope as well as fear for the future of the blacks. Given the developments in the Reconstruction Period, it seems that his reserve was justified.
The issue of slavery is not the only point in the novel about which De Forest displays an ambiguous view. The Civil War veteran lavishes praise on his representative northern character Colburne and comes down hard on the slaveholding Sodom of the South and its Cavalier Colonel Carter. However, De Forest was not blind for the flaws of his own society, and, like a sharp social critic or even satirist, he does not refrain from holding a mirror up to the North.

4.4. Critique of Northern Society: Cold Puritans and Corrupt Yankees

Though most of the narrative space is reserved for the deconstruction of the South and southern manhood, De Forest opens his novel with an ironic yet fierce swipe at northern society. The author’s critique is primarily aimed at his native region, New England, the breeding ground of Puritanism. De Forest fictionalizes his town of residence, New Haven, as New Boston, which he presents as the capital of Baratarya, that is the fictionalized state of Connecticut. The narrator immediately apologizes for “introducing a seventh State into New England”, and slyly remarks that he “do[es] not mean to disturb thereby the congressional balance of the republic (8). The reason for this “geographical impertinence”, the narrator explains, is so that he “may tell [his] story freely without being accused of misrepresenting this private individual, or insulting that public functionary, or burlesquing any self-satisfied community” (7-8). The narrator concludes his brief introduction of his Yankee hero’s state of origin by explicitly mentioning the connection between this seventh New England state and the homonymic island of Cervantes’s Sancho Panza. In Don Quixote, the Isle Barataria derives its name from the Spanish word ‘barato’, which indicates the low price at which its government can be bribed (Scharnhorst 470). Thus, already in the first paragraph, the two unfavorable characteristics of New England society which will bear the full brunt of De Forest’s social critique are hinted at: its Puritan narrow-mindedness and self-satisfaction on the one hand, and its susceptibility to corruption on the other.

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4.4.1. Cold Puritans

As mentioned before, Colburne’s New Boston is depicted as a region fundamentally lacking in real men. According to the narrator, the feminization of the aristocratic young gentlemen is caused by the numbing effects of the conservative Puritan environment these youths grow up in. De Forest caricaturizes New Boston, and by extension New England, as stiff, cold and generally unpleasant. “New Boston”, De Forest’s narrator remarks,

is not a lively nor a sociable place. The principal reason for this is that it is inhabited chiefly by New Englanders. Puritanism, the prevailing faith of that land and race, is not only not favorable but is absolutely noxious to social gayeties, amenities and graces. (21-22)

The representatives of the “socially stiff and unsympathetic” New Bostonians (22) are the Whitewoods, the patriarch of which is a prominent professor at the distinguished Winslow University. Even the house of the Whitewood family is presented as an embodiment of the New Boston character. “Trim, regular, geometrical, one half of the structure weighing to an ounce just as much as the other half”, in short, “it was precisely such a building as the New Boston soul would naturally create for itself” (19-20). The citizens of this northern community are so stern that they seem incapable of expressing emotions. The smile of one of the “conscientious but uncharitable ladies”, the narrator mockingly remarks, seemed “rather a symptom of pain than an expression of pleasure; it was a kind of griping smile, like that of an infant with the colic” (24). Even Colburne, though considered “charming” by New Boston standards, is not unaffected by the hardening Puritan climate. When his mother is dying, neither she nor her son sheds a tear, because “the Puritans and the children of the Puritans do not weep easily” (81). Against the coldness and severity of the New England character is placed the southern warmth and social grace of the Ravenels. Because the

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34 However, De Forest adds that, “deficient as the New Bostonians are in timely smiles and appropriate compliments, they have strong sympathies for what is clearly right, and can become enthusiastic in a matter of conscience and benevolence” (22). The suggestion is, of course, that the northern cause to fight for the Union and liberty is the ‘right’ one.
inhabitants of New Boston are unaccustomed to a “radiant, smiling, universally sympathetic and perennially sociable gentleman” like Dr. Ravenel, the Southern gentleman is an attraction in the puritan northern city (23). The Doctor’s southern warmth and cordiality generally seems to have a softening effect on the stiff New Bostonian spirit. When the gracious South-Carolinian grasps the “frigid hand” of one of the “elder university magnates”, the ice of the “usually solid and sincere” gentleman “melted away from him leaving him free to smile” (23). In the dichotomy between southern warmth and northern chilliness already identified by Alexis de Tocqueville, De Forest’s sympathies clearly go to the former.

De Forest also exposes the New England moral outrage at what they deem too liberal as drenched in hypocrisy. When at the picnic of the New Boston youths, also attended by Lillie, Colburne and Carter, two of the young men discover the champagne brought by the Virginian, more than half of the party, particularly the matrons, are perplexed with “a holy horror” at the ‘wicked’ presence of alcohol (39). Moreover “the moral excitation” reaches its climax when the southern sinner Carter starts distributing cigars (40). The indignation of the New Boston ladies over the ‘desecration’ of the New Boston picnic by Carter’s alcoholic beverages and cigars, stands in sharp contrast with their own immoral sexual behavior. Carter stands in wonder at the fact that some of the middle-aged ladies, who are supposed to keep an eye on the moral conduct of the youths, impudently flirt with the young beaux. Even more to his amazement, he sees couples of New Boston youths “strolling off by themselves among the thickets” and remaining “out of sight for half an hour” without eliciting any comment from their chaperones (50). With a mixture of satire and genuine indignation, the southern Union officer confronts Colburne with the hypocrisy of his New Boston compatriots:

Now how the devil can these old girls, who have lived long enough to be able to put two and two together, be so dem’d inconsistent? After regarding me with horror for offering them a glass of champagne, they will commit imprudences which make them
appear as if they had drunk a bottle of it. And yet, just look. I have too much delicacy to ask one of those young ones to stroll off with me in the bushes (51).

While it is generally the South and the adulterous Carter who are associated with sexual licentiousness, De Forest suggests that the conservative New England aristocracy is also far from “immaculate” (50). As Carter points out to Colburne, the sexual morals even seem to be looser above the Mason-Dixie line: “you do some things here which would draw down the frown of society in other places. [...] You don’t catch our young Louisianienne [sic] making a dryad of herself” (50-51).

4.4.2. Predatory Yankees

A second major flaw of northern society that De Forest denounces in his novel is the rampant corruption, greed and opportunism. De Forest’s model northerner, Colburne, is confronted with the ruthless nature of the Yankee business world via his mother. Mrs. Colburne lost most of the fortune that her deceased husband had bequeathed her in an investment which “some of the sharpest New Boston capitalists” assured her was “both safe and permanent” (78). Besides the unscrupulous world of capitalism, De Forest also exposes the corruption dominating the political scene. Both forms of opportunism, economic as well as political, are embodied in Captain Gazaway. This Union officer and political opportunist functions as the representation of the despicable predatory Yankee, a type of northerner which De Forest condemns. Because of his political connections and the importance of his district for the Republican Party (to which he went over after the rebellion had made the Democratic party unpopular), the incompetent Gazaway is twice given a promotion for which Carter recommended the valiant Colburne. De Forest condemns the political intrigue which rules northern society and which dictates the appointments in the military, a world where soldierly skill should prevail over political considerations. In contrast to the consistent lobbying of Gazaway, Colburne himself “had never asked for promotion, believing, with the
faith of chivalrous youth, that merit would be sure of undemanded recognition” (321). As opposed to Captain Colburne, whose courage in combat allows him to attain a reinvigorated model of manhood, the predatory Gazaway displays the typical antebellum Yankee trait of cowardice. Though he “look[s] like a champion of the heavy weights” (351), Gazaway suffers from a “want of pluck” (320). As an officer in the Union army, Gazaway is notorious for his spectacular about-faces upon hearing the whistling of enemy bullets. At Fort Winthrop, where Colburne arrives after his skirmish with the Texan horsemen, it is Gazaway who acts as the commanding officer of the fort’s garrison. When the Texans threaten to attack Fort Winthrop, the spineless Gazaway is immediately disposed to accept the Confederate’s demand to surrender the fort. Because of the shameless display of cowardice by this political intrigant, the manly courage of Colburne, the garrison’s soldiers and the black laborers who successfully defend the fort is highlighted even more.

Although De Forest is at times harsher in his condemnation of Gazaway than he is of Carter, he does not, like with the southern gentlemen, kill the greedy Yankee off. In fact, as the narrator bitterly recounts near the story’s close, Gazaway managed to obtain the Lieutenant-Colonelcy in exchange for carrying his district for the Republicans. Moreover, he gathered a small fortune via corruptive schemes in his position as the commander of the conscript camp (which he likewise acquired by lobbying). When he was finally ordered to the front, the sly schemer

At once sent in his resignation, backed up by a surgeon’s certificate of physical disability, retired from the service with a capital of ten or fifteen thousand dollars, removed to New York, set up a first-class billiard-saloon, turned democrat once more, obtained a couple of city offices, and now has an income of seven or eight thousand a-year, a circle of admiring henchmen, and a reputation for ability in business and politics. (482)

The question can be raised, however, whether in a war novel it is better to survive as a coward than to die heroically in battle, as the much-despised yet respected Cavalier did.
4.5. Respect for the South

Despite his fierce denunciation of the South in his novel, De Forest does not refrain from expressing his reverence for what he discerns as the admirable qualities of the southern character. As a veteran Billy Yank who participated in several dearly fought battles with Johnny Reb, De Forest knew from experience that, if the idea of the southerners’ superhuman courage and pugnacity was an exaggeration, it was at least rooted in truth. In A Volunteer’s Adventures, the Union Captain comments on the military skills of the southern army after the battle of the Opequon:

Three points I noted with regard to our opponents, the famed veterans of ‘the Army of Virginia.’ They aimed better than our men; they covered themselves (in case of need) more carefully and effectively; they could move in a swarm, without much care for alignment and touch of elbows. In short, they fought more like redskins, or like hunters, than we. The result was that they lost fewer men, though they were far inferior in numbers, and perhaps not half our numbers. (VA 190)

In Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, De Forest also makes no secret of his admiration of Robert E. Lee’s Virginians. Commenting on the character of the Virginia-born Carter, the narrator remarks that “as we have seen in this war, [the Virginia gentleman] is capable of amazing activity, audacity and perseverance. Of all the States which have fought against the Union Virginia has displayed the most formidable military qualities” (164). It is probably out of respect for the Virginia courage, even more so than because of his state as a Yankee officer, that Colonel Carter, for all his moral flaws, is depicted as a heroic commander on the battlefield, a military heroism which culminates in his noble death in battle. Even the South’s fiercest critic, Dr. Ravenel, concedes that, though they will undoubtedly lose the struggle, his southern countrymen will also be “an honor to the fortitude [...] of human nature” (10). Because, as a native southerner, Dr. Ravenel is fully aware of the militancy and fighting spirit of the Southern people, he challenges the confident statement of Colburne, who is thereby
“speaking the common belief of the North”, that the war “will probably be a short struggle” (10).

Furthermore, even though in most of the battles described in the novel, the North emerges victorious, De Forest never depicts his former adversaries as cowards. In fact, in De Forest’s view the Yankee soldiers can learn from their soldierly southern brethren. This view is voiced by the army drunk Van Zandt. Commenting on the fiasco of General Banks’s Red River Campaign, Van Zandt states that

If we had had half the go, the vim, the forward march, to lead us, that the rebels had, we would have finished the war in the southwest. We must take a leaf out of Johnny Reb’s book. Fas est ab hostes doceri. I believe I quote correctly. If not, please correct me. (433)\textsuperscript{35}

After the war, De Forest’s semi-autobiographical character Captain Colburne even defends his former enemies when a northern citizen, who “never smelled a pinch of rebel powder”, declares to him that “the rebel soldiers were cowards” (490). The veteran Yankee replies that in his three years of field service he found the Confederate “a very even match in fighting” (490). Given the numerical and material superiority of the Union, the rebels were certainly not cowards if they managed to equal the Yankees in fighting.

Besides his display of respect of its military aspect, De Forest also pays tribute to the social grace and warmth of the southern character. As stated before, the politeness, hospitality and courtesy of the Ravenels stands in sharp contrast with the rigidity and chilliness of the North. Thus, though De Forest, surfing on the wave of jubilant patriotism that characterized the victorious North, deconstructs the southern Cavalier, he also shares the special fascination that many northerners harbored about the South and its plantation society. That the plantation world of the Old South did not fail to attract the Union Captain De Forest, who was already acquainted with Dixie through his visits to South Carolina before

\textsuperscript{35} He does, of course, misquote the Latin saying, however slightly: “fas est et ab hoste doceri” (“it is right to be taught even by the enemy”) (Scharnhorst 493).
the war, emerges from some almost sentimental passages in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion. Despite the hostility of the white southerners, Colburne is enchanted with the picturesque southern landscape. In a letter to Dr. Ravenel, the Union Captain writes

Give my compliments to Miss Ravenel, and tell her that I modify my criticisms on the scenery of Louisiana. On either side the land is a living emerald. The plantation houses are embowered in orange groves in a glossy mass of brilliant, fragrant verdure. (124)

De Forest’s sentimentality particularly emerges when he describes the ruined state of the once flourishing southern plantation house of the fled Robertson family, where Dr. Ravenel will set up his free labor experiment. With a certain sense of outrage, he writes that, after the planter family had abandoned their estate, their black field-hands “plundered [the house] from parlor to garret [...] and diverted themselves with soiling the carpets, breaking the chairs, ripping up the sofas, and defacing the family portraits” (253). Though to Dr. Ravenel, the ravaged state of the plantation is a just punishment from God for the planters’ slaveholding ways, De Forest’s narrator displays more sympathy for the South’s elite. “To the merely sentimental observer”, De Forest writes, “it was sad to think that this house of desolation had not long since been the abode of the generous family life and prodigal hospitality of a southern planter” (254). In his later sketches of southern life, made when he resided in post-war Dixie as Freedman’s Bureau officer, De Forest portrays the southern social elite, the “chivalrous Southrons” as he termed them (A Union Officer 173), in a positive light. Similar to his depiction of the Ravenels, De Forest praises these southern gentles for “their consideration for others, their unpretentious dignity, their grace of bearing, their genuine courtesy, and their personal courage” (Croushore and Potter xiii). Thus, although he had only deconstructed the figure of the southern Cavalier a few years before in his war novel Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, De Forest’s fascination for the southern gentleman was thoroughly rekindled in the early Reconstruction years. In this way, De Forest again
anticipates a tendency that would come to dominate the North only in the late nineteenth century. As Nina Silber argues, northerners, mostly because of the progressive changes in their own industrial society, again looked with fascination to the chivalrous southern gentleman who showed himself the master of his environment (Silber 174).

4.6. Always at the North!

Even if De Forest was attracted by the South’s social warmth, what prevails in his Civil War novel is his ardent patriotism. In the war, the North had proven its worth and conquered Dixie. Likewise, in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, the northerner Colburne emerges victorious from the battle with the South, not only in military but also in social terms.

At the story’s outset, the two representative male figures of North and South both court the secessionist Lillie Ravenel. Because of his natural masculinity and social graces, the outwardly pompous yet morally flawed southern Cavalier initially defeats the yet imperfect northerner in the social game of courting, which De Forest often describes in military terms. In the chapter symbolically titled “Colonel Carter is entirely victorious before he starts his Campaign”, the marriage between Lillie and Carter signs the (social) victory of the Cavalier over the Yankee. Given that, in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, De Forest places two models of manhood against each other, the conversion of Miss Ravenel from secession to loyalty is not fully completed when she is converted to Unionism, but only when she is also converted to ‘Colburne’, the reinvigorated model of northern manhood. In other words, the conversion that Lillie undergoes is a double conversion, political and ideological, away from secession and away from the Cavalier. For this purpose, the southern gentleman is gradually deconstructed and exposed as a drinking, dishonorable and adulterous figure. When Dr. Ravenel discovers a incriminating letter from Mrs. Larue to Carter, the husband of his beloved daughter, the indignant father wants to “carry her north” (439). When the southern Belle finds out about her husband’s infidelity herself, she consents with her father’s
resolution that “we will go north, we will never come back here” (441). Thus, Lillie Ravenel abandons the South and the southern manhood model once and for all. After he has been informed by Dr. Ravenel of their decision to go to the North, the exposed Cavalier dies his inevitable yet symbolical death in battle. With Carter, it seems that the southern model of manhood has perished also.

Meanwhile, the Yankee has risen to full masculinity. Indeed, Colburne “is a better and stronger man for having fought 3 years [...] like the nation, he has developed and learned his powers” (468). Now that he emerges victorious over the South and the southern Cavalier, the one thing left for him to conquer is the southern Belle. To achieve this, there is one final obstacle he has to overcome, that is the ‘old’ and weak northern manhood model as represented by the young Whitewood. However, given that the war veteran has already fought and defeated far stronger opponents, the outcome of this final battle is never really in doubt. Though Colburne secretly fears that the pecuniary means of the “eighty thousand dollar youth” might appeal to the recently widowed Mrs. Carter (507), the effeminate Whitewood Jr. is never a match for masculine vigor of Colburne. The young rival himself recognizes Colburne’s overall superiority:

Whitewood bowed modestly to Colburne’s superior conversational cleverness, and humbled himself in the dust before his honorable fame as a soldier. What was he, a man of peace, a patriot who had only talked and paid, in comparison with this other man who had shed his blood and risked his life for their common country and the cause of human progress. (508)

Of course, when he asks Mrs. Carter’s hand in marriage, Whitewood Jr. meets rejection. Captain Colburne, by contrast, is successful in his siege of the South’s last fortress. While at the beginning of the story, Colburne was too self-effacing and too passive to act on his feelings for Lillie, now he has “manliness enough [...] to say what was in his own heart”. While before he “overestimated [Lillie] and was afraid of her [and] underestimated himself
and was too modest” (155), he has now acquired assertiveness and confidently takes the lead in the game of courting:

She could not speak nor raise her eyes to his face as he stood before her. If he had kept silence for a few moments she would probably have recovered herself and said, “Won’t you sit down,” or some such insanity. But he did not give her time for that; he took one of her hands in both of his and said, “Lillie!” (514)

After vanquishing the southern men on the battlefield, the Yankee manages to subdue the southern Belle. This ultimate northern victory is underlined by the former secessionist’s expression of her preference for the land of industry and commerce:

"Where are we to live?" [Colburne] asked. "Do you want to go back to New Orleans?"

“Oh, never!” she replied. “Always at the North! I like it so much better!”

In the novel’s final chapter, Colburne’s conquest is formalized through marriage. This matrimonial bond not only symbolizes a reunion between the two warring regions, but first and foremost stresses the manly authority of the North over the South. In the relationship between Colburne and Lillie, the southern Belle occupies the role of the obedient wife and devoted mother, symbolizing the weak, submissive position that the North imagined for Dixie. However, as the development of the Reconstruction Period shows, the proud white inhabitants of the South were not intent on just resigning themselves to this subordinate position. And some indications in the novel suggests that De Forest was at least mildly skeptical of the prevalent northern feeling of political and masculine superiority over a ‘defeated’ South.

4.7. A Happy Marriage?

A first clue of the author’s moderate skepticism is the fate of Dr. Ravenel’s philanthropic experiment, which ends in bitter failure. The reason for its failure is particularly interesting, and suggestive of De Forest’s doubts as to whether the South will
actually be subdued. Not long after the failed attack of the Confederates on Fort Winthrop, the abandoned plantation of Dr. Ravenel is burned to the ground by the rebels, who “put a devout zeal into the task of laying waste every spot which had been desecrated by the labor of manumitted bondsmen” (352). In other words, Dr. Ravenel’s experiment of ‘northernizing’ a small part of the South fails because white Southerners re-capture the plantation. Like a true visionary, De Forest seems to anticipate the failure of the post-war Reconstruction policy. The Reconstruction plan of introducing in the conquered South northern principles such as free labor, liberty and political rights for all men regardless of their color indeed failed because the white southerners, the former masters, managed to regain (political) control of the former ‘plantation’ that is the South.

This restoration of southern control can be connected to a trait which De Forest and, to a much greater extent, Albion Tourgée identify as central to the southern character: its capacity for leadership and domination. In the antebellum sectional debate, both southerners and northerners assigned this quality to the South (Silber 18-19). De Forest’s Virginian is attributed with the very same quality. Carter is “willful by nature” and “accustomed to domineer” (160). In a conversation with Dr. Ravenel, Van Zandt emphasizes the southern gentleman’s domineering nature in various domains. “General Carter”, Van Zandt proclaims, “is born for command and for victory. Wherever he goes he conquers. He is triumphant in the field and in the boudoir. He is victorious over man and women” (434). Of course, it can be argued that via the elaborate deconstruction and eventual death of the Cavalier, De Forest attempts to disprove the southern claim to leadership and reclaim it for the North, as many northerners did after their victory in the Civil War (Silber 18). However, as is the case with the related characteristic of southern courage, Carter’s capacity for dominance and (military) leadership is one which he does never actually loses, even if the northern man Colburne eventually surpasses him in this domain. More importantly, there is one southern character who manifests this domineering quality throughout the story and
fully retains it until the very end: Mrs. Larue. In this character, the author’s suspicion that perhaps northern victory in the war will not subdue the South seem to be concentrated, albeit in a rather suggestive manner. As De Forest’s narrator remarks, Mrs. Larue is “a curious study” (378). She is “a true type of Louisiana” (53), but in terms of her sympathies, she is “double faced as Janus” (143). Although, it seems that, ultimately, her sympathies go to her native region, the chameleon-like Mrs. Larue changes (political) color according to her needs or the preferences of her interlocutors. As opposed to the simple and naive Lillie, whose pretentious rebellion is quite harmless and innocent, Mrs. Larue is “artful and anxious to govern” (226), a sly example of the southern Belle. In her false submission to the North and with her feigned Unionism, she is far more dangerous than the openly ‘rebellious’ Lillie. Moreover, skilful in the art of dominating and manipulating, she is a genius in the social game that Colburne only manages to master at the novel’s close. Even after the revelation of her affair with Carter brings disgrace over her and excludes her from the company of her family, the Ravenels, the manipulative Mrs. Larue manages to come out on top. In order to improve her situation, she decides to “break with treason, and flirt with loyalty in gilt buttons” (444). The crafty southern Belle manages to wind a prominent army officer around her finger and convinces him to make her his wife. Furthermore, via her Union husband, she re-establishes her lost fortunes on the Yankee business market. The fact this female embodiment of the southern domineering spirit not only survives the war but also manages to emerge victorious out of the struggle suggests De Forest’s suspicion that, contrary to the prevailing northern opinion, the southern character might not be subdued. The ‘defeated’ South may be an servile Lillie, but he fear that she is a dangerous Mrs. Larue.

That De Forest, though certainly optimistic, was perhaps not entirely confident about the nation’s future also glimmers through the novel’s final chapter. To underscore the victory of his region over the feminine South, the author presents the North as the ultimate residence of the newly wedded couple. He is however, somewhat hesitant to speculate on
the future of his heroine and the nation. “It grieves me”, the narrator remarks, “to leave this young woman thus on the threshold of her history. [...] it will be perceived that, if I continue her story, I shall have to do it through the medium of prophecy, which [...] lead[s] me to assume grave responsibilities, such, for instance, as deciding the next presidential election without waiting for the verdict of the people” (520). As Stephanie LeMenager argues in “‘Geographical Morality’: Place and the Problem of Patriotism in John W. De Forest’s Civil War Realism”, by leaving his heroine on ‘the threshold of her history’, “the narrator acknowledges that his novel is unfinished as the nation itself” (576). The possibility remains that the (re-)marriage between North and South will not be a happy one, as indeed it was not.

In spite of these minor indications to the contrary, the overall tone of De Forest with regard to happiness and northern dominance in the post-war North-South power relation is marked by optimism. As he indicates at various occasions in his novel, De Forest’s hope and believe is that the war has strengthened the northern character. As the narrator confidently states, “we need have no fears about the prospects of Colburne” (520). As Colburne is the representative northern war veteran, this optimism extends to the whole nation: “he is the soldier citizen: he could face the flame of battle for his country: he can also earn his own living. [...] It is in millions of such men that the strength of the Republic consists” (521). In addition, that the son of the southern Cavalier, Ravvie, will be educated in the North and formed by northern principles, suggests the post-war South will indeed be ‘Northernized’. Similarly, after the war, Colburne expresses his expectation that the war will have beneficent effect on the hostile southern nature: “the southern character will be improved by the struggle [...] . They will be sweetened by adversity, as their persimmons are by frost” (496). Thus, ultimately, De Forest’s confident patriotism seems to obfuscate his doubts. He concludes that “as for [Colburne’s] domestic history, I think that we need have no terrors, either for his happiness or that of Mrs. Colburne (521). In reality, however, the
domestic happiness of the northern husband and the subdued southern wife De Forest hoped for would prove to be an illusion, an illusion which Albion Tourgée mercilessly punctures in his Reconstruction novel *A Fool's Errand*. 
5. Albion Tourgée’s A Fool’s Errand

5.1. Situation in the Reunion Culture

While De Forest’s Miss Ravenel’s Conversion fits quite neatly in the culture of reconciliation, a tendency which he even seems to anticipate, Albion Tourgée’s novel bears a rather different relation to this post-war reunion rhetoric. Tourgée wrote his Reconstruction novel in 1877, when the tone of the sectional discourse in the North had shifted from hostile to sentimental. With the Reconstruction experiment over, many northerners “abandoned their intention to force a purely economic solution on the South”, and instead “enhanced the sentimental vision of reconciliation, stressing the joining of hearts and souls as opposed to a bonding through words and legislation” (Silber 55). The idea that came to prevail in the victorious North was that to come to a true national bonding, they should show forgiveness and sympathy to their former enemies (Silber 48-49). Consequently, the South was again looked upon with sympathy and even admiration. However, as the congressional balance in the antebellum, the balance of sympathy also had to be maintained, and increased pity for the former enemies meant less support for the former slaves, who were seen as preying on their degraded one-time masters (Silber 51-53). The outcome of this outburst of feelings of emotional reconciliation was, as mentioned before, the proliferation of the sentimental marriage metaphor, one in which the victorious North is assigned the masculine, dominant role. In this way, the North could continue to exert domination over the South even after it had slackened its political, economic and military control over the South (Silber 64-65). Tourgée, however, resisted being carried away by the current of sentimentality and forgiveness that characterized the period after Reconstruction. The former ‘carpetbagger’ opposed his compatriots’ willingness to forget the past, the war, slavery and other “old sectional animosities”, in order to come to a national reconciliation (Silber 96). As Kathryn Warren states,
Tourgée’s was a voice of dissent in this period of vigorous national re-imagination that sought to paper over the rancor of the past. Unlike those who would forge a national culture on a foundation of forgetting, Tourgée wrote so that readers would remember what he understood as the reality of Reconstruction—and act on it. (47)

For Tourgée, who “waged a long an relentless struggle for full equality for the Negro” (Olenick 332), it was clear that the victims of a national forgetfulness would again be the blacks. To oppose the predominant rhetoric of sentimental reconciliation, Tourgée stresses in his novel the fundamental differences in attitude, belief and even culture between North and South. As Warren states, “while a popular discourse of reunion worked to dismantle this sense of two nations within a nation, Tourgée attempted to reinforce it, for the nation could move forward, he believed, only after recognizing and remedying, not denying, the divisions within” (53). Not surprisingly, the pivotal element in the North-South opposition identified by Tourgée concerns slavery in the antebellum and the fate of the freedmen after the war. By highlighting the gap between the two regions, which, in his view, can even be seen as two separate civilizations, Tourgée makes clear that a true reconciliation between North and South can only be accomplished when one of the two American civilizations abandons its deep-rooted beliefs. Much to Tourgée’s frustration, the lawmakers of the North, the ‘Wise Men’ as he mockingly terms them, failed to see the complexity of the North-South relationship when the plan of Reconstruction was devised. For Tourgée, Reconstruction failed because of the incompetence and “cowardly shirking of responsibility” of the northern leaders (152). As George J. Becker argues in “Albion W. Tourgée: Pioneer in Social Criticism”, Tourgée “charged the North with dereliction of duty” (69).

While the North refrained from taking full advantage of its victory, the South did everything in its power to resist the changes, particularly black equality, imposed by the

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36 Kathryn Warren terms this Tourgée’s “entrenched ideas thesis”. She identifies three major premises underlying this thesis: “First, the North and the South are two separate civilizations. [...] Second, individuals are shaped by the civilization into which they are born, and these early influences limit their ability to empathize with others. [...] And third, the thesis conveys despair at the possibility of change so long as dialogue between regions is forestalled by the power and practice of habit.” (53-54).
northern conqueror. As the outcome of Reconstruction demonstrates, the resistance of the ‘defeated’ South was successful. Having witnessed these developments first hand, the embittered Radical Republican Tourgée counters the optimism that prevailed in the North about its (masculine) superiority vis-à-vis the South. To make clear to his compatriots that, contrary to their beliefs, it is not the North but still the South that is the dominant region of the nation, he reverses the stereotypical North-South marriage metaphor used by northern writers to underscore northern dominance over a feminized Dixie. By reversing this plot device, that is by coupling a northern woman with a southern man, Tourgée anticipates a development in the reunion culture. As Nina Silber writes, from the 1890s onwards, southern writers but also prominent northern novelists like Henry James in The Bostonians (1886) “reversed the standard formula of romantic conciliation and made southern men the heroes of [their] novels, the conquerors of the northern woman’s heart” (Silber 186). But, while most northern authors turned the romantic plot formula around primarily out of a new found veneration for the agricultural South, the chivalry and the masculinity of the southern gentleman, qualities they found lacking in the progressive northern society of the Gilded Age (Silber 186-187), Tourgée’s had a different motivation. The Radical Republican reversed the romantic roles of North and South out of a deep disappointment with what he saw as the lack of virility of his own region, and out of an admiration for the action and the domineering quality of the southern character.

5.2. The Fool’s view of the Wise Men’s Reconstruction

Like Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, in which the author combines the southern historical romance and northern realism (Fick 473-475), Albion Tourgée uses two very different literary genres in his novel. As Warren points out, in A Fool’s Errand, “plot-driven, high-drama chapters” appertaining to the historical romance alternate with “non-narrative elements” (50). The latter, “letters, charts, essays, and newspaper articles, all drawn from
Tourgée’s own experience”, form the novel’s second major genre, the political tract (Warren 50). It is to the political part of his novel that Tourgée devoted most of his attention. This is far from surprising given that the aim of the embittered author was to expound the reasons why the Union government’s Reconstruction policy was doomed to fail from the start. The author’s retrospective scrutiny of the Reconstruction period, primarily expressed via letters to and from the northern protagonist Comfort Servosse, is of course not unrelated to the romance-part of the novel. The story, which describes the difficult life of Servosse, the ‘Fool’, as a carpetbagger in the South, functions as a sort of fictional illustration of the political and cultural views expressed in the non-fictional part. Although my brief analysis of A Fool’s Errand will mainly focus on the fictional part of the novel, I think it is interesting to give a synthesis of Tourgée’s views of the failure of Reconstruction as expressed in the novel.

Tourgée’s view of why Reconstruction turned out to be a failure consists of two major points. Firstly, the Wise Men who had to decide on the policy failed to realize just how big the divide between the two American regions was. For Tourgée, “the Rebellion was the culmination of a long smoldering antagonism, — a divergence of thought and sentiment which was radical and irreconcilable: it was a conflict between two divergent civilizations” (149, my emphasis). After Lee’s surrender at Appomattox, however, the northern political leaders assumed that the war had settled the sectional differences. They underestimated that the southern beliefs about the black race were not mere superficialities, but deeply-rooted prejudices that had become part of the South’s ‘civilization’ and the Southern mind. In Tourgée’s eyes, a proper Reconstruction Plan would aim to root out these prejudices by placing the South under federal control for as long as it takes to Northernize its inhabitants and to educate the neglected freedmen (Short 243)37. However, the Wise Men, who underestimated these southern prejudices, devised a plan, a compromise between Radical and moderate Republicans, that left the core of the problem, the southern racial mindset,

37 According to Gretchen Short, Tourgée’s A Fool’s Errand is basically “an appeal to imperial control (over education and Southern society in general) as a means of forcibly converting the South to the ideals of Radical Republicanism” (243).
untouched. Moreover, the leaders of the victorious North underestimated the strength of the southern spirit to offer resistance to a policy which aimed to grant (political) equality to a race the white southerners deemed their natural inferiors. Tourgée’s second major point is that the Wise Men were so foolish and cowardly to burden a weak minority in the South, consisting of southern Unionists, northern carpetbaggers and the freedmen, with the impossible task of carrying out the Reconstruction plan they had devised. Though these people had the best intentions, they lacked the political know-how to carry out a this complex scheme. In the novel, Comfort Servosse remarks that “three-fourths cannot read or write, five-sevenths are landless, two-thirds are utterly impoverished, and nearly the whole is inexperienced in the conduct of public affairs” (A Fool’s Errand 151). Despite this inexperience, Tourgée’s protagonist rages, “the nation has rolled [upon this party] the burden of restoration, reconstruction, re-organization!” (151). Therefore, Servosse bitterly concludes, “that it will fail is as certain as the morrow's sunrise” (151). Instead of taking its responsibility, the victorious northern government decided to pass the bucket to those people who supported the Union in the South during the civil conflict, that is the southern Unionists and the freedmen. The government’s way of repaying them for their ardent support was to abandon them as an easy prey for the powerful and politically more experienced white southerners. In the story, Bob, a southern black who fought heroically in the Civil War, comments on the lack of government support for the freedmen who are threatened by the Ku Klux Klan:

“Ef de gubment won't take keer o' de darkeys y'her, an' gib 'em a white man's chance, dey' run away, jes' ez dey did in slave times”. Dat's my notion,” said the freedman, who had fought to save the life of the nation, which would not lift a finger to save his in return. (171, my emphasis)

The sneer at the northern government added by Tourgée speaks for itself. Thus, for Tourgée, the primary reason for the failure of Reconstruction was that “the North would not see the
fact that war did not mean regeneration, nor perform the duty laid upon it as a conqueror” (152).

5.3. The Element of Gender in A Fool’s Errand

The fictional part of Tourgée’s novel offers an illustration of the northern failure described above. It traces the story of Comfort Servosse, a northern lawyer who, after the Civil War in which he has obtained the rank of Colonel, decides to settle in North Carolina with his family. Although he realizes that the plan the Wise Men have devised is doomed to fail, he becomes actively involved in the Reconstruction of that southern state. The local southern whites, however, do not appreciate his radical views on the subject of racial equality, which are incompatible with their white supremacist beliefs. Servosse and his wife Metta are socially ostracized, and Servosse is confronted with verbal as well as physical intimidation. Via the story of Servosse, to a large extent based on Tourgée’s own experience in North Carolina (Warren 50), the reader is confronted with the difficulties southern Unionists, northern carpetbaggers and black freedmen encountered when they were trying to put the government’s plan into practice by forming Republican state governments. Tourgée’s protagonist tells us how Unionists, for their support to the Reconstruction plan, and freedmen, for asserting their newly acquired political rights, are attacked and even killed. Likewise, Tourgée traces the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, and he shows how their strategy of intimidation and violence paid off. At the novel’s close, the Klan in North Carolina has dissolved, but the damage has already been done: the old southern ruling class has retaken political control over the new state government, and once again they are free to impose their will on the black population. Reconstruction has failed.

The predominance of a politically tinted discourse in the novel does not prevent Tourgée from incorporating the issue that was at the centre of most post-war novels dealing with the North-South relations, that is gender. In fact, it is a substantial element of the author’s political message. Like De Forest in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, Tourgée employs the
notion of gender as a metaphor to represent the power relations between North and South. Although both authors use the same instruments and images, they use them in opposite ways, and the message their novel conveys is equally incompatible. In *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*, De Forest emphasizes the growth to a genuine, virile manhood of the North via its exemplary citizen Colburne. Moreover, he feminizes the South, kills off the southern model of manhood, and couples the harmless and subservient Lillie Ravenel with the reinvigorated northern veteran, thus underscoring the North’s masculine superiority. Despite some minor reservations traceable in the novel, the former Union Captain shares his compatriots optimistic belief that the war has purified and reunited the nation, and that the once-dominant South has been subdued. By contrast, Tourgée, who wrote his novel not long after his disenchancing experience in the ‘subdued’ South under Reconstruction, shows the fallacy of the victorious North’s excessive optimism. Tourgée realized that a single event, even one as massive in scope as the Civil War, could not change and had not changed as by magic the outlook of a nation that had been divided for so many decades. In contrast to what De Forest and his protagonist had hoped, the war had not forged the nation anew. Moreover, contrary to Colburne’s optimistic expectation, the war had not “sweetened”, let alone Northernized, “the southern character” (*Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* 496). On the contrary, the war seemed to have deepened between both regions. In a letter which is “significant in many ways of the public sentiment of the day” (93), a Union man remarks to Comfort Servosse that “the war has rather intensified than diminished the pride, the arrogance, and the sectional rancor and malevolence of the southern people” (94). More important is Tourgée’s pessimistic observation that, contrary to what most northerners believed, the war had not even changed the nature of the power relations between North and South, between the Yankee and the Cavalier. Basing himself on the inefficiency and utter incapability with which the ‘reinvigorated’, victorious North handled the Reconstruction of the defeated Confederacy, and on how its leaders abandoned the
freedmen and Unionists to their fate amongst the hostile southern population, Tourgée’s conclusion is that the power relations between the two regions had not changed: the South is superior in leadership, in rule and in manhood, as it was before the Civil War.

To drive home his point, Tourgée reverses several of the developments, sketched by novelists such as De Forest, that support the notion of post-war northern superiority over Dixie. In *A Fool’s Errand*, Tourgée intends to alert his readers to how the post-bellum power relations really stand by elaborating three gender-related concepts. Firstly, Tourgée stresses that the war has not infused the North with masculinity. In his eyes, his region’s conduct in the Reconstruction Period demonstrates that it still lacks manly vigor. Secondly, Tourgée seems to ‘revive’ the prematurely written off southern manhood model. In contrast with the passive North, southerners are by nature a virile people, a ruling people who are born to dominate. Thirdly, Tourgée’s illustrates his view that the power relations between North and South have not changed by reversing the popular marriage metaphor used by northern writers of his time to express northern masculine superiority. While it may appear from this brief outline that Tourgée utterly condemns his own native region while blindly admiring Dixie, his view on the North-South relationship as expressed in his novel is more nuanced. As an ardent believer in northern values such as freedom of speech and political rights for all men, Tourgée ultimately sticks by his region. Despite the pessimistic tone that dominates most of his novel, the author ends on a more hopeful note: it is Tourgée’s hope and even his belief that on the long run, the northern civilization and the values it advocates will also be adopted in Dixie, even if the North will have to (forcefully) impose them. This final straw of optimism also finds it expression in the North-South romance envisioned by Tourgée. Despite that the masculine position is indeed occupied by the South, his northern sweetheart is in no way a passive and obedient woman. In fact, she can hardly even be termed womanly. I am, however, running ahead of things. To capture the development of Tourgée’s train of thoughts as expressed in *A Fool’s Errand*, it is important to first elaborate
on how he reverses the myth of northern dominance that, in his eyes, undeservedly caught hold of the minds of many of his compatriots.

5.3.1 Northern Lack of Virility

In his novel, Tourgée, a Radical Republican who wanted to get things done, associates masculinity and virility with taking action. This association between virility and action was certainly not new. In the antebellum period, the passivity of the northern abolitionists was already used by the South as an illustration of the Yankee’s lack of virility. In the context of the sectional gender-debate, southern men portrayed northern abolitionists as “men of talk and not of action” (Silber 22). The association of passivity with femininity is also suggested by the rhetorical question of prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison already quoted in my first chapter: “where is our northern manhood? Do we always mean to cower under the southern lash?” (William Lloyd Garrison, “Disunion”). For Tourgée, the Civil War did not transform the northerners from passive ‘men of talk’ to active ‘men of action’. Witness thereof the author’s harsh condemnation of the Congressional Reconstruction policy, a compromise of three original plans.38 “Like all compromises”, Tourgée rages, “it had the evils of all the plans from which its pieces came, and the merits of none of them” (117). In

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38 Of the three original plans, Tourgée only deemed the plan of the Radicals acceptable. In A Fool’s Errand, he offers an elaborate and unequivocally positive description of the Radical plan: “The third [plan] […] accepted the past, and sought to guarantee the future. It did not regard immediate re-organization of the recently rebellious communities upon a Federal basis, as necessary or desirable. Without seeking vengeance, it took warning from what had been, and sought to prevent a recurrence of evil. It recognized the fact that a doctrine which had been known as State Sovereignty was at the root of the evil, and that the nation had taken a race from bondage which it was morally bound to prepare for freedom. So it proposed that the States which had been in the infected region should be quietly left to molder in the grave of rebellion, — the bed they had themselves prepared; that the region they once embraced should be divided up into Territories without regard to former state lines, and so remain for a score of years under national control, but without power to mold or fashion the national legislation — until time should naturally and thoroughly have healed the breaches of the past, till commerce had become re-established, and the crude ideas of the present had been clarified by the light of experience. It recognized as an undeniable fact the idea that men who had gazed into each other’s faces over gleaming gun-barrels, and by the lurid light of battle, were not so fit to adjust the questions arising out of the conflict as those yet unborn. It was based upon the fact, too, that the slave was not made fit for unrestrained political power by the simple fact of freedom. Slavery might be ended as a legal status by proclamation, but as a living fact it could not. The hands could be unshackled by a constitutional amendment; but heart and brain must have an opportunity to expand, before the freedman could be capable of automatic liberty” (115-116).
Tourgée’s view, the compromise Reconstruction policy Congress decided upon was short-sighted and exhibited the passivity and even the impotence of the northern leaders to resort to vigorous action. In the eyes of the Radical Republican, the North had refrained from reaping the fruits of its victory by settling on this compromise. As in the antebellum, the North has once again failed to pass beyond the stage of talking and halfway measures. Instead of working out an effective, long-term plan to northernize the South, gradually instilling in the minds of the former slaveholding people the northern notions of freedom and egalitarianism, and educating the ignorant blacks to prepare them for their new status as equal citizens, the government settled on a compromise which was aimed at a rapid Reconstruction and re-introduction of the former Confederate states. By doing so, it left the root of the problem, the southern prejudice about the inferiority of the servile black race, unaddressed. Moreover, with its moderate Reconstruction plan, Congress cowardly abandoned those who had stood by the Union relentlessly during the war, the freedmen and Unionists in the South. Tourgée’s frustration at the passive and inadequate Reconstruction policy emerges very clearly from a letter written by his protagonist to Dr. Enos Martin.

This cowardly shirking of responsibility, this pandering to sentimental whimsicalities, this snuffling whine about peace and conciliation, is sheer weakness. The North is simply a conqueror; and, if the results she fought for are to be secured, she must rule as a conqueror. (152-153)

The cautious, moderate policy pursued by the victorious North makes Servosse conclude that, in spite of its victory in the Civil War, “the North lacks virility” (152). The people of the South, by contrast, do manifest virility and a willingness to act promptly. This opposition brings us to the second gender-related notion incorporated by Tourgée: the natural dominance of the southern people.
5.3.2. Natural Southern Rule

To underline the difference between the passive North and the vigorous southern spirit, Servosse imagines what would have happened if the outcome of the war had been in Dixie’s favor:

Suppose the South had been triumphant, and had overwhelmed and determined to hold the North? Before now, a thoroughly organized system of provincial government would have been securely established. There would have been no hesitation, no subterfuge, no pretense of restoration, because the people of the South are born aggressives, who, having made up their minds to attain a certain end, adopt the means most likely to secure it. In this the North fails. She hesitates, palters, shirks. (153)

Tourgée’s message is evident. As opposed to the hesitancy and inaction of their northern neighbors, the people of the South are vigorous and efficacious in their actions. Their quality is that if they ardently believe in something, if they have a common purpose, they manage to achieve that purpose efficiently and effectively. In his description of the South and the nature of its inhabitants, however, the author adopts a double attitude. On the one hand, Tourgée, as an ardent Unionist and Republican, sketches a rather negative image of the southern mentality and culture, and especially of Dixie’s elite. On numerous occasions, Tourgée stresses that the southern ruling class are intolerant towards opinions that do not confirm with their own (racial) beliefs. In the antebellum period, people who held opinions against the South’s Peculiar Institution were reviled. After the war, with slavery abolished, the new victims of southern intolerance were those who stood up for the political rights of the blacks as set out by law, that is Unionists, carpetbaggers and especially the freedmen. As the southerner Dr. Garnet informs Servosse,

that civilization by which you are surrounded has never been tolerant of opinions which do not harmonize with its ideas. Based and built on slavery, the ideas which
were a part of that institution, or which were necessary to its protection and development, have become ingrained, and essential to the existence of the community (92).

In *A Fool’s Errand*, Tourgée’s semi-autobiographical protagonist severely criticizes this embargo on freedom of opinion. On the other hand, the southern intolerance of divergent opinions is, paradoxically, also part of the second attitude Tourgée displays towards the inhabitants of Dixie, one of (reluctant) admiration, of genuine respect. Disappointed in what he deemed the utter passivity of his own region, Tourgée, stands in admiration of the South’s ability to impose their will. Despite his staunch Unionism and his strong adherence to northern values of freedom and equality, Tourgée envies the southerners for their resoluteness, their action, and consequently, their masculinity. Tourgée’s reverence for southern virility is underlined by the fact that he seems to ‘revive’ the southern manhood model, the Cavalier figure, who died on the battlefield in *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion*. In *A Fool’s Errand*, even though his beloved South lies in ruins and he has lost all of his possessions, including his slaves, the southern gentleman is alive and kicking under the northern military and political occupation during Reconstruction. The figure of the Cavalier presented in *A Fool’s Errand* exhibits his customary characteristics. He is hospitable, courteous, graceful, but most importantly, he is shown as virile, more virile than his northern counterpart. Related to that, the sacred southern code of honor, dismantled by De Forest, is restored to its former glory. In *A Fool’s Errand* the sense of honor and duty of the southern gentleman is placed in the spotlight, because for Tourgée, this element of the southern character is essential for its much cherished virility. In both *Miss Ravenel’s Conversion* as in *A Fool’s Errand*, the southerner living by a code of honor is shown as hot-tempered and easily incited. While in De Forest’s novel, this typical hot-temperedness evidences the Cavalier’s violent and aggressive nature and is part of the deconstruction of the southern manhood model, Tourgée seems to assess this southern characteristic in a more positive way. For Tourgée, the excitability and impetuousness of the southerner is part of his strong sense of
pride. And it is this sense of pride which inspires the southerner to take effective action, the masculine quality which the Radical Republican Tourgée found lacking in the northern character. When the southerner feels that his honor has been insulted, and the novel provides numerous examples of insulted southern honor, he does passively turn the other cheek like his northern counterpart does. The southerner’s pride and sense of duty make sure that he acts. In Tourgée’s view, the ‘Wise Men’ of the North failed to realize that by releasing the South’s slaves and by putting the freedmen on the same political level as their former owners at a moment’s notice, they not only insulted the honor of every individual southerner, but of the South as a people. And, as Tourgée indicates, that is one button they should have avoided pushing. Putting himself in the position of the defeated southerners for whom the system of slavery was a way of life, Tourgée articulates the outrage in Dixie over the new civil status granted to their former slaves by the lawmakers of the North:

The negro is made a voter simply to degrade and disgrace the white people of the South. The North cares nothing about the negro as a man, but only enfranchises him in order to humiliate and enfeeble us [...] The whole purpose of the measure is to insult and degrade. But only wait until the States are restored and the “Blue Coats” are out of the way, and we will show them their mistake. (122)

Tourgée’s message is evident. The North has failed to see that by making what the southerners deemed an inferior race their equals without preparing both the southerners and the blacks for such a transition, it has offended the South in its very essence. Moreover,

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39 An early example of insulted southern honor is when Squire Hyman, a local southerner, visits the immigrant Servosse to kindly warn him that his associating with the northern young women, the so-called ‘Yankee schoolmarm’s’, who have taken it upon them to educate the local blacks, is not appreciated by the local white population. Servosse sarcastically informs Hyman that “I would be glad if you would say to these good people who have undertaken to regulate our associations, that I bought this property, paid for it cash down, and am quite capable of regulating my own affairs without their aid.” The proud southerner immediately takes offence: “What do you mean, sir?” said the squire, starting from his seat, white with rage. ‘Do you mean to insult me?’ “ (45).
it has underestimated the will of the South. Incited by their still powerful ruling class, the southerners, “a race of warlike instincts and regal pride” (289), joined forces against what they perceived as the northern military rule and against the Negro rule. Being a people of action and not hesitation, the southerners found and mobilized efficient means to counter the northern measures they deemed insults, that is verbal and physical intimidation of scalawags, carpetbaggers and freedmen via organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Although Tourgée evidently condemns the Klan and its violence strongly in his novel, he cannot help but express his admiration for its clear structure, effectiveness and masculine action:

One cannot but regard with pride and sympathy the indomitable men who, being conquered in war, yet resisted every effort of the conqueror to change their laws, their customs, or even the personnel of their ruling class; and this, too, not only with unyielding stubbornness, but with success. One cannot but admire the arrogant boldness with which they charged the nation which had overpowered them [...] (227)

Despite the reprehensible methods used by the members of the Klan, Tourgée still feels that its actions “must be counted but as the desperate effort of a proud, brave, and determined people to secure and hold what they deemed to be their rights” (228). On the question whether it was not a sign of cowardice “to assail poor, weak, defenseless men and women with overwhelming forces, to terrify, maltreat, and murder” (228), Tourgée’s didactical narrator answers in the negative. The actions of the Ku Klux Klan would be cowardly if they were directed at the individual negro, but they are directed at the whole nation, at the conqueror. The narrator even goes so far as to compare the action of the Klan with the symbol of northern manhood, John Brown:

It was no brave thing in itself for old John Brown to seize the arsenal at Harper's Ferry; [...] but, when we consider what power stood behind that powerless squad, we

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40 Tourgée sums up the general southern sentiment about the freedom and political equality of their former slaves as follows: “the slave is now free, but he is not white but he is not our equal, cannot be made our equal, and we will not be ruled by him” (121-122).
are amazed at the daring of the Hero of Ossawatomie. So it was with this magnificent organization. (229)

Thus, in the somewhat envious northern eyes of Tourgée, organizations such as the Klan are examples of the masculine superiority of the South. In A Fool’s Errand, the virile southern Cavalier has come back, hidden under white robes and masks, but as vigorous and determined as ever. As pointed out in my discussion of Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, a significant part of the antebellum southerner planter’s masculinity was the fact that he owned, controlled and ruled of an inferior servile race (Silber 8). Not surprisingly, the way in which the ‘masked Cavalier’, the representative of the southern manhood model that De Forest deconstructed, reclaims his manhood is by re-asserting his dominance over the now emancipated blacks. And indeed, the dark nights of the Ku Klux Klan succeed in reducing the freedmen to a condition not too dissimilar from the antebellum bondsmanship. Nonetheless, Tourgée does not present the blacks as weak in A Fool’s Errand. In fact, one could argue that, while he more or less obliterates the masculine reinvigoration of the North as sketched by writers like De Forest, the Radical does not undercut the blacks’ rise to manhood. As opposed the characterization of the Northern leaders as cowards, Tourgée depicts the blacks as courageous, manly men. The old Uncle Jerry, a crippled black man scarred by slavery, openly defies the Ku Klux Klan because he “had an idea that his race must, in a sense, achieve its own liberty, establish its own manhood, by a stub-born resistance to aggression” (202). Similarly, Bob, the black war veteran, indicates that the former slaves do not lack in vigor, and that they are willing to fight the Klan: “Jes' gib us a fa'r chance, an' de culled men'll tak' keer o' dersel's. We ain't cowards. We showed dat in de wah. I'se seen darkeys go whar de white troops wa'n't anxious to f oiler 'em, mor'n once.” (170). In Tourgée’s eyes, they did not get this ‘fair chance’ because those who were supposed to aid and protect them, that is the Wise Men in Washington, refrained from
taking proper action. While Tourgée commends the heroism of the black, he deems that resistance is useless against the power of the southern ruling class:

> When experience, wealth, and intelligence combine against ignorance, poverty, and inexperience, resistance is useless. Then the appeal to arms may be heroic; but it is the heroism of folly, the faith — or hope, rather — of the fool (202)

Having witnessed how effectively the South, via organization such as the Klan, crushed black resistance and challenged the measures imposed by their northern ‘conquered’, Tourgée concludes that, as opposed to the passive Yankees, “the people of the South are born rulers” (153). They are a dominant people and contrary to what the Yankees believe, the war has not changed that: “the Southrons are the natural rulers, leaders, and dictators of the country, as later events have conclusively proved” (240).

5.3.3. A Progressive Marriage

Tourgée’s view that the northern victory in the Civil War has not dethroned the South as the dominant partner in the North-South relationship is reflected by the roles both regions are assigned in the intersectional romance featuring A Fool’s Errand. The role of the woman is not occupied by the South, as is the case in De Forest’s Civil War novel, but by the North. In line with the conventions of the historical romance, the daughter of Comfort Servosse falls in love with an ‘enemy’ named Melville, or ‘Mel’, Gurney, the son of a prominent ex-confederate general. Like his father, Melville Gurney, “being tall and commanding in person, of that easy grace which is rarely matched in other portions of the country”, is a “splendid specimen of the stock of southern gentlemen” (235). During the Civil War, the sixteen year old Mel demonstrated his courage and virility by insisting on participating in the final battles of the war, which was by then already a lost cause. In the Reconstruction Period, Mel, again following the footsteps of his patriarch, is a member of the Ku Klux Klan, though not a militant one. While both in terms of his behavior and his
physical appearance Mel Gurney is a fine illustration of the southern gentleman, the northern girl he falls in love with is much harder to classify. Through a fortunate literary coincidence, the daughter of Comfort Servosse bears the same Christian name as De Forest’s Miss Ravenel, albeit with a difference in spelling: Lily. This difference in orthography is already a sign of the fact that Lily Servosse differs from Lillie Ravenel in almost every possible way. While De Forest’s southern Belle is presented as weak, girlish, naive, simple and even ignorant, Lily Servosse can almost be termed a ‘mannish woman’. She is intelligent, vigorous, strong-willed and brave. The difference between Lillie and Lily becomes apparent when one examines their differing responses when they are informed that their respective fathers are in danger. When Dr. Ravenel has not returned home from a visit to a friend in the occupied New Orleans, the girlish Lillie Ravenel can only panic and cry. Her solution is to send a northern man, Captain Colburne, to look for her missing father. Lily Servosse, by contrast, takes matters into her own hands. Immediately after she has received the note from the mounted stranger (later revealed to be Mel Gurney’s younger brother) that the Klan has planned an attack on the judge her father is visiting, and that therefore her father is also in great peril, she does not hesitate one second. As a true Amazon, she jumps on her father’s impetuous young horse, Young Lollard, and undertakes a dangerous nocturnal journey to warn her father. The vigor, resoluteness, courage, in short the action that the sixteen year old northern girl demonstrates on this journey, during which she even stumbles upon and manages to escape from the plotting Klan raiders, gives her a masculine quality. One could argue that, in spite of the thoroughly northern education Lily received from her parents who were social ostracized in the South, this Yankee girl also manifests characteristics which Tourgée associates with the men of the South. Indeed, the fact that she is an exquisite horsewoman and that “a more easy, graceful, and daring rider it was hard to find, even in that region of unrivaled horsemen and horsewomen” (234), is an important indication of Lily’s masculine, Cavalier qualities. Horsemanship, in fact, was one of the key qualities
attributed to the Cavalier figure besides military prowess and a chivalric sense of honor (Taylor 318). Tourgée tries hard to give his female northern character a masculine air. Besides horse-riding, she has also “been trained to the use of arms, and handled both rifle and revolver, not only without fear, but with readiness and precision” (324). Furthermore, during her courageous journey through the dark North Carolina woods, the female rider literally takes the appearance of a man by tying up her long hair and hiding it under her hat. For all her rather masculine characteristics, however, Lily Servosse is still a female character. Consequently, just as the marriage between the northerner Colburne and the southern Belle Lillie Ravenel in De Forest’s novel is a metaphor for northern superiority, Lily’s relationship with Mel Gurney in A Fool’s Errand suggests northern weakness vis-a-vis the South. There are, however, a couple of significant differences between the intersectional romances in both novels. First of all, while Lillie Ravenel is frequently referred to as ‘girlish’ or even ‘childish’, Lily Servosse is described as a true woman. Because of the bravery she demonstrated on her hazardous journey, her father remarks that she “had grown to womanhood” (256). In other words, as opposed to the weak, simple and ridiculous Lillie Ravenel, Tourgée’s northern Lily is not a caricature, but a strong and mature young woman. Of course, the growth to womanhood of the northern girl is not as powerful an image as the growth to manhood of Colburne in Miss Ravenel’s Conversion. The most important difference is the underlying power relation between man and woman in the intersectional romance. While Lillie Ravenel is presented as a passive Belle who is conquered by the reinvigorated Yankee and who takes pleasure in her obedient role as a mother and a wife, Lily is not conquered by the southern Cavalier. What is more, while the romance between Lillie and Colburne depends on whether the Yankee will have the vigor to declare his love, it is Lily Servosse who states the conditions for a romance. Even though she is madly in love with Mel Gurney, she refuses to enter into a relationship with him until his father, who objects to his son marrying a Yankee, has given his consent. Thus, it is Lily and not the
southern Cavalier who ultimately pulls in strings. By portraying the northern Lily Servosse as an assertive woman and by adding a fragment of masculinity to her character, one can argue that, in spite of his criticism of the North’s lack of virility, Tourgée will not go so far as to depict his region as an utterly harmless and obedient woman.

Thanks to the ‘manly’ qualities of Lilly Servosse, the North retains a certain remnant of masculinity in A Fool’s Errand. The existence of such an element of manliness associated with the North is vital for Tourgée. Frustrated at his region inaptitude, it is the Radical Republican’s expectation that the nation will be dominated by the South in the years ahead. This pessimistic outlook derives from his belief that the southern people “are thoroughly united, and are instinctive, natural rulers. They are not troubled with scruples, nor do they waste their energies upon frivolous and immaterial issues. They are monarchical and kinglike in their characteristics” (342). The North, by contrast, “is disunited: a part will adhere to the South for the sake of power” (342). This makes Tourgée conclude that “just as before the civil war, the South will again dominate and control the nation” (342). However, despite his pessimism with regard to the near future, the Radical Republican still fosters the hoop that, on the long run, the North and its egalitarian values will prevail. Just like Abraham Lincoln in his House Divided speech, Tourgée is convinced that, because of the radical differences between both regions, either the southern or the northern ‘civilization’ will be adopted by the entire nation. As Tourgée’s protagonist declares, “the battle must be fought out. If there is to remain one nation on the territory we now occupy, it must be either a nation unified in sentiment and civilization, or the one civilization must dominate and control the other” (341). For the near future, Tourgée sees the South emerging as victors out of this battle of civilizations: “As it stands now, [the civilization] of the South is the most intense, vigorous, and aggressive” (341). However, as an ardent believer in the democratic values of his region, Tourgée believes that it will ultimately be the civilization of the North and not that of the born rulers of the South that will become dominant in America. In his view, the southern
intolerance, the lack of freedom of speech and opinion, and most of all their prejudices towards the blacks as inferior must and will eventually be substituted by the northern democratic and egalitarian spirit. Tourgée carefully expresses his hopeful expectation about the nation’s (northern) future on the long run. “I feel sure”, the Fool declares to his friend Dr. Enos Martin, “that when the Nation has smarted enough for its folly, it will find a way to undo the evil, whether the State-Rights Moloch stand in the way, or not” (347).In Tourgée’s view, this shift in mentality cannot be achieved overnight. As Dr. Garnet informs Colonel Servosse, this is a process that will take several generations:

You must remember, dear Colonel, that neither the nature, habits of thought, nor prejudices of men, are changed by war or its results. The institution of slavery is abolished; but the prejudice, intolerance, and bitterness which it fostered and nourished, are still alive, and will live until those who were raised beneath its glare have moldered back to dust. A new generation — perhaps many new generations — must arise before the North and the South can be one people, or the prejudices, resentments, and ideas of slavery, intensified by unsuccessful war, can be obliterated. (92)

The Radical Republican author incorporates also an example of his idea that the new generations of southerners can indeed be Northernized. Two young southern Cavaliers, Mel Gurney and John Burleson, are shown to be ‘converted’, as it were, to the northern perspective. That these southerners are young is significant, for in Tourgée’s view, the southern conservative mentality and beliefs are so ingrained in the minds of the older generations of southerners who have been fully formed by this culture, that it would be useless to try to convert them. Although Tourgée probably did not have the generation of Mel Gurney and John Burleson, men in their early twenties, in mind, their conversion seems to serve as a fictional illustration of Tourgée’s belief in the possibility of Northernization. John Burleson, a young member of the Ku Klux Klan, turns his back on the southern organization and thus initiates the demise of the Klan in Servosse’s district. More significant
is the conversion of Mel Gurney, the beloved of Comfort Servosse’s daughter. When the southern Cavalier is informed that Lily has returned North to “pursue certain studies for which she had developed a peculiar aptitude” (333), which again demonstrates her independence in contrast to the domestic Lillie Ravenel, Mel Gurney decides to disobey his father’s will and to travel North to find Lily. After having reached the unnamed northern city, the southerner decides to take up residence and study there. In the “great city that opened its myriad-paged book of life before him”, Mel Gurney “learned many a rare lesson which the insular exclusiveness of the South could never teach” (335-336). Thus, under influence of the education he receives in the North, he distances himself from his conservative southern beliefs and adopts more northern notions. This conversion added to the fact that Mel Gurney defies the will of his father to follow a northern girl, which is far from self-evident in the paternalistic society of the South, is a powerful hint incorporated by Tourgée that the people of the South can indeed abandon their traditional (racial) prejudices, habits and beliefs. This process, however, requires patience and efficient action, two crucial things the northern leaders lacked after the Civil War:

We tried to superimpose the civilization, the idea of the North, upon the South at a moment's warning. We presumed, that, by the suppression of rebellion, the southern white man had become identical with the Caucasian of the North in thought and sentiment; and that the slave, by emancipation, had become a saint and a Solomon at once. So we tried to build up communities there which should be identical in thought, sentiment, growth, and development, with those of the North. It was A Fool’s Errand. (340)

Despite the tone of bitterness and pessimism that characterizes A Fool’s Errand, the novel ends on a hopeful note. Indeed, one cannot fail but notice that the final chapters, dealing with the period after 1877, that is the official end of Reconstruction, radiate a kind of cautious optimism. Servosse is treated kindly by the same southern neighbors who used to despise him for being a carpetbagger. This shift in attitude, however, is mostly due to the
fact that the southerners know that Servosse has become politically harmless. Reconstruction has failed, and the democrats and the former Confederate leaders are once again in control. Therefore, it is no longer plausible that Servosse’s radical ideas of racial equality will be implemented. Nonetheless, one can argue that there is a genuine approximation between North and South. This possibility of conciliation is illustrated most clearly by the fraternization between the Radical Republican Servosse and the representative of the traditional South and former Klan member General Gurney. When Servosse, back at his plantation home in Warrington after a period of absence, is struck by yellow fever, Gurney volunteers to vigil over the sick northerner. Before Servosse dies, both sides admit that their opinions might have been slightly exaggerated and that they actually have a great respect for one another. As such, Tourgée’s Reconstruction novel somewhat unexpectedly ends on a more positive note, with an opening to reconciliation. However, the sentimentality traceable in these final chapters is in no way comparable to the more typical romances of reunion that emerged in the Gilded Age, with its tone of forgiveness and forgetfulness. To make sure that there is no mistaking his novel was written out of frustration and bitterness and not out of optimism and hope, Tourgée closes his novel with an unquestionably pessimistic image: an image of the tombstone of Conform Servosse depicting the sign of the fool and bearing the inscription “He followed the counsel of the Wise, And became a Fool thereby” (360). The meaning is obvious: the Reconstruction Plan devised by the Wise Men was destined to fail and Servosse/Tourgée was a fool for having tried to execute it. The reader is left the idea that Servosse is buried in southern soil, and with him his ideals.
Conclusion

In my discussion of John William De Forest’s Miss Ravenel’s Conversion from Secession to Loyalty and Albion Winegar Tourgée’s a Fool’s Errand. By One of the Fools, I have tried to examine the cultural images that the two northern novelists incorporated in their novels of their own region and of the ‘enemy’. Drawing on Nina Silber’s exploration of the importance of gender in the antebellum and post-bellum sectional debate, and on William Robert Taylor characterization of the representative types of North and South, the Yankee and the Cavalier, I have identified some conspicuous similarities, but most importantly, some striking differences between both writers. In their respective works, the former Union soldiers both exhibit a double attitude towards North and South.

With regard to the portrayal of their native region, the Yankee authors do not refrain from exposing what they consider the flaws of the northern character and society. In Miss Ravenel’s Conversion, De Forest ridicules the stiff conservatism of the Puritan New Englanders and reproaches them for being hypocritical. Moreover, their cold, emotionless attitude is negatively contrasted to the human warmth of the southern Ravenel family. However, the overall tone of De Forest when describing his northern compatriots is more uplifting and optimistic. De Forest’s representative Yankee, in fact, undergoes a transformation in terms of virility. Under the influence of his war experience, Mr. Colburne blossoms from a reserved, meek lawyer, into the resolute and purposeful Captain Colburne. In his Reconstruction novel, Albion Tourgée is far more scathing in his criticism of the North, especially those in power, who he reproaches cowardice and incompetence in handling the defeated South. In the end Tourgée, a Yankee in heart and soul, slightly attenuated his critique and creates an opening for the ultimate victory of the northern republican values of democracy and egalitarianism.

In their representation of the South, both authors likewise combine a critical view with a more respectful attitude, though again, important differences can be noted. In Miss
*Ravenel’s Conversion*, patriotism clearly outblazes his admiration for the romantic image of Dixie. While he praises the southern social graces and courage on the battlefield, he practically disassembles the Cavalier figure, represented by Colonel Carter, who is deprived of his characteristic masculinity and is literally put to rest on the battlefield. This transformation in opposite direction of the Cavalier and the Yankee in De Forest’s Civil War novel fits can be seen as an expression of the North’s feeling of masculine superiority after the war. The prevailing northern idea that “the manlier men had won the contest” is ultimately symbolized by the social conquest of the southern Belle Lillie Ravenel by the Yankee soldier (Silber 19). By contrast, in Tourgée’s characterization of the supposedly defeated South, what stands out is his admiration for their resilience and perseverance, as opposed to the passivity of his own region. Therefore, while De Forest in the 1860s and several northern novelists in the Gilded Age, who often had no real-life experience with the ‘defeated’ South, envisioned a reunion between the two warring regions with the Yankee on top, Tourgée reverses this in his eyes overly optimistic image. By reversing this plot device, that is by coupling a northern woman with a southern man, Tourgée anticipates a development in the reunion culture sketched by Nina Silber. As Silber writes, from the 1890s onwards, southern writers but also prominent northern novelists like Henry James in *The Bostonians* (1886) “reversed the standard formula of romantic conciliation and made southern men the heroes of [their] novels, the conquerors of the northern woman’s heart” (Silber 186). But, while most northern authors turned the romantic plot formula around primarily out of a new found veneration for the agricultural South, the chivalry and the masculinity of the southern gentleman, qualities they found lacking in the progressive northern society of the Gilded Age (Silber 186-187), Tourgée’s had a different motivation. The Radical Republican reversed the romantic roles of North and South out of a deep disappointment with what he saw as the lack of virility of his own region, and out of an admiration for the action and the domineering quality of the southern character. Because of
the southern people’s talent for ruling, Tourgée predicted that the nation would again be dominated by the South, and that consequently, the promise of black equality would not be fulfilled in the near future. Unfortunately, history proved him right. As historian Mary Susan Grant concludes her work on the American Civil War, “reunification was achieved at the cost of the new birth of freedom that Lincoln that envisaged for his nation” (226). And it would take until deep in the twentieth century before racial inequality in America, and especially in the segregated South came to an end.
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