Write a one page single space describing

A -The major thesis or position of the chapter

B -What evidence does the chapter offer to support the thesis?

2

"The Best Government on God's Footstool"

One of the questions often asked a Civil War historian is, "Why did the North fight?" Southern motives seem easier to understand. Confederates fought for independence, for their property and way of life, for their very survival as a nation. But what did Yankees fight for? Why did they persist through four years of the bloodiest conflict in American history, costing 360,000 northern lives—not to mention 260,000 southern lives and untold destruction of resources? Puzzling over this question in 1863, Confederate War Department clerk John Jones wrote in his diary: "Our men *must* prevail in combat, or lose their property, country, freedom, everything. . . . On the other hand the enemy, in yielding the contest, may retire into their own country, and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began."[1]

If that was true, why did the Yankees keep fighting? We can find much of the answer in Abraham Lincoln's notable speeches: the Gettysburg Address, his first and second inaugural addresses, the peroration of his message to Congress on December 1, 1862. But we can find even more of the answer in the wartime letters and diaries of the men who did the fighting. Confederates who said that they fought for the same goals as their forebears of 1776 would have been surprised by the intense conviction of northern soldiers that *they* were upholding the legacy of the American Revolution.

"We fight for the blessings bought by the blood and treasure of our Fathers," wrote an enlisted man from Missouri to his parents in 1861. "I will fight till I die if necessary for the liberties which you have so long enjoyed." A Michigan soldier told his younger brother that he fought against "Traitors who sought to tear down and break into fragments the glorious temple that our forefathers reared with blood and tears."[2] A New Jersey officer declared that "the man who doesn't give hearty support to our bleeding country in this day of our country's trial is not worthy to be a descendant of our forefathers. . . . We will be held responsible before God if we don't do our part in helping to transmit this boon of civil and religious liberty down to succeeding generations." An Illinois farm boy whose parents had opposed his enlistment asked them tartly: "Should We the youngest and brightest nation of all the earth bow to traters and forsake the graves of our Fathers?" He answered his own question: "No no never."[3]

The theme of parallel sacrifice with the patriots of 1776 punctuated the letters of many Union soldiers. An officer in the 101st Ohio wrote in December, 1862, that "our fathers in coldest winter, half clad marked the road they trod with crimson streams from their bleeding feet that we might enjoy the blessings of a free government." Likewise, "our business in being here [is] to lay down our lives if need be for our country's cause." Two weeks later he was killed in the battle of Stones River. A young Michigan private was also killed in action not long after he wrote a letter to his uncle describing the hardships of a soldier's life. But "did the revolutionary patriots in valley forge," he asked rhetorically, "complain [when] they had to march in the snow with there bare feet and to stand the cold twenty degrees below zero without blankets? . . . We will show our fathers and mothers wifes

sisters brothers and sweethearts that we are" worthy of that heritage.[4]

Some of those wives, however, told their soldier husbands that they had a greater responsibility to their present families than to the founding fathers. In response to such letters from wives, a good many Union soldiers wrote as did an Ohio lieutenant: "Our Fathers made this country, we, their children are to save it . . . and you should . . . experience a laudable pride in the part your [husband and brothers] are now taking to suppress the greatest rebellion the history of the world has ever witnessed. . . . Why denounce the war when the interest at stake is so vital? . . . Without Union & peace our freedom is worthless . . . our children would have no warrant of liberty. . . . [If] our Country be numbered among the things that were but are not, of what value will be house, family, and friends?" Another Ohio soldier, whose wife complained repeatedly of the burdens of raising three children while worrying about his fate, asked her to "bear your trouble with good cheer. . . . It only gives another trouble on my mind to know that you are so discontented. . . . If you esteem me with a true woman's love you will not ask me to disgrace myself by deserting the flag of our Union a flag that is as dear as life to me. . . . No it will never do, cheer up and . . . remember that thousands went forth and poured out their lifs blood in the Revolution to establish this government; and twould be a disgrace to the whole American people if she had not noble sons enough who had the spirit of seventy six in their hearts." Justifying to *his* wife a decision to stay in the army after more than a year's fighting instead of accepting a medical discharge, a thirty-three-year-old Minnesota sergeant, father of three children, wrote home from an army hospital where he was recovering from exhaustion: "My grandfather fought and risked his life to bequeath to his posterity . . . the glorious

Institutions" now threatened by "this infernal rebellion. . . . It is not for you and I, or us & our dear little ones, alone, that I was and am willing to risk the fortunes of the battlefield, but also for the sake of the country's millions who are to come after us."[5]

But why did these soldiers think that the "infernal rebellion" jeopardized the survival of the glorious republic? Why could they not, as Confederate War Department clerk John Jones suggested, merely return home to a northern nation and leave the South alone so that the two republics could live in peace as dual heirs of the Revolution? Because, said northern soldiers almost as if in echo of Abraham Lincoln, once admit that a state can secede at will, and republican government by majority rule would come to an end. The dis–United States would fragment into several petty, squabbling autocracies, proving the contention of European monarchists and reactionaries that this harebrained experiment in democracy could not last. Government of the people, by the people, for the people would perish from the earth. Many Union soldiers voiced with extraordinary passion the conviction that preservation of the *United* States as "the beacon light of liberty & freedom to the human race," in the words of a thirty-five-year-old Indiana sergeant, was indeed the last, best hope for the survival of republican liberties in the Western world.[6]

"I do feel that the liberty of the world is placed in our hands to defend," wrote a Massachusetts private to his wife in 1862, "and if we are overcome then farewell to freedom." If "traitors be allowed to overthrow and break asunder ties most sacred—costing our forefathers long years of blood and toil," agreed a Connecticut enlisted man in 1863, then "all the hope and confidence of the world in the capacity of men for self government will be lost . . . and perhaps be followed by a long night of tyranny."[7] In 1863 on the second anniversary of his enlistment, a thirty-three-year-old Ohio private

wrote in his diary that he had not expected the war to go on so long, but no matter how much longer it took it must be prosecuted "for the great principles of liberty and self government at stake, for should we fail, the onward march of Liberty in the Old World will be retarded at least a century, and Monarchs, Kings and Aristocrats will be more powerful against their subjects than ever." After Lee's surrender at Appomattox, a fifty-one-year-old New Jersey colonel who had fought the entire four years wrote to his wife that "we [can] return to our homes with the proud satisfaction that it has been our privilege to live and take part in the struggle that has decided for all time to come that Republics are not a failure."[8]

All of these quotations are from native-born soldiers, many of whose ancestors did fight in the Revolution. Yet one quarter of the white soldiers in the Union army were foreign born. They are proportionately underrepresented in my sample, and some of those whose letters I have read were not particularly ideological. Others were, however—especially on the theme of the Union as a beacon light of liberty for the oppressed in their homelands. In 1864 a forty-year-old Ohio corporal who had been born in England wrote to his wife after he had reenlisted for a second three-year hitch: "If I do get hurt I want you to remember that it will be not only for my Country and my Children but for Liberty all over the World that I risked my life, for if Liberty should be crushed here, what hope would there be for the cause of Human Progress anywhere else?"[9]

Irish-American soldiers drew some of the clearest parallels between their fight for the Union and the struggle for liberty in the old country. A thirty-three-year-old Irish-born carpenter, a private in the 28th Massachusetts of the famous Irish Brigade, angrily rebuked both his wife in Boston and his father-in-law back in Ireland for questioning his judgment in

fighting for the Black Republican Lincoln administration. "This is my country as much as the man who was born on the soil," he wrote in 1863. "I have as much interest in the maintenance of . . . the integrity of the nation as any other man. . . . This is the first test of a modern free government in the act of sustaining itself against internal enemys . . . if it fail then the hopes of milions fall and the designs and wishes of all tyrants will succeed the old cry will be sent forth from the aristocrats of europe that such is the common lot of all republics. . . . Irishmen and their decendents have . . . a stake in [this] nation. . . . America is Irlands refuge Irlands last hope destroy this republic and her hopes are blasted."[10]

Like Lincoln, many northern soldiers saw secession as a deadly challenge to the foundation of law and order on which all societies must rest if they are not to degenerate into anarchy. "The central idea of secession," said Lincoln, "is the essence of anarchy." Southern states had seceded in response to Lincoln's election by a constitutional majority in a fair vote held under rules accepted by all parties. To reject this outcome would destroy the basis of constitutional democracy, said Lincoln, and "fly to anarchy or to despotism."[11]

Echoes of these words can be found in many soldiers' letters. We are "fighting for the maintenance of law and order," they wrote, "to assert the strength and dignity of the government" against the threat of "dissolution, anarchy, and ruin."[12] A New York lieutenant and an Iowa colonel agreed that "constitutional liberty cannot survive the loss of unity in the government. . . . If [secession] can prosper under such auspices surely the downfall of civilization like that which devastated Rome has returned to dessolate the world."[13]

Officers from upper- or middle-class backgrounds were the most likely to voice this law-and-order theme. But a good many enlisted men from humbler circumstances did so as well. A twenty-three-year-old printer from Philadelphia, a

private in the 71st Pennsylvania wounded while helping to repel Pickett's assault at Gettysburg, wrote to his father that any sacrifice was worth the cost, "for what is home with all its endearments, if we have not a country freed from every vestige of the anarchy, and the tyrannical and blood thirsty despotism which threatens on every side to overwhelm us?" To an Ohio blacksmith and miller, the cause for which he fought as a private in the 70th Ohio was "the cause of the constitution and law," he wrote in 1863. "Admit the right of the seceding states to break up the Union at pleasure . . . and how long will it be before the new confederacies created by the first disruption shall be resolved into still smaller fragments and the continent become a vast theater of civil war, military license, anarchy and despotism? Better settle it at whatever cost and settle it forever."[14]

Like Johnny Reb, though, Billy Yank most often expressed what he fought for in words of simple patriotism. We "have gone forth to defend this Country in this her hour of peril," wrote a young Connecticut recruit who would lose his life in the contest. A Union corporal from Missouri declared that "No one loves wife or family more than I. Yet my country has claims upon me strong as that of home or family." The mother of a corporal in the 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry was probably not gratified by a letter from her son that listed his duties in the following order of priority: "first my God, second my country, third my mother. Oh my country, how my heart bleeds for your welfare. If this poor life of mine could save you, how willingly would I make the sacrifice."[15] This statement is saved from bathos by our knowledge that he did indeed sacrifice his life in one of the last battles of the war, at Dinwiddie Court House on March 31, 1865. A similar fate overtook a deputy sheriff from Minnesota; he was killed at Gettysburg a month after writing to a friend that he was prepared to give his life "for the purpose of crushing this

d——d rebellion and to support the best government on God's footstool." And a fifty-four-year-old farmer from upstate New York was killed in the battle of Plymouth not long after he had written his wife: "My country, glorious country, if we have only made it truly the land of the free . . . I count not my life dear unto me if only I can help that glorious cause along."[16]

Glorious. Sacrifice. Hearts bleeding for the welfare of the country. These are the words that Ernest Hemingway mocked in *A Farewell to Arms*. We would justly mock them if we heard them today. Even in the 1860s such phrases in a Fourth of July speech or at a recruiting rally might evoke a cynical guffaw. But these words occurred in letters to loved ones from men on the front lines who did give their lives. They must be taken seriously. I remained skeptical about this even after reading hundreds of such statements, both Union and Confederate. But I was finally converted when I encountered the letters of two Quaker brothers, farmers from New York State, whose ideological convictions overcame their pacifism and caused them to enlist, leaving behind a widowed mother. "If I die for the cause of the Unity entire of this government," wrote the older brother (age twenty-six) to her, "that is the way a man should die, for die he must, and a few years more or less don't make much difference. . . . A man in fighting for liberty . . . can realize that he died to save something better than life." Less than two months later he was killed at Gettysburg. The younger brother consoled their mother that "he is laid a sacrifice on the altar of Liberty . . . with his face toward the enemies of freedom." But "Oh, God! Thy price for freedom is a DEAR ONE!" Three months later the younger brother also died, in Libby prison after having been captured in a skirmish. Their words were not mawkish melodrama; they *meant* what they said.[17]

But the same questions that we asked about Confederate

soldiers must be asked here. How typical were these expressions of patriotic and ideological convictions? And how representative is the sample? The answer to the first question is the same as it was for Confederates. Of 562 Union soldiers whose letters or diaries I have read, 67 percent voiced simple but strong patriotic convictions and 40 percent went further, expressing ideological purposes such as liberty, democracy, majority rule, constitutional law and order, and survival of the Revolutionary legacy of republican government as the causes for which they fought. This compares with 66 and 40 percent in these two categories for Confederate soldiers—virtually identical with the Union percentages.

There was one difference between Yankees and Rebels, however. Among Confederates, 82 percent of the officers, compared with 52 percent of enlisted men, avowed patriotic motives; 52 percent of the officers but only 28 percent of the enlisted men went further and discoursed upon ideological goals. The difference between officers and enlisted men was smaller for Union soldiers: 78 percent of officers and 61 percent of enlisted men expressed patriotism; 49 and 36 percent, respectively, advanced various ideological themes, including opposition to slavery. Moreover, officers are less overrepresented in the Union sample than in the Confederate: 35 percent of the Union sample were officers for at least half of their service, compared with 47 percent of the Confederate sample.

What is the significance of this? Using army rank as a surrogate for class, it means that patriotic and ideological convictions were shared more evenly across class lines in the Union army than among Confederate soldiers. This interpretation is confirmed by other data in my samples. Among the Confederates, the highest-status groups—members of planter families and of slaveholding professional families—expressed ideological convictions at twice the rate of nonslaveholding soldiers. In the Union army the disparity between comparable

groups—professionals and high white-collar occupations on one hand and low white-collar and blue-collar workers on the other—was much less, only about 25 percent.

To summarize: In both the Union and Confederate samples, soldiers expressed about the same degree of patriotic and ideological convictions. But the larger disproportion of officers in the Confederate sample skews that percentage upward, and the higher degree of such convictions among enlisted men and lower-status groups in the Union sample compared with their Confederate counterparts means a greater democratization of ideological purpose among Union soldiers. What impact that difference had on morale and fighting effectiveness is hard to say. It may explain the dogged determination that sustained Union soldiers through four long years of fighting in enemy territory against a foe sustained by the more concrete motive of defending that territory. It also probably reflects the higher literacy rate, broader education, and greater degree of political awareness in the North than in the South.

But let us not overstate this point. For one thing, although my Union sample is somewhat more representative of the class spectrum of the army as a whole than the Confederate sample, it is still skewed toward officers and upper-strata occupations. Some 45 percent of the men in the Union sample had held professional or white-collar jobs in civilian life, compared with about 11 percent for the Union army as a whole. And only 3 percent of the sample were unskilled laborers, compared with 16 percent of all Union soldiers. The 7 or 8 percent of white Union soldiers who were illiterate are not represented in the sample, nor are the 70 percent or more of the black soldiers who could not read or write. In fact, only 2 of the 562 men in the sample were black, so it is impossible to say much about the ideological convictions of the 9 percent of Union soldiers who were black except to state

the truism that they were aware of fighting for the freedom of their race. The most important underrepresented category is foreign-born soldiers: only 8 percent of the northern soldiers in the sample were born abroad, compared with some 24 percent in the Union army as a whole. Particularly underrepresented are Irish and German Catholics, who constituted 11 or 12 percent of the army but only 2 percent of my sample. The actual proportion of immigrants in my sample may be slightly larger than this, for I do not have information on the nativity of everyone, and some of the unknowns may have been born abroad. Nevertheless, immigrants are clearly underrepresented, and those least enthusiastic about northern war aims—Irish and German Catholics—are the most underrepresented, despite my quotation earlier of an Irish soldier.

Finally, as in the Confederate sample, the draftees, substitutes, bounty men, soldiers who enlisted to escape the draft, and deserters are radically underrepresented. But in the Union army as in the Confederate, these individuals were the least likely to do much fighting, whereas the *they* who really *fought* are overrepresented in the sample. Again this is demonstrated by casualty figures: just over 5 percent of all Union soldiers and sailors were killed or mortally wounded in action, but 17 percent of the men in the sample suffered this fate. An ideologically committed Illinois sergeant who was later killed in action told his fiancée in 1863 that "the *best, truest,* and *bravest* of the nation" went to the front and got killed, while the "beats" did their best to avoid combat. "A 'beat,'" another Union soldier explained to his brother, "is one who plays sick, shirks duty . . . and is always missing in a fight. The beats of a regiment sometimes number one half."[18] A Missouri sergeant said that bounty men and substitutes were usually found among the beats, for "it is the caus that makes a man fight . . . and they have not much love for the union." A Massachusetts corporal was killed in action

not long after he wrote home: "Mother if all our army felt as I feel when I go into battle, the war would soon be over but I am sorry to say that we have got too many in the army that are not fighting for there country but for money and all they think of when they go into battle is how to . . . skulk behind the first stump . . . [and] keep out of danger."[19]

Most Yankees did not have the same consciousness of fighting to defend home and family that Confederates had. But this truism requires some qualification. Union soldiers from Confederate areas like East Tennessee and from border states plagued by guerrilla warfare rivaled the most bitter of Confederates in their feelings of hatred and desire for vengeance. East Tennessee Unionists driven from their homes to Kentucky, where they joined Union regiments, vowed to return and exact "eye for eye and toth for toth" in retaliation for reported Confederate atrocities. "*If I live, I will be revenged,*" wrote one East Tennesseean. "Yes I will draw their blood and mutilate their dead bodies and help to send their souls to hell."[20] An Ohio captain serving with West Virginia Unionists expressed awe at their animosity toward Rebels. "Hate rankled in their breasts," he wrote his wife. "Oh, how strong is this passion, this desire for revenge." The bushwhacking civil war in Missouri fired Unionists there with a desperate belief "that it is to be a war of extermination. . . . It is life or death. . . . Union men will have to Leave or Pitch in and Kill as Many secesh as they can before Thay Kill [us]."[21]

Robert E. Lee's invasions of Union states in 1862 and again in 1863 produced northern echoes of southern calls for defense of home and family. A Pennsylvania soldier from a farm near Gettysburg was convinced that he was "defending my Mother and Home and Country." A cavalry trooper from Maine in the Army of the Potomac wrote from Pennsylvania in July, 1863, that "here men will fight with twice the courage

and determination than they will in Virginia."[22] A semiliterate private in the 54th Pennsylvania, whose wife had rebuked him for thinking more of the Union than of her and the children, wrote to her with some asperity that "if the rebels would invade the north whad whoud become of you and my children . . . thay woud be perfeck slaves thay whoud be triede like a doge . . . and hour property wodden be worth a cent for thay wold take it to pay thair dates." A Michigan soldier told his wife in 1863 that he was fighting "to save our homes our Fathers & Mothers, Brothers & Sisters, Children & Wives from the curse of slavery & butchery. . . . I feel like fighting them to the last minute before I would give up & let them run over us & burn our homes & murder our friends as they would shurely do if they could get a chance."[23]

The notion of Confederate soldiers on a rampage in Michigan seems a bit farfetched. And indeed, few northern soldiers conjured up such a scenario. But this particular soldier had seen his brother killed in action almost by his side, which did not improve his opinion of Rebels. The desire to avenge comrades or relatives killed by enemy bullets burned as hotly in northern hearts as in southern. Another Wolverine, a sergeant in the 1st Michigan Cavalry, which became a crack regiment in George A. Custer's brigade, wrote to his mother in 1862 that two of his friends had been killed from ambush by guerrillas in the Shenandoah Valley. "Those that are left of us are determined to visit a terrible vengeance upon their murders. We are to take no prisoners after this." A private in the 10th Illinois whose best friend was mortally wounded at Fort Donelson wrote to his aunt after the fight: "I Went to help him up, he said oh Warden Care not for me, But go and revenge my deathe now is your time, it made me feel so desperate and strong as a lyon . . . that I fought with a more determined Will."[24] A New York lieutenant whose younger brother, a corporal in the same regiment, had been killed at

Cold Harbor, longed for a chance "to cut one of the Rebs into pieces [to] . . . pay them back." Three weeks later a Confederate counterattack on his sector of the Petersburg lines gave him his chance: "We let them get within 3 rods of us & then we jumped up & gave them a volley. O how we did mow them down. We thought of Cold Harbor & the Boys just went in as fast as they could."[25]

Some Union soldiers avowed a more abstract motive of revenge for Confederate atrocities elsewhere, even the Fort Pillow massacre. Whether or not Billy Yank liked black soldiers personally, he identified with the uniform they wore. A Wisconsin soldier with Sherman's army in Georgia wrote to his fiancée that when his regiment charged Confederate works at Resaca, "twenty-three of the rebs surrendered but the boys asked them if they remembered Fort Pillow and killed all of them. When there is no officer with us, we take no prisoners. . . . We want revenge for our brother soldiers and will have it. . . . Some of the [rebels] say they will fight as long as there is one of them left. We tell them that is what we want. We want to kill them all off and cleanse the country."[26]

As this letter suggests, punishment for treason and a determination to "clean out" the Rebels, whom they held responsible for starting the war, motivated many northern soldiers. "I want to fight the rest of my life if necessary," wrote an Illinois sergeant to his sister, "before we recognize them as anything but Rebels and traitors who must be humbled." "We have got to whip and partially exterminate the South," agreed a Massachusetts lieutenant in 1863. A Minnesota captain who had fought for three years would hear of no peace terms except "utter submission" of these "traitors to the government. . . . When they have submitted I would propose to hang the leaders and let the poor *dupes* of Soldiers go."[27]

More than a few Union soldiers drew a similar distinction between leaders and followers in the South, between an arrogant "aristocracy" and the deluded common people. They were familiar with the famous Senate speech by James Hammond of South Carolina in 1858 labeling the northern working class as mudsills. Many soldiers echoed the words of a farmer's son in the 93d Illinois, whose two brothers also fought in the war. All three of them itched for the "chance to try our *Enfields* on some of their villainous hides and let a little of that *high Blood* out of them, which I think will increase their respect for the *northern mud sills*."[28]

This feeling underlay the well-advertised resolve of Sherman's soldiers to take South Carolina apart. "No man ever looked forward to any event with more joy," wrote an Ohio soldier, "than did our boys to have a chance to meet the sons of the mother of traitors, 'South Carolina.'" After leaving a fiery trail through the state, another Ohio infantryman wrote to his brother that "her black ruins will stand as a warning of more terrible things to come" if the inhabitants persisted in treason. This soldier was particularly contemptuous of the self-styled Carolina aristocracy that "can talk of nothing but the purity of blood of themselves & their ancestors. . . . Their cant about aristocracy is perfectly sickening. . . . If you hear any condemning us for what we have done, tell them for me and for Sherman's Army, that '*we found here the authors of all the calamities that have befallen this nation . . . and that their punishment is light when compared with what justice demanded.*'"[29]

The theme of punishment for treason became more prevalent as the war dragged on. It was the visceral counterpart of retribution for invasion and destruction that increasingly motivated Confederate soldiers. This might seem to confirm Gerald Linderman's thesis, in his book *Embattled Courage*, that the experiences of Civil War soldiers hardened them, causing them to shed the ideals of those innocent days of 1861 and to suffer "a disillusionment more profound than historians have

acknowledged." Another historian of the Union army, influenced by Linderman, maintains that "whatever idealism that the soldiers brought with them into the army faded" by the latter years of the war.[30]

This conclusion seems to conform with common sense. How could men sustain a high level of idealistic commitment through the grim experiences of disease, death, exhaustion, and frustration as the war ground on year after year? The weary cynicism of Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe in World War II, the bitter disillusionment of the "grunt" in Vietnam, must have had their counterparts in the Civil War, especially during the lethal campaigns of 1864 and the wasting warfare of the trenches. Whose idealism could survive all that?

A good bit of evidence exists to support Linderman's contention that it did not survive. Desertion rates on both sides rose in the second half of the war. Many of the conscripts, substitutes, and bounty men who made up an increasing proportion of both armies from 1863 on were motivated marginally if at all by ideology or patriotism. The tone of soldiers' letters as well as their behavior did take on a more negative, cynical, callous, even brutal quality as time went on. Without doubt there was a decline in the romantic flag-waving rhetoric of the war's first year or two.

But the thousands of letters and scores of diaries I have read for the latter part of the war do not support the thesis of a decline in positive expressions of ideological and patriotic commitment among veterans who had enlisted in 1861 or 1862. Their belief in what they continued to call "the glorious Cause" was what kept many of them going. If anything, their searing experiences refined ideology into a purer, tougher product. This was particularly true for Union soldiers fighting far from home for seemingly more abstract goals than defense of home and hearth. Billy Yank needed an even stronger sense of ideological purpose to sustain him, es-

pecially during the summer of 1864, when war-weariness spread like a fog over the northern home front.

Many Yanks reached deep inside to find that purpose. "Amongst the survivors" in the 57th New York, wrote a lieutenant in 1864, "the excitement and enthusiasm of the early days has long since passed away, but the resolve still remains." An Ohio noncom wrote after three years of fighting: "I will confess it, I am very sick of war," but "the enthusiasm of the hour when we first enlisted, has greatly settled down to the firm resolve to do or die for our cause. . . . [Our] tough experiences have but served to endear our institutions more firmly in our minds."[31] After three years of service and as many wounds, Captain Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., of the 20th Massachusetts could still describe northern war aims as "the cause of the whole civilized world . . . the Christian crusade of the 19th century." A thirty-five-year-old officer from Pennsylvania wrote his wife that "sick as I am of this war and bloodshed, as much oh how much I want to be at home with my dear wife and children . . . every day I have a more religious feeling, that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind. . . . I [cannot] bear to think of what my children would be if we were to permit this Hellbegotten conspiracy to destroy this country."[32]

Writing from the trenches before Petersburg and Atlanta and from active fronts elsewhere during 1864, enlisted men echoed the theme of weariness but determination to see it through. "There is nothing pleasant" about soldiering, wrote a corporal from Ohio, but "I can endure its privations . . . for there is a *big Idea* which is at stake . . . the principles of Liberty, of Justice, and of the Righteousness which exalteth a Nation." A New York sergeant wrote to his fiancée that "I have had quite enough of this kind of life . . . yet the thought that we are doing what is right makes it easily borne."[33] A few months before he was killed at Fort Fisher, another

New York noncom wrote to his brother that "this is no time to carp at things which, compared with the success and reestablishment of the Republic, are insignificant." And in letters to his mother, an Irish-born sergeant in the 2d New Jersey Infantry declared that neither the "horrors of the battlefield [nor] the blind acts of unqualified generals" had "chilled my patriotism in the least." "We are still engaged in the same holy cause," he wrote on the third anniversary of his enlistment, "we have yet the same Country to fight for."[34]

Not all Union soldiers felt this strongly, of course. For every one who did, there was a bounty jumper or draftee or substitute or straggler or beat who cared more for money or for his own skin than he did for the cause. Such is always true of armies—but it seems to have been less true of Civil War armies. The iron resolve of genuinely dedicated Union veterans underlay the message conveyed by a dispatch from the American correspondent of the London *Daily News* to his paper in September, 1864. "I am astonished," he wrote, by "the extent and depth of the determination [of the northern people] to fight to the last. . . . They are in earnest in a way the like of which the world never saw before, silently, calmly, but desperately in earnest; and they will fight on, in my opinion, as long as they have men, muskets, powder . . . and would fight on, though the grass were growing in Wall Street."[35]

This was chilling news to southerners who had counted on a waning of the northern will to fight. Those southerners might have experienced an even colder chill could they have read the letters of northern soldiers confirming the observation of the *Daily News* correspondent. "*We must succeed*," wrote an intensely Unionist Missouri officer to his wife in August, 1864. "If not this year, why then the next, or the next. And if it takes ten years, why then ten years it must be, for we never can give up, and have a Country and Government left." A New York lieutenant wrote from the Petersburg

trenches, also in August, 1864, that "I would rather stay out here a lifetime (much as I dislike it) than consent to a division of our country."[36] Another New York officer thought it better to "carry on this war twenty years longer than to yield one iota of our rights"—although he did not make it that long, for he was killed three months after he wrote these words. A semiliterate farmer in the 66th Indiana admitted to his brother in 1864 that "I am tierd of ware . . . but not Discuraged I am moer Deturmin to Day than I ever was . . . I don't want to see the ware Stop until the . . . Stars and Strips waves over Every Precinct in America."[37]

Not only patriotism but also the idealism of 1861 persisted among many veterans, including a Pennsylvania private who wrote to his wife from a hospital after a couple of hundred miles of marching up and down the Shenandoah Valley in 1864, the last twenty-five of them in bare feet. He was ready to keep this up for years, he told her, for "I cannot believe Providence intends to destroy this Nation, this great asylum for the oppressed of all other nations and build a slave Oligarchy on the ruins thereof." A Kansas lieutenant who had spent more than a year in prison after capture at Chickamauga longed for release but, he wrote his fiancée, nevertheless did not want the war to end short of unconditional victory, for otherwise "the hope of the freedom of Nations and Millions in Europe and elsewhere [will be] driven back and obscured for ages." An Iowa officer who had risen from the ranks during three years of service while his father and younger sister had died and his brother was missing in action after the battle of Atlanta wrote to his distraught mother in September, 1864, that he could not resign his commission and come home while the war's outcome remained in doubt. "Thank God," he counseled her, "that you have children that will support the Government that *your* Father supported in the Revolution."[38]

they could not merely retire into their own country," as Confederate clerk John Jones expected them to do. But for some soldiers there was more yet that they fought for. A Massachusetts private named Emerson, who had interrupted his studies at Williams College to enlist and was wounded at Fredericksburg and again at Chancellorsville, wrote to his missionary parents in Hawaii from a hospital bed after he had been struck down a third time, by typhoid, that he was anxious to get back to the regiment to help "the holy cause for which I am fighting. . . . I say, better let us all *die* fighting for *union* and *liberty*, than to yield one inch to these 'rebel slave mongers,' as Charles Sumner justly calls them." And in 1864 an Ohio lieutenant, a carpenter by trade, wrote to his ten-year-old son complimenting him on a neatly written letter to the daddy he had scarcely seen during the past three years. "It tells me that while I am absent from home, fighting the battels of our country, trying to restore law and order, to our once peaceful & prosperous nation, and endeavoring to secure for each and every American citizen of every race, the rights garenteed to us in the Declaration of Independence . . . I have children growing up that will be worthy of the rights that I trust will be left for them."[39]

These soldiers were white, but they professed to fight for the freedom of another race as well as of their own. They were not typical of Union soldiers—but neither were they uncommon. The issue of slavery lay at the heart of what many soldiers on both sides thought they were fighting for. But it was not a simple or clear-cut issue, and for one side it threatened for a time to divide more than to unite them. The next chapter will analyze the soldiers' perceptions of the slavery issue.