

10. Alexander Gardner, *Washington Navy Yard, D.C., Lewis Payne [Lewis Powell], in Sweater, Seated and Manacled*, 1865, from wet-plate collodion negative
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

photography that is saturated with death. Contemplating the striking portrait of a young prisoner condemned to death, Barthes states, “I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.... The photograph tells me death in the future.” “Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”⁵⁶

Barthes’s thoughts on the “catastrophe” of photography are inspired by a Civil War photograph made by Alexander Gardner, but surprisingly not one of his grisly battle-field scenes. Instead, it is a portrait of Lewis Powell (also known as Lewis Payne), participant in the plot to assassinate President Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson, and Secretary of State William H. Seward (fig. 10).⁵⁷ The man condemned for conspiracy and attempted murder hovers briefly on the threshold between life and death, and it is the certainty of his impending death that alarms Barthes, allowing him to see in the photograph an extreme or heightened version of what is also the case for every photographic portrait—the photograph will outlive its subject, and viewers will look back, like Barthes, and understand that “he is dead and he is going to die.”

For Barthes, all photographic subjects approach death, but perhaps this photograph uniquely tells Barthes death in the future because it also evokes so much death in the past. The Civil War haunts Gardner’s photograph of Powell, and as one looks at the image of Powell, it is hard not to recall Gardner’s photographs of all the bodies left dead after the battle of Antietam.

Mann’s photographs of Antietam are also about death and photography. In their emptiness and opacity they point to the photograph’s limits and absences, but also to its substance. Mann’s vacant images evoke the bodies that populate earlier photographs of these same battlefields, scenes that even at the time marked the belatedness of photographers to the events of war. But as Mann’s Antietam photographs seem devoid of subjects, they are unusually marked by the photographer herself. Mann highlights her presence almost obsessively in the images,



11. Sally Mann, *Untitled 26 (Starry Night, Antietam)*, 2001, silver gelatin print from wet-plate collodion negative
Courtesy Sally Mann

in the traces of stained fingers, in the haphazard application of collodion, in scratches and smudges, and the smoky light leaks of ill-fitting lenses—in the matter of photography itself. Such blemishes draw attention to the surface of the photographic plate, to the chemical and material elements of the photograph, and to the photographer’s hand in making it. Mann refuses to disappear from her images, and her presence pulls death into life, reinforcing the collapsed time of the photograph and its perennial oscillation (fig. 11).⁵⁸

Mann’s irregular images, consistently imprinted with her touch, recall Barthes’s

musings on the tactile nature of the photograph. Barthes famously proposed that photographed subjects touch their viewers with an uncanny caress: “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here.”⁵⁹ The only body photographed in Mann’s Antietam images is her own. She reinserts the photographer back into the dynamic from which Barthes would remove her, announcing her presence as mediator of time and history and memory. Mann leaves residues of her own flesh in the photographs, and in this way she gestures toward her own

6. Wilbur H. Burnham, Robert E. Lee window, 1953, stained glass, Washington National Cathedral, detail of Lee in academic regalia, as president of Washington University (now Washington and Lee University)

Washington National Cathedral; photograph Ken Cobb

7. Wilbur H. Burnham, Stonewall Jackson window, 1953, stained glass, Washington National Cathedral, detail of Jackson as “the warrior crossing the river,” with an inscription from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*

Washington National Cathedral; photograph Ken Cobb

8. Wilbur H. Burnham, Robert E. Lee window, 1953, stained glass, Washington National Cathedral, detail of Lee and Jackson at Chancellorsville

Washington National Cathedral; photograph Ken Cobb

Iconography and Rhetoric

According to Bashinsky, it was stained-glass designer Wilbur Herbert Burnham (1887–1974) who devised the iconography of the bays, her only input being in the depiction of “Jackson...in prayer...forecasting his last words: ‘Let us pass over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.’”⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is evident from existing correspondence that G. Gardner Monks, the canon of the cathedral, who sat on the building committee, in consultation with Philip H. Frohman (1887–1972), the architect of the cathedral, made very specific recommendations that Lee be depicted in academic regalia because he “so successfully devoted the closing years of his life [to] the healing of the breach between North and South and the spiritual no less than the physical and mental rebuilding of the South following the ravages of the war” (fig. 6). Monks also expressed his approval of depicting Jackson symbolically in medieval armor as “the warrior crossing the river” although he recognized that

“some have spoken of it a little irreverently as the apotheosis of Jackson” (fig. 7). He further noted that he preferred to Jackson’s dying words a passage from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* that Burnham had proposed: “So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him.”⁴⁸ The correspondence also shows that Monks’s lengthy critical response regarding iconographic elements forced a reconsideration of many details, as well as the sequencing of the incidents, much to Burnham’s discontent.⁴⁹

The particulars proved most contentious, and although Bashinsky protested the “failure to represent Lee as the Commander of the Confederate Army,” the scene was never included.⁵⁰ As realized, the iconography only minimally references Lee’s service to the Confederacy, although in the accompanying inscription on the wall below the windows, he is recognized as “leader of men and General-chief of the armies of the Confederate States.” Pictorially, his service in the Civil War is explicitly identified on the top of the left window, where he is shown along



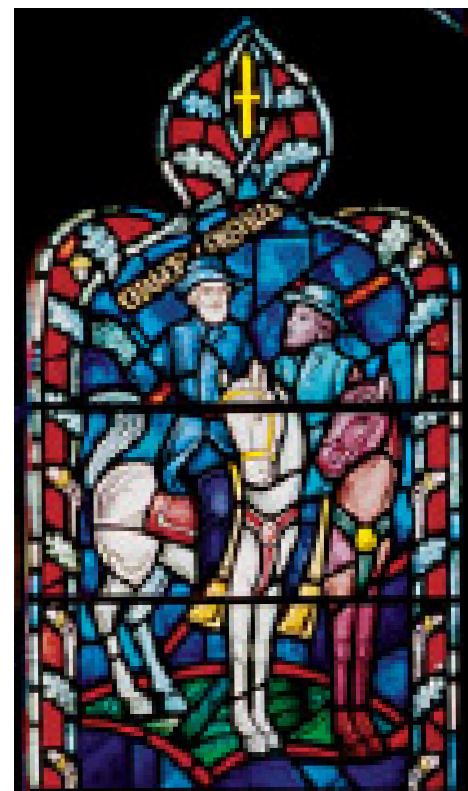
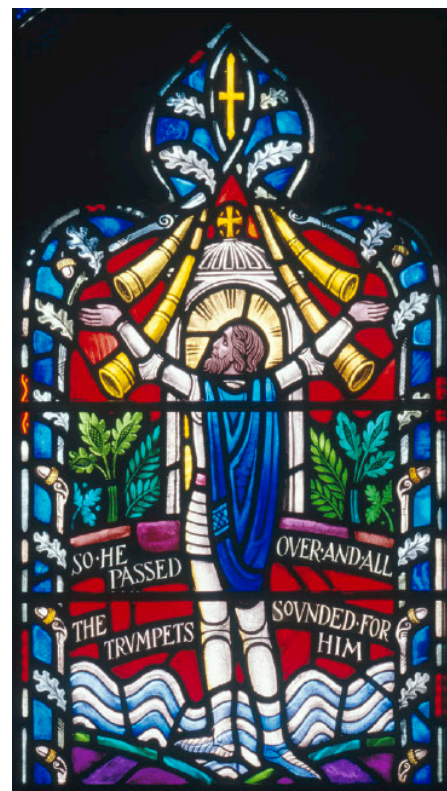
9. Frederick Read, illustration from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan (New York, 1898), 26

with Jackson at Chancellorsville (fig. 8), while in the bottom portion, the design honors his service as commandant at West Point (see fig. 1). In the right window, emphasis is placed on his civic duties as engineer (below) and as president of Washington University (above; see fig. 6), which is depicted in the background, accompanied by the inscription “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,” from Luke 2:29. Similarly, Jackson is shown instructing cadets at Virginia Military Institute in the lower left and reading the Bible in camp on the upper portion of the left window, whereas on the lower right, attention is given to his activities in the Mexican-American War (see fig. 2). The panel culminates in the upper right with Jackson in armor standing opposite a verdant landscape, trumpets blaring, with the inscription from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (see fig. 7).

Hagiographic references are all too prominent in the windows’ iconography. Lee’s static frontal attitude and long academic robes underscore his piety and nobility as a devoted Christian man; in a peaceful stance he invites all to come within his embrace. The inclusion of the Good Samaritan on the upper left portion of this window emphasizes poignantly the benevolence of Lee, who concentrated on preparing his students for civilian life and on healing the persistent divisions in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Similarly, Jackson in full armor, directly recalling Christian and Hopeful crossing the river in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, evokes one of the most popular narratives in midcentury America (fig. 9).⁵¹ The notion of Confederate soldiers and their leaders as Christian soldiers emerged in the immediate post-Civil War era and was codified in the writings of the theologian Robert Lewis Dabney (1820–1898), who recast the Confederate fallen in the guise of Christian martyrs, thus elevating their sacrifice above the support of partisan politics to the service of Christian ideals. Indeed, Dabney, in an 1861 speech to Confederate soldiers in Jackson’s presence, used the sacrificial death of Saint Stephen as a paradigm of a moral death in Christ and its potential for redemption; in addition, he asked his audience to associate the martyrdom of Saint Stephen with the description of Christian and Hopeful crossing the river as the path for the righteous sacrifice. Describing as martyrs those who had sacrificed their lives during the Civil War in both North and South was not uncommon, but Dabney fashioned Jackson as the moral martyr whose courage and Christian faith were the guiding principles of his life.⁵²

The iconography of Jackson at the National Cathedral accentuates the significance of its source. Christian symbols abound: as Jackson in armor crosses the River of Death, evidence of his deep faith, he faces an altar surmounted by the cross and crowned with trumpets. Burnham included in the tracery of the arches above both the Lee and the Jackson windows depictions



1. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, sculptor, and Charles McKim, architect, Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, Boston, 1881–1897, bronze

Library of Congress, Carol M. Highsmith "This is America!" Collection; photograph Carol M. Highsmith



2. Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, 1863

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



The couple spent less than a month together at her parents' home in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts before the 54th Regiment left Boston on May 28, 1863. They never saw each other again.⁶

The regiment's embarkation from Boston drew curious crowds. Some were there in support, while others saw the event as a quirk, or even a mistake.⁷ Shaw had drilled his men hard to make a good impression as they marched through the streets of the city. As the progression continued past the state house, Shaw halted briefly at the sight of his wife and parents on a balcony and raised his sword to his lips. Sent to the Carolinas, the regiment saw small skirmishes until July 1863, when its moment came.

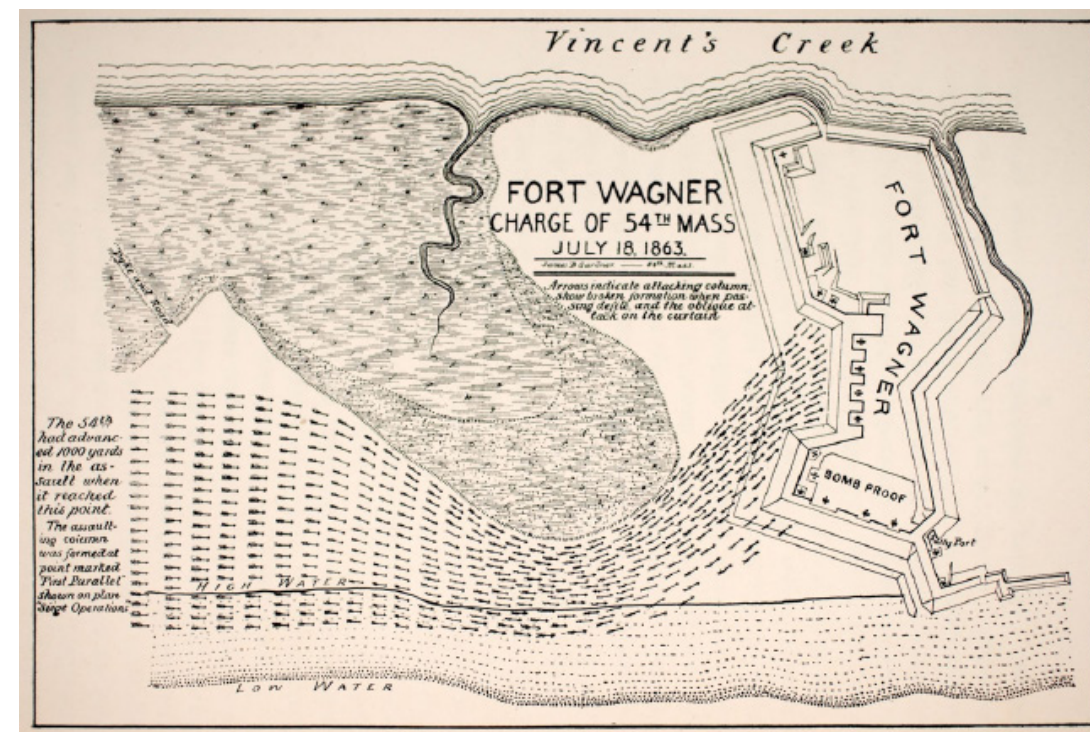
The Second Battle of Fort Wagner

In that month, the 54th Massachusetts joined a massive Union buildup that sought to take Charleston Harbor by destroying the powerful fortifications at Fort Sumter and the



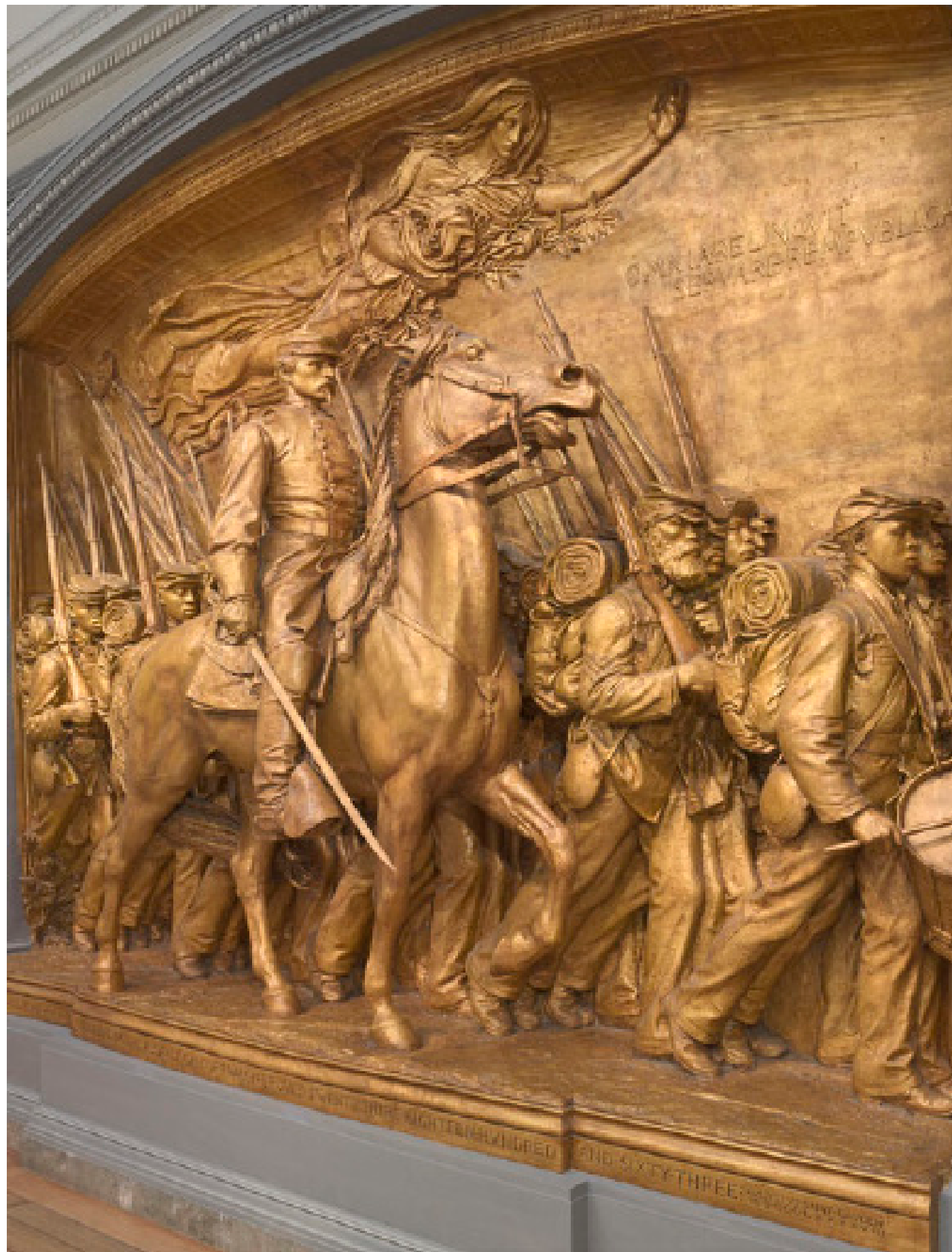
3. Interior of Fort Wagner, 1865
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

4. *The Charge of the Massachusetts 54th Regiment at Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863*, from Luis F. Emilio, *History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863–1865* (Boston, 1894)



island batteries on Morris, James, and other coastal islands. The focus was on Morris Island's Fort Wagner (called Battery Wagner in the South), an earthen-walled fortification surrounded by water, with swamps to the west and sand and beach to the east (fig. 3).⁸ A moatlike trench of seawater protected the fort, and sharpened stakes set in and out of the water afforded an additional obstacle to advancing troops. There could be no direct assault; instead, attackers had to approach at an angle (fig. 4). Inside, a massive pile of sandbags formed a "bombproof" that held most of the defenders.

Originally, the Union intended to take Charleston Harbor with the infantry pushing into Fort Wagner after a massive bombardment from the ships at sea. This plan was tried once and failed.⁹ The second battle of Fort Wagner came a week later, on July 18, 1863, with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment leading the charge. This was the moment of destiny for Shaw and his men. As they prepared for battle, they all knew that this was their time. Shaw declared that he would lead the charge. Uncharacteristically, he relaxed enough to walk among the men, speaking freely, chatting amicably, sharing



Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Robert Gould Shaw Memorial (detail), 1900, patinated plaster
 U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, New Hampshire

“Is war so predominant a topic in our national life and ambition that the ‘man on horseback’ shall confront our vision at every conspicuous street-corner?” asked Swedenborgian minister Frank Sewall shortly after the 1896 commissioning of an equestrian monument to General William Tecumseh Sherman for Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. “I am convinced,” he added, “that no one of our great patriotic generals would say that this was the kind of patriotism for which he gave his life.” Sewall’s frustration marked the extent to which a proliferation of war memorials had not only reflected but also deepened the militarization of American culture during the previous thirty years, a process that would continue into the twentieth century. The transformation reshaped the vertical and horizontal planes of the nation’s capital. The Washington Monument, completed by the Army Corps of Engineers in December 1884 and dedicated in February 1885, abandoned antebellum admirers’ emphasis on the surrender of military authority as the Revolutionary leader’s finest moment and instead asserted dominion over the countryside from a commanding height. The Senate Park Commission plan of 1901 swept away a picturesque Mall grounded in individual contemplation of nature and imposed an aggressively rectilinear formalism. Military order defined public space. At the dedication of the Sherman Monument in 1903, former Union general Daniel Sickles proudly declared that “no visitor to Washington need be told that we are a martial people.”¹

A few important war memorials have resisted this vision of the polity. The Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial have partly offset the militarization of

the Mall, although the ramifications of both landmarks range widely. The World War I monument in Orange, Massachusetts, provided such a rallying point for the local pacifist movement that the small town sought to serve as the headquarters for the United Nations. Trench veteran Paul Philippe Cret’s Eternal Light Peace Memorial, dedicated at Gettysburg in 1938, linked the American battlefield park to contemporary invocations of the permanent flame at the French tomb of the unknown *poilu* as a symbol of left-wing vigilance against war-mongering.²

The monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, dedicated on Boston Common in May 1897, stands at the forefront of peaceable war memorials. Although eventually publicized by the movie *Glory* (1989), the work originated in a proposal by a statesman who once declared that “all ‘glory,’ won in bloody strife among God’s children, must be fugitive, evanescent, unreal—unstable as water, worthless as ashes.”³ Launched by a leading voice of the mid-nineteenth-century peace movement, the undertaking intermingled with parallel commemorations that explored alternatives to a military monument. The design gradually developed by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, within the classicizing architectural frame conceived by Charles McKim, presented a thoughtful counterpoint to the tendency to treat soldiering as the highest expression of citizenship. Sponsors of the project included prime critics of the imperialism that produced the Spanish-American War, and the dedication orator was the most prominent antiwar philosopher in American history. In the decades after the unveiling, artists deepened this resonance through poetry, photography, and



P. S. Duval and Son, *Come and Join Us Brothers* (Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments, Philadelphia, c. 1863), lithograph
 William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan

August 10, 1863. It has been two weeks since the 54th Massachusetts Regiment made its fateful assault on Fort Wagner, near Charleston, South Carolina. Frederick Douglass was in Washington, DC, meeting for the first time with President Abraham Lincoln. Two of Douglass’s sons had enlisted in the 54th Regiment and survived the battle; one of them, Louis, wrote a vivid letter to his father describing his experience. But Douglass was not on a personal mission that day. He wanted to talk to Lincoln about the mistreatment of black prisoners by their Confederate captors and what he thought the president should do about it. In a way, however, the substance of their conversation was less interesting than the mere fact that it took place. The president of the United States was about to meet with the nation’s most prominent African American, one of the foremost radical abolitionists of his day. As important as the issue of black prisoners was to Douglass, he could also appreciate the symbolic importance of his meeting with Lincoln. “I have been down there to see the President,” he told a gathering of fellow abolitionists in Philadelphia a few months later, “and as you were not there, perhaps you may like to know how the President of the United States received a black man at the White House. I will tell you how he received me,” Douglass went on, “just as you have seen one gentleman receive another.”

I tell you I felt big there! [Laughter.] Let me tell you how I got to him; because everybody can’t get to him. He has to be a little guarded in admitting spectators. . . . The stairway was crowded with applicants. . . . They were white; and as I was the only dark spot among them, I

expected to have to wait at least half a day; I had heard of men waiting a week; but in two minutes after I sent in my card, the messenger came out, and respectfully invited “Mr. Douglass” in. I could hear, in the eager multitude outside, as they saw me pressing and elbowing my way through, the remark, “Yes, damn it, I knew they would let the n—r through,” in a kind of despairing voice—a Peace Democrat, I suppose. [Laughter.] When I went in, the President was sitting in his usual position, I was told, with his feet in different parts of the room, taking it easy. [Laughter] . . . As I came in and approached him, the President began to rise, [laughter,] and he continued rising until he stood over me [laughter]; and, reaching out his hand, he said, “Mr. Douglass, I know you; I have read about you, and Mr. Seward has told me about you”; putting me quite at ease at once.¹

Two years earlier, Douglass had been among the first to demand that federal authorities lift the ban on blacks serving in the Union army. Slavery was the “stomach of the rebellion,” he had explained. “Strike here,” he added, “cut off the connection between the fighting master and the working slave, and you at once put an end to this rebellion.” One sure way to break that “connection,” Douglass believed, was by enlisting free blacks and emancipated slaves in the Union army. “Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service and formed in a liberating army,” Douglass urged a month after the attack on Fort Sumter. After all, Douglass pointed out, the slaveholders had “not hesitated” to put black slaves to work. “They have had no scruples against employing the Negroes to exterminate freedom, and in overturning the Government.” Why, then, did the government hesitate to employ that same force to protect freedom and preserve the Union? For the federal government