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**“We Do Not Believe Him to be Sick... but Completely Worthless:”
Victorian Character, Self-Mastery, and Pension Outcomes for Disabled Union
Veterans**

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History Honors Thesis

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Introduction:

Private Murty Brennan received gunshot wounds to his left foot, left hip, and left arm along with another graze on his forehead at the siege of Petersburg, a long struggle that lasted nearly a year during 1864 and 1865. Clearly disabled due to his war injuries, it must have surprised Brennan that the government denied his pension because he did not have “the general appearance of a man of good habits” and was “‘broken’ for his age no doubt due to his occupation & habits-not disabled by wounds or injuries.”¹ Later, when surgeons eventually determined Brennan deserved a minimal pension, Pension Bureau referee N.F. [no other name] Graham rejected the ruling without ever meeting the private. Graham clearly based his decision on the initial examination’s conclusions saying, “It is my opinion that the claimant is not disabled in any degree.”²

As Brennan’s story suggests, the battle for Civil War veterans did not end at Appomattox with the surrender of General Lee in 1865. Hundreds of thousands of veterans, like Pvt. Brennan, felt they had earned the right to aid when returning to civilian life, calling for pensions for their service. Pensions for disabled veterans were not a new concept, but they were distributed on a significantly smaller scale for the American Revolution, War of 1812, and the Mexican American War.³ It was only reasonable that men fighting for a purpose as great as the preservation of the Union expected assistance.

¹ Sarah Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue: Disability in the Civil War North* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2019), 106.

² Ibid. I was unable to locate Graham’s full name, so I refer to him how Handley-Cousins did in describing Private Murty’s case.

³ For an overview of these conflicts and their pension payments, see William Glasson’s *Federal Military Pensions in the United States*, part 1, pages 9-108. William Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions*, (United States: Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1918).

Congress passed the first set of Civil War pension laws in 1862. Along with various amendments through the 1890s, this conglomeration became known as the general law system. However, it left the administration of payments to the U.S. Pension Bureau. The Pension Bureau consisted of a single commissioner, who was appointed by the President, along with its own medical examiners. The Commissioner created and distributed standards for its medical examiners and referees to follow as well as regularly reported to the Secretary of the Interior in his *Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Pensions to the Secretary of the Interior*.⁴ At its peak, the Pension Bureau employed more than 1,700 clerks, referees, and examiners.⁵

Through its administration of pensions, the Pension Bureau held Union veterans to ideals of Victorian manhood and character.⁶ Those the Bureau rejected were deemed unworthy of help. Soldiers with physical disabilities, such as Pvt. Brennan, who failed to lead ideal lives, according to Victorian standards incorporated in the Pension Bureau's rulings, could be, should be, and (often) would be rejected no matter how clear their war injury.⁷ Veterans with psychological/mental trauma (hereafter called trauma) had even greater difficulty securing pensions. Since science and society lacked the modern knowledge we have today on the psychological effects of war, Bureau evaluators mistook disturbed veterans' coping mechanisms,

⁴ For the most part commissioners looked to strike a balance of both the Pension Bureau's and Veterans' interests. An exception to this is Corporal James Tanner, who was appointed commissioner and helped transform pension law. He is briefly mentioned in chapter two. For a more detailed account of his life, see James Alan Marten, *America's Corporal James Tanner in War and Peace* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2014).

⁵ Larry Logue and Peter Blanck, "More Money, More Problems: The Pension Bureau," Clara Barton Museum, December 28, 2017, <https://www.clarabartonmuseum.org/pension/>.

⁶ I am defining Victorian standards in a narrower and simpler window than Americanists traditionally would. I use the term to describe the rise of purity reform through education that gained momentum in the late 1850s and the wave of temperance movements that developed for a variety of vices. I acknowledge that the term "Victorian" is a vastly more complex term, but the more specific definition is the best way to present the argument in this thesis.

⁷ My work focuses on the interaction between Victorian norms, veterans, and the Pension Bureau. Peter M. Blanck examines the influence of a soldier's particular disability on pension outcomes. See his work "Civil War Pensions and Disability," which I briefly reference later in chapter 3. Peter M. Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," *Ohio State Law Journal* 62, no. 109 (2001).

such as heavy use of alcohol, as signs of negative character instead of illness. These factors, along with the Bureau looking to reduce costs at every opportunity, left countless veterans having their claim rejected.

There were a multitude of amendments and changes to the laws from their start in 1862 to its final form as a civil service pension in 1890.⁸ These decades in between are where the focus of this paper rests. What developed, according to scholar Theda Skocpol, is America's first social security system.⁹ The evolution of pension law represents the struggle of disabled veterans at a time when physical strength and economic independence were the determinants of a man's social status. Early general law payments varied depending on the extent to which a veteran's war injury prevented him from earning wages, and as time went on, veterans fought for increased eligibility as soldiers struggled with their mangled bodies. This expansion in eligibility, and the Bureau's desire to maintain control over the system, created a battle between soldiers and their government lasting fifty years after the last shots rang.

Injured soldiers returned with new bodies and had to navigate a world where physically fit bodies and independence were the pinnacle of manhood. This paper examines soldiers' experiences within the pension system and emphasizes the role that Victorian manhood as well as other social norms played in shaping the Pension Bureau's policies. It also showcases, in line with growing literature on the topic, that views on disability are constructed not by the people

⁸ While I do mention widows when describing a veteran's case, I do so to highlight the standards of the Pension Bureau. A widow's pension eligibility under the general law started once a soldier died from an injury or disease contracted during the war. For a quick overview of this, see William Glasson's "The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain," 209-210. William Glasson, "The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 19 (1902), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1009892>.

⁹ Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1992), 102-103.

with disabilities themselves, but by the ways the rest of society values their limitations.¹⁰

Additionally, I hope the piece can be a valuable contribution to the history of veterans' affairs development in the United States.

I rely on a variety of sources in this work, but, with the outbreak of COVID-19 at the time of writing, my primary sources are limited to those digitized or published in other secondary sources. This is especially of note for all the pension cases I reference as they all come from a variety of books and journal articles. My secondary sources range from modern works of disability scholarship from the post-war era to classics on Victorian America.

This paper is organized to best highlight the influence of Victorian America on the pension system. Chapter one focuses on the roots of Victorian culture to provide a foundation for understanding the aggressive standards established by Pension Bureau examiners. It also provides important context for the third chapter of the piece, by discussing how desertion, drug abuse, masturbation and alcoholism became recognized/viewed as symptoms of insanity in addition to already being recognized as poor habits. Chapter two traces the changes to pension laws and eligibility requirements to understand the complex dynamic between veterans with physical wounds, the law, and pension distribution in creating social standards for soldiers. It also includes an exploration of African American experiences within the pension system. Lastly, chapter three explores the struggle of veterans with war trauma in general and those seeking

¹⁰ This is the social model of disability, instead of the medical model seen in older work regarding disability. With this perspective, disability is seen as an interaction with the social forces of the time a historian is examining as society, not the diagnoses or condition is what disables an individual, Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015082696892>, 3.

pensions. It also briefly discusses the development of asylums and so-called feeble-mindedness in nineteenth century America.¹¹

The Civil War thrust disability into the mainstream of American conversations. America's deadliest war did not end for those who managed to survive. They had to navigate a hostile social environment while struggling to take care of themselves and those they care about. Instead of being treated as heroes, veterans were going to be held to the most demanding standards of Victorian character.

¹¹ I focus solely on Union soldiers because Confederate veterans were not eligible for federal pensions. Southern states set up pension systems for their soldiers, but they offered significantly lower rates than Union pensions. For a quick comparison, see Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Mothers and Soldiers*, 139-143. It is also worth clarifying that Union veterans who lived in or moved to the South were still able to receive a pension.

Chapter 1: Beginnings of the General Law and Pension Bureau Standards of Character

Introduction:

Proof of an injury suffered from the war was not the only thing veterans needed to show to be eligible for a pension. The fifth requirement in Pension Bureau Commissioner Joseph Baker's "Instructions and Forms for Invalid Pensions" states, "The habits of the applicant, and his occupation, since he left the service, must be shown by at least two credible witnesses."¹² Beyond the willingness to work, Bureau officials wanted insight on the character of the veteran in question. This eventually made it into the words of the law, as veterans with "vicious habits" were denied assistance. The Pension Bureau looked to award pensions to veterans who proved themselves worthy of payments. Victorian culture, and notions of manhood and disability, are at the roots how the Bureau developed its standards for character, asking veterans to fight struggles to reclaim their manhood.

Victorian Culture and Manhood:

Victorian culture in America was obsessed with social competition and regulation. Strict notions of morality developed to create a purer society. Beyond this, Victorian Era scholar Daniel Walker Howe writes in his article, "American Victorianism as Culture," that "[e]ven more than inter-personal competition, however, the Victorians valued what has been called 'intra-personal competition,' stressing mastery over the 'bad passions' within oneself."¹³ In combination with this belief in self-mastery, many Victorian reformers looked to bring back traditional Protestant values. Ridding society of sinful habits were responses to attacks on creationism, and thus religion, as it became a point of contention with emerging scientific

¹² Joseph Baker, "Instructions and Forms for Invalid Pensions" n.d, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9n30r62z>, 4.

¹³ Daniel Walker Howe, "American Victorianism as a Culture." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 5 (1975): 522.

thoughts.¹⁴ Lastly, Victorians were a didactic people, looking to instill their policies of moral and social regulation wherever possible.¹⁵ Pension Bureau officials acted as morality police, holding disabled veterans to near perfect images of manhood.

Bureau officials shaped their standards around the ideals of middle-class men.

Employment was the centerpiece of a man's identity. As the individual worker became more important in business, so did the social power of employment.¹⁶ Theodore Russell wrote in his search for work, "Man is made for action and the bustling scenes of moving life."¹⁷ Furthering this view, a New York college student wrote to his fiancé that life without "*sustainable* [emphasis added by the college student] employment" is one without meaning.¹⁸ A man's largest determination of his character shifted from his role in the family to his position in the workplace, "a man determined his own social position and that of his family through work... it also gave men an arena in which they could exercise their manliness through dominance."¹⁹ A workplace was essential to a man's life, as was keeping his inner temptations in check.

Regulation of bad vices was another key to creating a manly image. Although they were vaguely described in writings, elimination of laziness was one part of this regulation.²⁰ This was derived from a great fear of failure, especially in the workplace, where failing in business was strongly associated with poor character.²¹ Views on alcohol consumption capture the struggle of

¹⁴ Ibid, 525. For a discussion on the struggles of religion and science, see Paul Allen Carter's first chapter of his book, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age*, Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971).

¹⁵ Ibid, 526. Victorians embodied this through education reform, teaching children about mastering their bad passions.

¹⁶ Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 2001), 167.

¹⁷ Ibid, 168.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 176.

²⁰ Ibid, 179.

²¹ Ibid.

regulation for men. While the consumption of liquor was seen as a badge of manhood (especially in all male gatherings), overusing it held the opposite effect. In line with Victorian views of temperance and moderation, responsible use of alcohol was a sign of good character, while abusing it showed weakness, passivity and submissiveness, all traits normally assigned to females.²² Describing this balancing act, one man wrote, “If we have not the will to avoid contempt, misery and disgrace, we deserve neither relief nor compensation.”²³ Victorian manhood revolved around the strength to battle one’s temptations and succeed.

Along with this mental strength, by the mid-19th century manhood was also associated with the physique and athletic ability of the male body. This was accompanied by the rise of bodybuilding as the ideal man of the Gilded Age “had well-defined, bulging muscles, exuding vigor from neck to calf.”²⁴ A connection developed between a man’s physical strength and the strength of his character. Describing this relationship, politician and explorer, Hiram Bingham, said, “The only way to become an athlete is by continued exercise, one never did it yet by staying away from the gym... and I suppose moral strength grows in much the same way.”²⁵ This obsession with physical strength, character, and competition defined manhood in the post-war era for middle-class men, making it difficult for disabled men to feel like a man.

Lower-class men held similar views to those of the middle class. Working class men in the North, like Irish immigrants, were preoccupied with honor.²⁶ They also held physical prowess to a similar status of those in the middle class, likely without access to a gym, achieving

²² Ibid, 180.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 198, 223.

²⁵ Ibid, 224.

²⁶ William Pinar, “The ‘Crisis’ of White Masculinity,” *Counterpoints* 163 (2001): 326.

strength through hard labor.²⁷ Lastly, urban workers also conformed to Victorian morality through “self-discipline, sobriety and seriousness.”²⁸ The first laws passed by Congress embodied these principles, defining a man’s level of ability on their ability to work.

The Need to Work and the General Law System²⁹:

To provide immediate relief for struggling veterans, Congress passed what became known as the general law system. In line with Victorian beliefs on manhood, the determining factor for payment depended on the veteran’s ability to make a living through hard labor. Soldiers looking for assistance were held to ideals of character from the beginning.

The first law of the system was passed on July 14, 1862, establishing the basic framework for the eventual complex web of bureaucracy the system became.³⁰ Congress outlined who was eligible for an invalid pension as someone who is “disabled by reason of any wound received or disease contracted while in the service of the United States, and in the line of duty, he shall, upon making due proof of the fact” be eligible for an “invalid pension.”³¹ In this first act, Congress only outlined the fees for what was known as total disability—only veterans who could not work at all were eligible. Veterans who were able to work, but not to the extent their pre-war occupation demanded, were out of luck and had to find other employment.³² From the beginning,

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ This thesis incorporates and builds upon my work from my senior capstone paper with Professor Broderick.

³⁰ Glasson, “The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain,” 4.

³¹ 37th Congress, “An Act to Grant Pensions”, 566.

³² Claire Prechtel-Klusens, ‘A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude.’” National Archives and Records Administration. *Prologue Magazine*, Spring 2010.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/spring/civilwarpension.html>.

pension law revolved around a veteran's ability to work, signifying the importance of work for men in post-war society.³³

Over the next two years, the first in a new set of laws establishing a payment scale for partial disability passed on July 4, 1864. Initially, the only rates specified in the law were for the loss of both hands or eyes, which received a twenty-five-dollar monthly stipend, and twenty dollars for the loss of both legs.³⁴ Veterans and their advocates, typically Republican voters, pressed Congress to help the thousands still struggling with other wounds. These amounts increased dramatically under various amendments while later laws specified rates for around twenty specific disabilities. By the last changes in 1892, the rate for the loss of both hands was one-hundred dollars (the maximum under the laws) and only seventy-two dollars for blindness or the loss of both eyes.³⁵ The significant difference between the loss of both hands and both feet highlights the importance of one's ability to perform manual labor when being evaluated for a pension. There is a debate to be made for which is worse, but the general law system's rates dictate that the ability to perform manual labor merits a lesser payment. In other words, a man who can work is worth more to society than one who cannot. A larger payment meant a greater failure to be a proper man and overcome a disability in the eyes of the Bureau.

Acts in March of 1873 and August of 1888 gave the Commissioner of Pensions authority to allocate payments for fifty other disabilities, such as the loss of a great toe, little finger, or

³³ The pension system initially had ratings based on the branch in which a veteran served and his respective ranks. Amounts varied significantly from thirty dollars a month at the highest ranks (Lieutenant-Colonel in the Military and Captain in the Navy) to eight dollars a month at the bottom of the chain. This scale only lasted for two years as Congress expanded pensions to those beyond total disability, likely due to pressure from veterans, providing increasing wages depending on the impact of the disability when performing manual labor. 37th Congress, "An Act to Grant Pensions", 567.

³⁴ 38th Congress "An Act Supplementary to an Act Entitled " An Act to grant Pensions," Approved July Fourteenth, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-two." Library of Congress, July 4, 1864 <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/38th-congress/session-1/c38s1ch247.pdf>, 387.

³⁵ Glasson, "The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain," 43.

deafness in one ear. Each had varied rates from two to six dollars a month and could not exceed the rate of seventeen dollars a month for a combination of these kinds of minor disabilities.³⁶ Laws changing the initial general system continued through 1904 and add increasing complexity to which rate a veteran deserved. This was due to changing definitions of the term “total disability,” which the Pension Bureau originally only applied in relation to the performance of hard labor. Later acts included less physically demanding kinds of labor which require education and skill, making it “difficult to draw a line of distinction between the two kinds of labor” according to Bureau Commissioner James Baker, who served as Commissioner of Pensions from 1871-1875, in 1874.³⁷ That line would become clearer as the Bureau established its standards through medical evaluations.

Surgeon Evaluations:

Submitting a claim was not as simple as mailing your application to the Pension Bureau and receiving a rate. A surgeon affiliated with the Bureau evaluated veterans to determine both the legitimacy of their injuries and whether the resulting disability inhibited the soldier from making a living. Commissioner Baker reinforced this by saying “the number of soldiers discharged on a certificate of disability is by no means a measure of the number that are entitled to receive invalid pensions” because applicants still needed to prove they could not make a living.³⁸ Despite the importance of these exams, Army and Navy medical officers did not possess specific information to rate disabilities. They sometimes evaluated soldiers using fractions, such as $\frac{3}{4}$ disabled, to estimate their ability to perform labor.³⁹ Veterans with partial or temporary

³⁶ Glasson, “The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain,” 44.

³⁷ Glasson, *Federal History of Military Pensions*, 131.

³⁸ Prechtel-Kluskens, “A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude.”

³⁹ Ibid.

disability submitted biennial follow-up exams while those ruled to be totally disabled did not have to submit them.⁴⁰ Through these medical exams, surgeons imposed the Bureau's ideas about manhood, discriminating against veterans and bringing their character into question.

Self-Mastery and Disabled Veterans:

Manhood, and thus employment, became the roots of a disabled veteran's struggles to fit into society. As soon as they were discharged from the military, men found themselves occupying a new social status, that of a veteran. The North provided its injured veterans with a disability certificate which, along with proving their injury and meeting the Bureau's standards, was required to be eligible for a pension.⁴¹ Soldiers who received these had their perceptions of life changed by the Bureau. The existence of a disability meant they had to fight through their pain and maintain a veteran version of "self-mastery," preserving their manliness by achieving economic independence. Failure to do so left veterans open to heavy criticism, deterring early applicants from seeking pensions.⁴² Soldiers that could do so often hid their injuries until necessary. In looking at two early pension cases, the initial struggles of disabled veterans are apparent.

Soldiers were expected to appear able when they returned home. Those seeking a pension, or more commonly, a pension increase, debated exposing their injuries. But to be seen as a man, injured veterans had to fight through their pain and sustain themselves. Col. Joshua L. Chamberlain embodied these values a little too much as the Bureau questioned if he was truly disabled. Despite having gunshot wounds in both his hips from an attack on Rives's Salient in

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Cameron Sauers, "To Remake a Man: Disability and the Civil War," *The Gettysburg Compiler* (Civil War Institute, April 9, 2019), <https://gettysburgcompiler.org/2019/04/09/to-remake-a-man-disability-and-the-civil-war/>.

⁴² Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 4.

July of 1864, Chamberlain soon returned to service, rising to the rank of general. It took until 1892 for the American hero to apply for a raise in his pension due to a decline in his personal finances.⁴³ Testimony from fellow Union service member Fifth Corps Major General Fitz John Porter calling Chamberlain an “almost helpless invalid” was not enough for the Bureau as the strong-willed General’s reputation preceded him.⁴⁴ Pension Bureau referee Thomas Ingram denied the claim, citing that the increase required more specific evidence. He wondered, “Can he dress, undress, eat and walk without assistance? . . . What disability confines him to the house or bed and is permanent in its present degree?”⁴⁵ Chamberlain was given the choice to either subject himself to the full status of an invalid or continue to press through his pain. After another failed increase, Chamberlain declined a third medical exam because he no longer wanted to degrade his status for the Pension Bureau. Veterans who could pass as able had a choice to make. They could either maintain their public status as able-bodied and not receive assistance or expose their disability with the increased chance of being seen as less of a man.

The majority of Post-Civil War Americans believed that very few disabilities beyond obvious ones, such as amputations or blindness, had permanent negative consequences.⁴⁶ Further, if a veteran was able to land gainful employment at any point, his disability had been overcome.⁴⁷ As a result, veterans like Nebraska Senator Charles F. Manderson were publicly shamed for receiving a pension. The Union Army granted him a disability discharge for a gunshot wound in his right leg which caused temporary paralysis, and he saw his pension

⁴³ Ibid, 92.

⁴⁴ The word invalid was commonly used to describe people with disabilities, and I continue to use the word within this context.

⁴⁵ Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 105.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

approved in 1865.⁴⁸ Manderson became a lawyer after the war and, perhaps facing financial trouble, looked for an increase to his pension about twenty-five years later. A surgeon found his condition had worsened, and the wound threatened permanent paralysis. Despite this, Bureau examiners denied the claim which was then pushed through by Commissioner of Pensions James Tanner.⁴⁹ Manderson's story goes beyond the Bureau's quick dismissal of his case. Newspapers such as the *Illustrated American* and Pennsylvania's *Harrisburg Patriot* attacked the senator about his acceptance of increased payments and arrears. The *Patriot* strongly stated, "Mr. Manderson is neither a disabled man nor a needy one... He ought to be ashamed to be a beggar, a pensioner upon the bounty of men poorer than himself."⁵⁰ Continuing the ridicule, Secretary of the Interior John W. Noble wrote a letter to Manderson saying he should not have taken the pension payout. In the end, these forces were likely too much for the Senator as he decided to pay back his arrears and decline further payments.⁵¹ Veterans applying for a pension had to think deeply about the public lashings to which they might subject themselves. These acts of shaming were common, increasing as eligibility requirements loosened through the next thirty years. Views of economic self-sufficiency and manhood made veterans who looked for assistance appear as weak, unable to fulfill their role as men. These fears of attack likely played a role in a veteran's decision to apply for a pension as the government listed only 6.5% of soldiers on the pension rolls by 1875.⁵² Applying for a pension put veterans in the crosshairs of society.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 106.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Theda Skocpol, "America's First Social Security System: The Expansion of Benefits for Civil War Veterans." *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 1 (1993): 96, doi:10.2307/2152487

The Pension Bureau's Standards of Morality:

Beyond the legitimacy of one's physical injury, Bureau officials evaluated veterans on several acts considered violations of Victorian morality. These "vicious habits" included: desertion, drug use, masturbation, and alcoholism, among others.⁵³ While a veteran could be denied for any number of reasons, this handful were at the center of contention. For veterans seeking a pension due to trauma, these were often their coping mechanisms. Instead, the Bureau saw them as violation of character, disqualifying many disturbed veterans from pension eligibility. No action was more damning to a veteran's chances than desertion.

Desertion, Claim Gaps and Pension Outcomes:

Desertion was rampant during the war. About 200,000 Union veterans (approximately 9.6%) of soldiers deserted their brothers.⁵⁴ On top of this, recruitment of soldiers to fight was difficult. The North resorted to conscription by 1863, but the primary focus of these drafts (July 1862 and March, July, and December 1864) was stimulating volunteers.⁵⁵ The ability to pay a \$300 fee to not be selected during a particular draft, as well as substitution, crippled draft efforts.⁵⁶ Attempting to combat this dire need for men, Union officials desired to keep as many soldiers as possible on the front lines. Because of this need, officials labeled many men who sought a disability discharge as malingerers. The fear of veterans faking disability was so severe that surgeons were instructed to examine soldiers' limbs if the men claimed to be paralyzed. A Union circular stated, "When a march is likely to be made the Surgeon is called upon to make a careful

⁵³ 51st Congress "An Act Granting Pensions to Soldiers and Sailors Who Are Incapacitated for the Performance of Manual Labor, and Providing for Pensions to Widows, Minor Children, and Dependent Parents." Library of Congress, June 27, 1890. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/51st-congress/session-1/c51s1ch634.pdf>, 182.

⁵⁴ James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York, NY, Random House Inc.) 468.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 356.

⁵⁶ As McPherson states further, only 46,000 men were drafted directly into the Union army, while 118,000 found substitutes. *Ibid*, 357.

and rigid examination to avoid imposition” as the horrors of war will cause men “who never limped before and many hitherto good soldiers will make an effort to escape.”⁵⁷ Union Army surgeons, William Keen and S. Weir Mitchell, also subscribed to this idea. Writing a journal article in 1864, Mitchell and Keen concluded with their colleague George Morehouse that, “Every means should be adopted to ascertain positively the reality of the deception.”⁵⁸ With this strict attitude, desertion was almost always a means for disqualification.

Also detrimental to a veteran’s likelihood to receive a pension was having a gap between when he applied for a pension and when, during the war, he claimed to have sustained the injury.⁵⁹ Lapses as little as five years could mean the end of your case as Henry Slogan experienced. An examiner wrote, “Rejection, upon the ground of no record of insanity or medical testimony showing treatment for same, nor satisfactory testimony of any description, showing existence of said insanity in service, at discharge, or until 1870.”⁶⁰ Veterans with war trauma, like Slogan, had greater difficulty proving the legitimacy of their claim as time went on. As chapter three explores, Slogan’s rejection was also due to the lack of understanding with how trauma manifested itself—sometimes developing years after the war. Given the fear of malingering instilled in veterans during service (and the strict requirements of the general law system), some veterans were likely resistant to applying for pensions right away.

Substance Abuse in Post-Civil War America

Substance addiction was another common issue for veterans of the Civil War. One cause of this is the ease at which doctors prescribed opiates to veterans. Antebellum doctors prescribed

⁵⁷ Eric Dean, *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam, and the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 119.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁹ The impact of gaps on pension outcomes for veterans with war trauma was likely more significant compared to physical wounds given the greater burden in proving the legitimacy of the injury.

⁶⁰ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 148.

them for a variety of illnesses, from “troublesome looseness” of the bowels to “intolerable pain,” from “Pointed articles, sticking in the Body,” to various fevers.⁶¹ Some veterans, such as George H. from Alabama, used opiates to aid with the various stresses of war.⁶² Adding to this, there were no measures, that were regularly enforced, governing the sale and use of drugs. Historian David Courtwright, writing about the origins of narcotic regulation says, that “[p]harmacists even delivered drugs... Some customers were actually unaware of what they were purchasing: proprietors of patent medicines were notorious for slipping narcotics into their products, which before [the passing of the Pure Food and Drug Act of] 1906 bore no list of ingredients on their labels.”⁶³ This lack of regulation, along with the lackadaisical prescription of drugs was a recipe for addiction.⁶⁴ Despite this liberal usage of the powerful drugs, Victorian beliefs still demanded that soldiers not succumb to the temptations of substance abuse, as “Antebellum physicians and temperance advocates classified opiate addiction alongside drunkenness as a variety of intemperance, which, doctors believed, degraded morality and eventually led to mania in severe cases.”⁶⁵ The use of drugs as a coping mechanism was not seen as a medical condition and instead as a failure of a man to control his desires. Pre-war thoughts about drug addiction stayed throughout the war and veterans looking for an escape from their trauma faced resistance from Victorian reformers. Writing his thesis in 1854, Yale medical student Moses Collin White hinted at the looming drug crisis, “mental and moral powers are enfeebled” by opiate addiction and it

⁶¹ Jonathan Jones, “Opium Slavery: Civil War Veterans and Opiate Addiction,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 10, no. 2 (2020): 187.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶³ David T Courtwright, “A Century of American Narcotic Policy,” National Center for Biotechnology Information (U.S. Institute of Medicine, January 1, 1992), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK234755/>.

⁶⁴ The power of unregulated advertisements for the miracles of medicine also contributed to the problem of addiction. See James Harvey Young’s seventh chapter in *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America before Federal Regulation*, pages 93-110, for a discussion on the selling of patent medicine after the Civil War. James Harvey Young, *The Toadstool Millionaires: A Social History of Patent Medicines in America Before Federal Regulation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 93-110.

⁶⁵ Jones, “Opium Slavery,” 190.

“induces a suspension of the will.”⁶⁶ He concludes that we “as a people may soon be deeply interested in the means of curing patients addicted to the abuse of opium.”⁶⁷ White’s prediction rang true as drug abuse became rampant among Civil War veterans.⁶⁸

Criticism towards struggling veterans started to pour out as White’s warning seemed to be ignored. In 1866, a pamphlet described that opium addiction was destroying the character of the user, “enervating and emasculating his system, perverting his judgment.”⁶⁹ A writer for an article titled “Opium Eating” in *Zion’s Herald*, furthered this, saying addicts “sacrifice truth, honor and manhood, for the only drug that can appease the craving” in 1868.⁷⁰ The struggles of drug addiction were failures to achieving self-mastery. As scholar James Johnson writes, Victorian beliefs required that “Men were to be self-controlled in their habits and to exhibit courage and stoicism in the face of danger and pain. Above all, men were to be independent, not beholden to the dictates of a master, neither human nor chemical.”⁷¹ What made drug abuse such a damning struggle was its potential to prevent veterans from finding work. The inability to quit opiates at will and hold down a job left men dependent on family and friends, labelling men as weak and intemperate.⁷² At the same time, those using drugs for pain relief likely worked through pain that was normally unbearable, creating an even greater struggle for veterans who looked to quit drugs and continue working. This is highlighted by President Grover Cleveland’s veto of Eliza Smith’s widow’s pension, wife of Indiana veteran Clinton Smith, who died of an

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Scholar David Courtwright’s classic work, *Dark Paradise*, discussed opiate addiction in America. He argues that the Civil War and its heavy reliance on the addictive drugs began the history of opiate addiction in the United States.

⁶⁹ Jones, “Opium Slavery,” 188.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 189.

⁷² Ibid, 186.

overdose in 1884.⁷³ Despite noting that the soldier used morphine to aid his “very painful” wound, the president attacked the soldier for using opiates to ease the pain. Cleveland called Smith an intemperate man, “especially when suffering from his wound” and denied the claim.⁷⁴ This type of attack was common as addicts could be spotted and shamed for the many needle marks left in their bodies from continuous injection.⁷⁵ Veterans riddled with needle holes and other imperfections from drug use were in direct violation of the ideal Victorian man. Their once able bodies destroyed by injury and illness. Addiction to drugs was a failure of men to achieve victory in inner competition, a similar view was used on alcoholism.

Alcoholism:

There was no greater target of temperance and regulation than the use of alcohol. Although, as discussed earlier in this chapter, proper use of alcohol was an assertion of manhood, the line between temperance and addiction was thin. Views on alcoholism in the 1850s held that alcohol was a sin that God’s grace could alleviate. Reformers used prayer meetings with various groups of sinners (alcoholics, prostitutes, and other pleasure seekers) to alleviate their sins.⁷⁶ Similarly, the Pension Bureau saw veterans who excessively drank alcohol as unworthy. Veterans who struggled with alcoholism like Clinton Moore, whose story is discussed in part three, were disqualified from receiving assistance. Giving into temptation, and the subsequent consequences, went beyond alcohol. Veterans were also judged for sexually pleasing themselves.

⁷³ Ibid, 195.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 196.

⁷⁶ Caroline Jean Acker and Sarah W. Tracy, *Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 114.

Masturbation:

Masturbation was an issue Victorians struggled to regulate. In the eyes of doctors, masturbation was not just a bad habit, it was a disease. As Tristram Engelhardt says in his exploration of the act, “[e]xcessive sexual stimulation was seen to produce particular pathophysiological changes” including over-excitation.⁷⁷ The battle against masturbation was taken up by purity authors, like John Cowan, who wrote in 1871, that a “perfectly healthy man living a right life socially, morally and physically, does not and cannot have seminal emissions.”⁷⁸ Further, any man who gave into these temptations “threatened the health of his mind.”⁷⁹ According to a report to the Massachusetts state legislature in 1848, the superintendent of the Worcester asylum claimed that 32% of his patients were insane due to this act of “self-pollution.”⁸⁰ This claim gave legitimacy to the growing purity and chastity movements as few were willing to go against this claim from a medical standpoint.⁸¹ It is also likely that this belief trickled into the Pension Bureau’s rulings for pension cases as some veterans failed to secure funds due to the habit. This could happen even if a veteran used masturbation as a coping mechanism.

Voicing his opinion on the Bureau’s view of masturbation, historian Eric Dean writes, “From a modern-day perspective, the Pension Bureau’s obsession with the supposedly unwholesome and pernicious effects of masturbation appears to be patently ridiculous.”⁸² Indulging in self-pleasure was a sign of failing to achieve self-mastery against one’s temptations. Veterans, such

⁷⁷ Tristram H. Engelhardt, "The Disease of Masturbation: Values and the Concept of Disease." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 48, no. 2 (1974): 243.

⁷⁸ John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.32106014315060> , 201.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 150.

as Joseph Batson, who were found to masturbate were disqualified from receiving pensions, as the Bureau employed beliefs held by purity reformers.⁸³ In line with ideas of Victorian culture, those who failed to regulate their temptations were looked down upon by the Pension Bureau.

Conclusion:

Victorian views of morality had a strong influence on the development of the Pension Bureau's standards for veterans. Bureau officials handed out payments to those they felt were worthy. Along with an assessment of a veteran's character, the injury sustained, and the system of laws a veteran applied under were the other drivers of a veteran's pension ruling. Tracing the developments of the pension system highlights the continued struggles of veterans looking for relief and how the system evolved when veterans advocated for themselves.

⁸³ Ibid.

Chapter 2: The Changing Dynamics of Pension Law and Physical Wounds

Introduction:

In its early years, very few veterans applied for pensions, likely because of the general law's strict requirements, combined with the Bureau's standards of character. The eventual relaxation of what qualified as hard labor still left many veterans struggling. Along with this, it was nearly impossible to satisfy the Pension Bureau's standards for proving a soldiers' disability resulted from a war injury. Veterans and their allies fought back, seeking increased eligibility for suffering soldiers, but liberalization of pension law led to further emphasis of a veteran's character in applying for a pension.⁸⁴ A deeper analysis of the general law in practice showcases the standards a veteran had to meet to be deemed worthy of a pension.

Frustration with General Law Requirements:

The general law's shortcomings can be seen through the story of Private James M. Greenleaf. Pvt. Greenleaf was wounded in the eye at Fredericksburg in 1862 where he lost his right eye along with sustaining fractures in his jaw and eye socket. Initially approved with the minimum pension of eight dollars from the rank-based payments of the general law, Greenleaf made his first appeal for an increase in 1872. Writing about the experience of pain in his hip, Greenleaf says, "it still slips in the joint, and the joint has enlarged. It is so that it troubles me very much, so much at times that I cant [*sic*] walk without great trouble."⁸⁵ Between the injuries to his eye and the severity of his hip injury, Greenleaf was a prime candidate for a raise. He also

⁸⁴ While the word liberal has taken up many meanings over the years, I use it to mean the freeing and lowering of standards for veterans to meet.

⁸⁵ Robert Goler, & Michael G. Rhode, "From Individual Trauma to National Policy: Tracking the Uses of Civil War Veteran Medical Records." In *Disabled Veterans in History*, ed. David Gerber & Shay Jonathan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), 176 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.3874458.10>

emphasized not being able to work. However, his inability to prove his hip injury resulted from battle caused the Pension Bureau to reject the claim in 1874, saying “injury of left hip not proven,” despite Greenleaf including two affidavits to support his claim.⁸⁶ Eventually, Greenleaf secured a raise to eighteen dollars when there was pus leaking out of his eye. The inability of his eye to heal saw Greenleaf file yet another appeal in 1882. Describing the current state of the eye injury, his lawyer wrote, that along with an open and discharging wound “there is an increase of pain from year to year with loss of strength and increasing blindness in the left eye which is very weak & he is less & less able each year to do *any manual labor* [attorney’s italics] or care for himself.”⁸⁷ Leaving no possible room for gaps in his claim, Greenleaf also included twenty-four affidavits to support that his injury was worse than missing an arm or a leg. Even with the emphasis put on the private’s inability to perform labor, the Bureau still rejected the claim. These types of decisions were common from the Bureau as they looked to reduce costs on the system. Although Greenfield eventually got a raise from an act of Congress in 1883, thousands of veterans were unable to receive the aid they felt they deserved under the original requirements.⁸⁸ It is clear that the general law was too strict to properly aid veterans. Further, the extreme emphasis put on labor in Greenleaf’s case and the subsequent rejection suggest that there is more to pension eligibility than just a soldier’s inability to work.

By the mid-1870s, the Pension Bureau created an impromptu standard for veterans that many, like Pvt. Greenleaf, did not appear to fit, according to its rulings. Civil War disability scholar Sarah Handley-Cousins describes this ideal applicant:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 177. It is also worth highlighting that Greenleaf’s attorney recognized the importance of manual labor, providing his own emphasis on the term in his writing.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

The veteran had been healthy and able-bodied on the enlistment and had served dutifully through the war before being tragically cut-down with a disability that kept him from supporting himself or his family. Critical to the successful applicant's tale were the details that the soldier had worked diligently while able-bodied and that he *wanted* [author's emphasis] to continue working but was limited by his wounded or diseased body.⁸⁹

Veterans also had to develop a near perfect image, one that saw a man's spirit push through their disability and support themselves, even if their body was maimed. Only those who showed the Bureau they had no other choice appeared to be accepted. While these rigorous standards were initially developed to cut costs and rid the system of men looking for handouts, they also became vehicles to deny applications if the veteran in question did not fit the Bureau's ideals of Victorian manhood and character.⁹⁰ The Pension Bureau's desire to mold veterans in a certain image left many Union veterans suffering, increasing the frustration of soldiers with the current requirements of the general law system. Veterans in turn called for changes to the system, receiving help from those that profited from them.

Claim Houses and the Liberalization of Pension Law:

Congress recognized there were limits to processing claims through government officials and created regulations for private citizens to work as pension lawyers in assisting Union veterans with their claims. These private law firms, nicknamed "claim houses," had a few rules governing them. Congress limited the maximum fee a lawyer who worked at a claim house could collect for facilitating a successful pension case to ten dollars.⁹¹ Due to this statute, claim houses had an incentive to put through as many cases as possible, but by the early 1870s a reduction in

⁸⁹ Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 103.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ 38th Congress, "An Act Supplementary to an Act Entitled " An Act to grant Pensions," Approved July Fourteenth, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-two," 389.

the number of claims caused this booming business to flatline. Eager to continue earning profits, pension attorneys began campaigning for the addition of an arrears law to increase incentive for veterans to apply. The new law provided veterans with pension payments backdated to the day of the alleged injury and not from the day the application for a pension was submitted.⁹²

In the mid-1870s, successful pension attorneys began the campaign for the Arrears Act to be passed, seeking to continue to earn money from their work for veterans. George E. Lemon launched a periodical news sheet titled the *National Tribune* in October of 1877. It was distributed to Union veterans calling for support of arrears legislation and, of course, advertising his services as a pension lawyer.⁹³ This tactic was taken up by a competing lawyer, N. W. Fitzgerald, and his *Citizen Soldier* as well. Along with these efforts, soldiers themselves continued to lobby for better rates and lower standards. The Soldiers' Association was a lobbying group created by Captain R. A. Dimmick which wrote petitions to Congress and state legislators to approve the Arrears Act.⁹⁴ Similar acts of lobbying were done by the Grand Army of the Republic, Union veterans' fraternal organization, as Congress faced pressure from all sides.⁹⁵ By 1879, Congress caved, and passed the Arrears Act. These one-time arrear payments were about 2.5 times the average annual income of Americans.⁹⁶ The passing of the Arrears Act only solved part of the problem. While veterans received significantly higher amounts of money, the hurdle of meeting the strict legal and social requirements of the general law remained. Also, applicants still got their claims rejected at similar rates after the passing of the Arrears law

⁹² Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States*, 164.

⁹³ Skocpol, "America's First Social Security System," 103.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 103.

⁹⁵ There were other motivations beyond veteran advocacy, see pages 11-114 in Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Mother's and Soldiers* for a discussion of these.

⁹⁶ Gholler & Rhodes, "From Individual Trauma to National Policy," 171.

compared to before. Some veterans, taking the fight into their own hands, petitioned Congress directly to alleviate these issues.

Private Pension Bills and Changing Expectations:

Continued frustration with the Pension Bureau led some courageous veterans to have their cases sent directly to Congress. When sending a case to Congress, it was crucial to highlight bravery and patriotism above the (in)ability to perform labor. Legislators were certainly more likely to approve the case of an American hero who turned the tide of battle than a private who injured himself with a faulty weapon. Most requests were simply followed up by Congressmen telling the Bureau to expedite certain cases, some requests did see special examination.⁹⁷ For example, Major General Henry A. Barnum had received an abdominal wound that never healed from Malvern Hill in 1862. Included in Barnum's case to Congress were pictures of the wound along with affidavits supporting his courageous military record as a surviving POW from Libby Prison. His doctor even emphasized his military prowess, saying "The courage, will and determination of this man are something I have never seen equalled [*sic*], and to them alone is he indebted for his present tolerably good physical condition." For his determination to work around standards established by the Pension Bureau, Barnum was rewarded the maximum of \$100 a month by an act of Congress in 1890.⁹⁸ While these private bills only accounted for .5% to 2% of additional pension funds on any given year, Congress spent a lot of time on them. The 49th Congress had 40% of legislation in the House and 55% in the Senate consist of private pension bills and requests to see cases expedited.⁹⁹ This was likely due to the immense pride many

⁹⁷ Although I cannot definitively say rank played a role in how successful a private appeal was, it is likely that a higher rank commanded a greater form of respect. This may have influenced a soldier's chances of success.

⁹⁸ Gholler & Rhodes, "From Individual Trauma to National Policy," 171.

⁹⁹ Skocpol, "America's First Social Security System," 108.

Congressmen felt from helping deserving preservers of the Union.¹⁰⁰ Private pension bills, while cumbersome for Congress, gave veterans lucky enough to have their cases examined by representatives the ability to obtain a pension without molding themselves to the full standards of the Pension Bureau. Note, though, that Major General Barnum's case provided nothing about him being unable to support himself. It was more important for him to present himself as a hero of the Union and a man of exemplary character, especially as it became a greater determinant of a pension outcome. While it still held him to a high standard of patriotism, Barnum was able to work around one of the Bureau's most powerful tools of discrimination, the power to undermine his manliness based on his (in)ability to make a living.

Growing Suspicion and the Disability Act

Private pension bills were not a viable route for the thousands of veterans looking for aid as the process was slow and cumbersome for Senators. However, the liberalization of pension law was a double-edged sword. While these laws did increase the number of veterans eligible for pensions, it also raised questions about increased fraud within the system. As one critic said of the Arrears Law in 1884, "In one year 141,466 men who had not realized that they were disabled until the Government offered a premium of a thousand dollars or more for the discovery of aches and disabilities" now looked for assistance.¹⁰¹ This increase in cases led the Bureau to dive deeper into veterans' service records for deserters and malingerers in order to "sift out the wheat from this army chaff."¹⁰² Case numbers began to overwhelm the Pension Bureau. Attempting to gain some control, the Bureau looked to only give pensions to veterans they felt deserved it most.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 104.

¹⁰² Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 103.

Spearheaded by President Grover Cleveland in his first term (1884-1889), veteran character came under siege on a new level. President Cleveland embodied the changing attitudes of Bureau officials, looking to rid the system of those not worthy. For example, Abraham P. Griggs was attacked by special examiners. Evaluating him for rheumatism in 1885 they stated, “We do not believe him sick or that he has been sick, but completely worthless. He is obese and a malingerer,” despite Griggs having documentation that he could not ride a horse due to his condition, the reason for his discharge.¹⁰³ The statement made by examiners highlights how disability was viewed by Bureau officials. Griggs’s rheumatism is easily coverable and shows no obvious signs of struggle, so he was expected to fight through it and not need a pension. This sentiment was confirmed by the examiners’ description of the veteran’s character, saying he “was not what is called a good soldier.”¹⁰⁴ The late 1880s was a battle between struggling veterans and a Bureau looking to contain its now massive system.

Veterans won in the end as Congress moved to expand eligibility requirements for an invalid pension at the end of the decade. On June 27, 1890, the Dependent Pension Act passed, creating a different pension for which ailing veterans could apply.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the requirements passed to get a pension under the general law system, applicants under the disability law did not have to prove that their injury was a result of battle. These pensions instead required proof of at least ninety days service in the Union army or navy and proof of a permanent mental or physical disability which was “not the result of their own vicious habits” and “which incapacitates them from the performance of manual labor in such a degree as to render them unable to earn a

¹⁰³ Ibid, 109.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ The Act is also commonly referred to as the Disability Law or Act, which is the term I use hereafter.

support.”¹⁰⁶ By not having to provide evidence of a wartime injury, Union war veterans effectively had a free insurance policy—so long as they could conform to the Bureau’s standards of character.¹⁰⁷ Also important is the continued emphasis on manual labor, highlighting the importance of gainful employment in being a successful middle-class man. To make up for these lower standards, rates paid out under this system were significantly lower. Rates were not allowed to exceed a combined value for all injuries of twelve dollars a month and a minimum of six.¹⁰⁸ Another limit, now officially established in the policy, is created through the ability to be disqualified from receiving the pension if the injury was a result of a veterans own “vicious habits.”¹⁰⁹ This phrase was used by the Pension Bureau and medical examiners to enforce particular beliefs about character, disability, and race that often left a soldier’s claim to be rejected on similar lines to Abraham Griggs.

The African American Experience:

The Influence of Pensions on African American Manhood and Identity:

For African American veterans seeking pensions, racism added another layer of obstacles. Larry M. Logue and Peter Blanck’s *Race Ethnicity and Disability* analyzes data from the Center for Population Economics (CPE) of 40,000 Union veterans to understand the role of race and ethnicity within the Civil War pension system. African American veterans saw pensions as “spurs to assertions of manhood,” a view nearly opposite to that of white veterans.¹¹⁰ White

¹⁰⁶ 51st Congress “An Act Granting Pensions to Soldiers and Sailors Who Are Incapacitated for the Performance of Manual Labor, and Providing for Pensions to Widows, Minor Children, and Dependent Parents,” 182.

¹⁰⁷ Glasson, “The National Pension System as Applied to the Civil War and the War with Spain,” 53.

¹⁰⁸ 51st Congress “An Act Granting Pensions to Soldiers and Sailors Who Are Incapacitated for the Performance of Manual Labor, and Providing for Pensions to Widows, Minor Children, and Dependent Parents,” 182.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Larry Logue & Peter Blanck, *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: Veterans and Benefits in Post-Civil War America*. (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 79.

veterans spoke openly about how their disability destroyed their manhood with statements like: “Now I am no man at all... my l[eft] leg is practically useless” and even discussed other factors such as loss of strength, and productivity. Logue and Blank recognize these were standard descriptions for veterans seeking a pension but highlight that these types of statements are missing from records of African American veterans. They explain, “None of the black applicants in the CPE samples used the ‘broken down’ or ‘half a man’ phrasing, nor did they echo the white’s more direct acknowledgement of lost manly traits.”¹¹¹ Instead, analysis of African American participation under the disability law suggested blacks saw pensions as ways to obtain a status of manhood unavailable to them during slavery.

Historian Donald Shaffer confirms this experience through his own examination of African American pensions from the Civil War.¹¹² In one case, Pauli Murray, the granddaughter of soldier Robert G. Fitzgerald, described a time she accompanied him to cash a pension check. She wrote, “He seemed to walk straighter on those days... [h]is check was the government’s recognition of honored service and of the disability he had suffered in his country’s cause.”¹¹³ Pensions provided black veterans with economic legitimacy they never experienced previously, helping them towards achieving manhood on par with whites in America. For those who used it as supplementary income, they could more comfortably support their families, further embodying the role of male provider.¹¹⁴ Arrear payments gave veterans who managed to secure

¹¹¹ Ibid, 80.

¹¹² In *After the Glory*, Shaffer explores an array of ways, beyond pension outcomes African Americans asserted their manhood, Donald Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggle of Black Civil War Veterans*, (Lawrence, Kansas, Univ. of Kansas Press, 2004.).

¹¹³ Ibid, 133-134.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

them the ability to purchase land and other assets, another important factor in creating economic security and thus recapture their manhood.¹¹⁵

Becoming a man was only one of the many benefits African American veterans claimed from obtaining pensions. With many African American soldiers being former slaves, their names and identities were only associated with their past life. Black veterans applying for pensions, thanks to the large amount of documentation required, were able to make identities for themselves. Free from the shackles of slavery, some veterans established personal identity through changing their surname.¹¹⁶ African American Veterans also gained a new sense of citizenship by combining their economic freedom with social and political status.¹¹⁷

Obstacles of Black Veterans and Pension Outcomes:

As discussed earlier, medical examiners and Bureau agents held significant power in determining the fate of a veteran's application. Surgeon certificates and pension files of course did not explicitly mention race as a reason for denying a pension. However, the differences in application outcomes between black and white soldiers demonstrate that race heavily influenced the Pension Bureau's rulings. For example, under the general law system, medical examiners approved only half as many African Americans per hundred as white applicants.¹¹⁸ This was due, perhaps, to many examiners' being less likely to believe black veterans who were evaluated for internal injuries like intestinal problems and mental illness. As a result of this prejudice, many

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 135.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Ann Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, *Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction Through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files* (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2008), 26. At the same time, some black veterans kept their previous name, a testament to family members with the name or for convenience. For a deeper discussion, see the first chapter of *Voices of Emancipation*, pages 9-48.

¹¹⁷ For a deeper discussion of African American veterans and political status, see Shaffer's third chapter in *After Glory*, titled "Politics," pages 67-96.

¹¹⁸ Logue and Blanck, *Race Disability and Ethnicity*, 58.

black soldiers simply did not apply for pensions when dealing with intestinal injuries.¹¹⁹ This could also be attributed, in part, to the subjectivism of character. It is likely that examiners held African American veterans to stricter standards of Victorian character compared to whites.

Another component to the disparity in successful pension outcomes was lack of proper documentation for former slaves. African Americans had a more difficult time producing records of their names, ages, etc. This greatly increased the amount of special examinations required to prove the legitimacy of a black veteran's claim. Almost half of African American pension files include special examiners compared to about a quarter of a small sample of Southern Union soldiers.¹²⁰ Expressing his frustrations with African American veterans seeking pensions, examiner Eugene B. Payne wrote, "It is singularly impossible to get a colored person to give the date of anything."¹²¹ Another examiner, Charles Whitehead echoed this sentiment while trying to obtain a personal description of a deceased veteran from his widow. In response to his request, the woman identified her husband as "a fat, chunky black niggah wid big lips, wooly head an big black eyes."¹²² Writing of the description, Whitehead said, "When one asks an ignorant black woman—little above animal intelligence, to describe some other Negro she knew 40 or 50 years go... we drop special examination to the plane of absurdity."¹²³ Failure to provide proper and specific facts hindered the credibility of a black veteran's claim, adding to the already high likelihood of examiners not believing a black veteran's struggles.

African Americans who managed to get their cases approved by a medical examiner still needed approval from a Bureau claim agent. This also proved to be a significant hurdle. The

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 78.

¹²⁰ Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 129.

¹²¹ Ibid, 130.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

Bureau routinely claimed that physicians' evaluations are inaccurate while examiners claimed that Bureau procedure got in the way of proper evaluations.¹²⁴ These disputes added to the problems African American soldiers faced. Under the general law system, only 39.5% of black veterans' cases were approved by both medical examiners and the Bureau. These numbers are significantly smaller than the amount of awards the Bureau handed out to whites, who received an award 77.9% of the time for cases approved by medical examiners.¹²⁵ The significance of race is further proven as dark-skinned applicants were less successful at obtaining a pension than their light-skinned counterparts by nearly 25%.¹²⁶ African Americans applying for pensions under the general law were being disproportionately denied pensions. While the disability law did lower requirements, discriminatory practices only worsened.

The passage of the disability act resulted in a flood of new cases to the Pension Bureau. This bombardment of cases, thanks to the work of claim houses, increased the amount of discrimination black veterans faced. Skin shade became an important factor in the success of a veteran's cases. Light-skinned African Americans saw their odds of obtaining a favorable rating fall by 40% compared to whites. This disparity was even greater for dark-skinned applicants, who saw their odds decrease by over 50%.¹²⁷ As Logue and Blanck suggest in their work, race became a mechanism to manage payouts for the pension system as it became increasingly overwhelmed.¹²⁸

Claim Houses as Vehicles for Success:

¹²⁴ Logue and Blanck, *Race Disability and Ethnicity*, 38.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 57.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 59.

¹²⁷ Logue and Blanck, *Race Ethnicity and Disability*, 63.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 81.

Claim houses also paradoxically became the vehicle that aided former slaves who fought in the Union apply for pensions. Under the early general law system, 84.8% of former slaves utilized a claim house for their first-time application compared to 77% of native whites and 77.8% of free born African Americans.¹²⁹ Since claim houses grew exponentially in the late 1870s and 1880s, very few African Americans (19.7%) applied under the general law system before the passing of the disability law.¹³⁰ Pension attorneys were pivotal for freedmen given the high rates of illiteracy. With the passing of the disability act, former slaves used claim houses 96.9 % of the time.¹³¹ The disability act was also accompanied a wave of new applications from African Americans as 93.6% of soldiers decided to file for a pension. This large change in application rate was due to the wider availability of claim houses so illiterate freedmen could apply.¹³²

Clay Ballard and the Implications of Bureau Racism:

The individual experiences of African Americans trying to navigate this system can shed light on the discrimination they faced. Clay Ballard was born a slave in Kentucky and enlisted with the 116th Colored Infantry in 1864. He survived the war without injury, but he developed a variety of health problems in the 1880s. After the passing of the disability act, Ballard became eligible for a pension. He decided to hire an attorney and apply later in 1890 on the grounds of rheumatism and scurvy. Along with his application, Ballard included an evaluation from a private physician that ruled him “unfit for hard manual labor.”¹³³ Despite this evidence, a board of physicians rejected the claim citing that Ballard showed no signs of pensionable disabilities.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 123.

¹³⁰ Larry Logue and Peter Blanck “‘Benefit of the Doubt’: African-American Civil War Veterans and Pensions.” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, no. 3 (2008): 382. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20143649>.

¹³¹ Logue and Blanck, *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability*, 123.

¹³² Logue and Blanck, “‘Benefit of the Doubt,’” 382.

¹³³ Ibid, 378.

Furious, Ballard wrote asking for a reevaluation to take place in Cincinnati, saying, "I did not receive a fair and impartial examination" because no "colored ex-soldier can get justice from that board [in Lexington, Kentucky]."¹³⁴ Being denied the reevaluation in Cincinnati, Ballard was reexamined in Frankfort, Kentucky, where physicians found him partially disabled. Having cleared the first level of approval this time, it was up to the Bureau to determine the legitimacy of his claim. In line with the data analyzed by Logue and Blanck, the Bureau unsurprisingly rejected the claim. Ballard filed another application with additional disabilities in 1894 but died before his next examination could be scheduled.

Ballard's story is reflective of the experiences of most African American veterans; however, the story of Ballard's pension did not end with his death. With the help of her husband's pension attorney, Mary Ballard looked to acquire a widow's pension.¹³⁵ In 1897, the Pension Bureau responded to the request by claiming that Clay Ballard was still able to earn a support despite his disabilities and thus his request for a pension was rejected. Mary's attorney, recognizing the absurd stance of the Bureau, replied saying, "it certainly looks strange . . . when soldiers die without being disabled."¹³⁶ Scrambling, the Pension Bureau hired a special investigator and reopened the case. Once more depositions were gathered and the investigation was complete, the investigator determined that Clay Ballard was "practically totally disabled."¹³⁷ Mary collected her widow's pension and obtained justice for her husband who was wrongfully discriminated against when filing for a pension.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 379.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

While race did not become the basis for complete denial of pensions, cases that required further administration such as Ballard's show the presence of racism within the Pension Bureau's rulings. Logue and Blanck saw race as a crutch for examiners looking to deal with an overwhelming workload. Race "offered Bureau officials the satisfaction of imposing a measure of order" on a system that had grown far out of their reach.¹³⁸ Black veterans took the blow for the American government's failure to properly equip the Pension Bureau with the resources to handle the flow of cases from the disability act. Scholar Donald Shaffer wrote in his examination of black pension outcomes that, "[p]ractically speaking, black veterans and their families had a greater burden of proof than white persons had, despite the formal equality of black and white applicants under the law."¹³⁹ He continues, discussing the higher standards of Victorian character African American veterans had to hold themselves to, saying, "In a pension system in which eligibility was predicted on the worthiness of the applicant, black people had to work harder to prove that they were truly deserving."¹⁴⁰ African Americans looking to obtain a pension had to face a system where race and disability intersected, making black veterans navigate not only the norms established around disability, but also centuries of racism.

Conclusion:

The struggle for pensions was a dynamic process, as both laws and standards changed. Aging veterans looked to their government for help as payment for preserving the Union. They were met with a bureaucracy that asked them to be grateful, resilient soldiers who only asked for pensions as a last resort for income. Veterans who did not meet these standards were, in the eyes of the Bureau, lazy and useless freeloaders. African Americans fought through discrimination on

¹³⁸ Logue and Blanck, *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability*, 81.

¹³⁹ Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 130.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 130-131.

two fronts as the Bureau used race as a tool for controlling payouts. Veterans with trauma had a similarly difficult time meeting the Bureau's standards. Physical injuries moved out of the spotlight as the decades passed, but a veteran's character remained important and became the basis for their claim, sometimes seeing them denied despite an obvious injury. Veterans with war trauma faced this on a greater scale with internal struggles beyond the medical knowledge of the time.

Chapter 3: Veterans with War Trauma and the Struggle for Pensions

Introduction:

Writing from the New York Asylum for the Insane in Utica in 1864, Daniel Folsom of the Sixteenth New York described his experience, “I thought I had got through the hardest of my life when I got through solgerin [*sic*], but if ever [I] got into a place where my life is a drug to me it is here.”¹⁴¹ As Folsom described, veterans in asylums continued their struggles beyond the battlefield. Limited knowledge about war trauma, such as PTSD, as well as the absence of a vocabulary to describe it, led to veterans with mental illnesses coming face to face with new conflicts between their social identity and the norms of the Victorian era.¹⁴² Veterans in asylums looked for gainful employment to become members of society again. The Pension Bureau also played a role in soldiers’ struggles with traumatic injuries because their standards for pension eligibility were the same as those for physical wounds.

Beginnings of Treatment: Brief History of Asylums:

The treatment of mental illness before wartime is reflected in the early treatments of disturbed veterans. While the role of institutions in the 20th century for people with cognitive disabilities is well-accepted, before the Civil War, very few of these facilities existed. Evolution in treatment and conception of mental illness occurred during the late 19th century, but the insane were not a social category as became common during the eugenics movement in the early 20th century. Most people with mental illnesses, including early disturbed veterans of the Civil War, were kept at home, and watched closely by family. Treatment for veterans at home was similar to

¹⁴¹ Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 132.

¹⁴² On top of this, veterans had to navigate a new space while describing their injuries. Official terms for PTSD did not exist, so veterans used a variety of terms. Some that Eric Dean highlights are demoralized, nervous, and rattled. For a deeper analysis of this see his sixth chapter of *Shook Over Hell*, “Dying of Nostalgia: Official Diagnoses,” 115-134.

the experience of Francis Keilhoffer. After the war, Keilhoffer returned to his work as a tailor, reassimilating from the war almost seamlessly. However, his condition worsened over time. His wife, Maria, would find him failing to properly complete his work. After being unable to work, Francis was tasked with chores at home such as laying a garden bed by his wife. Maria found him talking to himself while digging the same hole repeatedly.¹⁴³ His experience was not unique, and as the war progressed and soldier's conditions became increasingly complex, asylums played a larger role in the treatment of veterans.

Ideas about how to cure people of these illnesses also shifted as the war continued. Superintendents of these asylum wards claimed to be able to cure somewhere between 80-90% of patients with short-term treatment, an accepted view of curability only at the beginnings of the conflict. Through the process of moral therapy, patients went through a variety of normative activities such as moderate work, purposeful leisure and the occasional dance or play.¹⁴⁴ This mode of/type of treatment sought to realign patients' minds back to the values of Victorian America. By giving patients a purpose in relaxed environments, their minds could be quickly restored.¹⁴⁵ This quick turnaround plan was only achievable in theory. Disturbed veterans such as Jacob Deffren made doctors realize that long-term treatment was needed.

Admitted to the Indiana Hospital for the Insane in August of 1881 with acute mania, Deffren was first treated using the original ideas about targeted short-term therapy. He was released a month and a half later, being labelled as "cured."¹⁴⁶ However, Deffren made his return quickly; less than six months later he was readmitted with what was now "recurrent

¹⁴³ Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 125.

¹⁴⁴ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 136.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

mania.”¹⁴⁷ Although this change in diagnoses reflects the hospital’s recognition of long-term treatment, they never claimed to cure Defferen fully again. When he was released in October of 1882, the assessment of his condition labelled him as “improved.”¹⁴⁸ Outcomes like Defferen’s were common for veterans. It is likely that many soldiers who struggled with alcoholism, masturbation and other taboos that were a result of their mental illness were put into asylums to break them of these habits. Thus, asylums treated the symptoms of their patients and not the underlying cause, unable to recognize the influences of war trauma in veterans. While staying in these restrictive environments may temporarily prevent veterans from indulging in their vicious habits, once they were released the lack of long-term support saw them relapse.

The Influence of War Trauma on Veterans and their Families:

As mentioned earlier, asylums were not a common treatment method of treatment at the beginning of the war. This leads to a few important questions: how did families deal with the trauma of veterans and why could husbands no longer stay at home? Historian Sara Handley-Cousins found in her research that “in their reports to hospital staff, family members described the behavior as an extension of a physical wound or the strain of warfare.”¹⁴⁹ Although there was a gap in understanding for a veteran’s condition, people recognized that the struggle stemmed, to a certain extent, from the soldier’s experience in the war. For veterans (and their families) who struggled to manage these conditions, the home could become a second battlefield and families looked to prevent themselves from becoming casualties.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. As Dean highlights, this may have been done to clear space for veterans with more severe illnesses. Regardless of the motive, Defferen’s release showcases the lack of understanding around the conditions of disturbed veterans.

¹⁴⁹ Handley-Cousins, *Bodies in Blue*, 126.

With war so fresh on the mind, veterans such as Clinton Moore struggled to control their emotions. Moore served under the 114th New York and his entrance to the New York Asylum for the Insane was due to “drinking freely, abusing his family and threatening his wife’s life.”¹⁵⁰ Eventually, Moore escaped the ward and returned home, where he continued this abusive behavior and “whipped his children so severely” it was dangerous for them to live with him.¹⁵¹ According to his case file, the deputy sheriff that came to arrest Moore met with great resistance, including having a large metal stove tossed down the stairs as part of Moore’s last resort to avoid being returned to the hospital. Once back at the asylum, doctors described him as “3 parts ugly and 1 part crazy.”¹⁵² For families such as Moore’s, it is clear why the asylum was necessary. Violent outbursts were increasingly common and as the post-war years continued, asylums worked to accommodate these cases, but proper treatment was unlikely. It is also worth noting that the first reason for Moore’s admission was related to alcohol abuse. Drinking excessively was, as previously discussed, seen as a reflection of one’s poor character during the late Victorian Era. Viewing alcoholism as part of a soldier’s condition instead of a symptom of a deeper illness also reveals the gap of knowledge medical professionals had at the time. By the 1890s, a shift to long-term treatment was taken to hopefully improve both the veteran’s condition and their family’s safety.

Violence was not the only reason for veterans to be kept in asylums. Many veterans were unable to work and were a detriment to have at home. Harriet Zane, the wife of a patient admitted to St. Elizabeth’s, wrote to the ward fearful that her husband, Joseph, would be sent home. In a letter to the superintendent, she explained that her husband’s inability to provide for

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 127.

¹⁵² Ibid.

the family forced her to send their children to live with others, as she could not attend to them while continuously travelling for “the hardest kind of work such as housecleaning washing and all kinds of laborious work.”¹⁵³ For Harriet, the ability for her to maintain a livelihood depended on her husband remaining in the asylum. In cases similar to this, the necessity of treatment forced women to take on new roles as bread winners in the household—a devastating blow to a veteran’s manhood if they ever returned home.

While asylums were beneficial for most families, veterans themselves often struggled to come to terms with their conditions. Along with the illness itself, veterans had to contend with the difficulties of reintegrating into society.¹⁵⁴ Treatment in asylums saw veterans struggle to find their identity and often felt a loss of both mental and social strength. For example, Private Robert Martin of the 126th was placed in Utica’s hospital for the insane after a bout with typhoid fever in 1863 made him struggle with memory. Frustrated after becoming lucid in February 1864, he wrote to his parents urging for them to bring him home, saying “When I get home I think my strength will increase faster. I want to go to work. Do not love to be idle so much.”¹⁵⁵ Martin’s desire to go to work demonstrates the pressure for veterans to become productive members of society. This construct is pushed further when he associates the inability to work with potential increases to his condition. Like doctors of the time, Martin seemed to believe that his illness was a result of his inner weakness and lack of strength. In other words, mental conditions were negative character traits that could be mended when veterans conformed to society through being better men, working through their conditions, and refraining from destructive habits.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 121.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 122.

War Trauma and Pensions:

Veterans and pension examiners alike struggled to articulate the conditions under which to evaluate a pension. Instead of citing shell shock or PTSD as we would today, mental illnesses were described under a few key phrases. Cases with clear signs of illness, likely violence, were labeled with some form of the word insane. Lesser cases regarding forms of mental stress used terms like nostalgia or home-sickness.¹⁵⁶ Attempting to conceptualize veterans' conditions, physicians used physical symptoms of mental illnesses as the diagnoses on pension files when there were no obvious physical causes to soldiers' struggle. Most notably were irritable or throbbing heart and sunstroke.¹⁵⁷ In other cases doctors cited that a veteran's declining mental health led to "irritation of the brain."¹⁵⁸ According to one pension file, a doctor explained that a veteran's mental state was "due in my opinion to the long continued invalid condition and to the morbid conditions of rectum and bladder."¹⁵⁹ Conditions that influenced a person's physical health also included phrases like "depletion of resources" such as sleep, and food.¹⁶⁰

Similar to its dealings with physical wounds, the Pension Bureau's administration of pensions held veterans to an ideal standard of character. The Bureau associated various coping methods of deteriorating mental health, such as alcoholism and masturbation, as violations of Victorian era norms due to not fully understanding veterans' conditions. Instead of recognizing that these acts were coping mechanisms for a mental illness, examiners saw these actions as immoral, and this immorality is what developed the depression or other struggles/illnesses. Claimants were denied their pension applications for insanity if they partook in any of those

¹⁵⁶ Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 129.; While it is no longer acceptable today, the term nostalgia referred to "a general disorientation and depression" according to Dean's analysis.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 131.; The modern equivalent to this term would be combat fatigue.

¹⁵⁸ Dean, *Shook Over Hell* 146.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

pleasures or distractions. Like physical wounds, desertion was a near automatic disqualifier as ignorance to the concept of shell shock had doctors associating leaving the battlefield as a flaw in character and not the result of illness.¹⁶¹ For veterans hoping to secure assistance from the government, they had to conform to the Bureau's standards of morality, no matter the obstacles their trauma presented.

The difficulty of meeting these standards is seen from the experience of William Morris of the 68th Indiana. While at the battle of Perryville in 1862, Morris deserted his regiment. The reasons for his desertion are unknown to the record, but the soldier attempted to use this lack of information to his advantage. In his application, Morris addressed his desertion by stating it was due to the extreme stress the war caused him, arguing "It is impossible for Neighbors [sic] to testify to the amount of suffering I have indured [sic] since being in the service."¹⁶²

Unsurprisingly, the Pension Bureau denied the claim because Morris abandoned his comrades.

The most telling piece of Morris's pension claim comes not from the decision handed to him, but from the support his wife received when applying for a widow's pension. Writing with the knowledge of shell shock after World War I, once shell shock received more recognition and acceptance, John Benham, a school superintendent, reflected on the soldier's life and original rejection in 1929. "Mr. Morris was regarded as queer from the time of his return from the Civil War and was rated as a Deserter." He "spent some time as a patient in the State Insane Hospital and for the past thirty years of his life he was regarded as an 'Incurable'... a victim of 'Shell Shock' would doubtless have been the verdict of similar cases of the World War Veterans."¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ See earlier discussion in chapter 1 regarding desertion as part of the Pension Bureau's standards.

¹⁶² Dean, *Shook Over Hell*, 127. This attitude continued into World War I as knowledge of trauma was still developing.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 128.

While later applications were fortunate to have medical advancements help convey the struggles of mental illnesses, the thousands of veterans seeking immediate relief were still at the mercy of the Pension Bureau.

Veterans did not exclusively suffer from either trauma or a physical wound. It was not uncommon for veterans to have both a physical and mental condition on their applications for pensions. The Bureau understood this, providing separate rulings for their ailments.¹⁶⁴ With this method, examiners could further impose their standards of morality on applicants such as John C. Britton. Britton applied for a pension for chronic diarrhea and insanity. While his claim for his bowel issues was approved, the Bureau rejected the part of insanity due to Britton's excessive use of alcohol.¹⁶⁵ To further prove the desire of the Pension Bureau to hold veterans to Victorian standards of morality, examiners ignored a letter of support for Britton where the writer makes a connection between the veteran's condition and his alcoholism, saying "He drinks to excess sometimes, but the peculiar actions and restlessness I speak of comes on and is manifest for three or four days before he goes drinking... I have attributed his drinking wholly to the disordered condition his mind would get into."¹⁶⁶ Despite evidence to suggest that the struggling soldier was dealing with some form of illness, the Bureau still rejected the claim. Britton's case highlights the importance of morality when applying for pensions. Veterans must present themselves as worthy of receiving assistance from the government. Those who failed to meet these standards were left relying on those closest to them for assistance.

A combination of this fear and the necessity to provide an account of an event that caused trauma made a successful case with just a mental condition even rarer. Overall, 42% of pension

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 149.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

claims from mental illness in scholar Eric Dean's Indiana sample were accepted compared to 77% of cases with mentions of a physical wound.¹⁶⁷ This trend, according to an empirical study done by Blanck in 2001, could be influenced by the law a veteran was trying to apply for a pension under. The general law system saw very few veterans apply for a pension with nervous disorders given the strict eligibility requirements. After the passing of the Arrears Act in 1879, a flood of aging veterans sought assistance for their developed nervous conditions. As a result, the proportion of zero disability ratings for claimants with nervous disorders shifted from 7% to 29% by the passing of the disability act in 1890.¹⁶⁸ Veterans with war trauma faced increased difficulty in getting their pensions approved.

Conclusion:

Due to limited medical knowledge, and an almost inflexible insistence that requirements be met, war trauma and its impact on veterans was not fully understood by Pension Bureau officials. This created another hurdle for struggling veterans to face. From having to prove their claim was legitimate to facing denial for attempting to cope with their illnesses, veterans with war trauma had an even greater struggle obtaining their pensions than those with only physical injuries. Bureau officials saw their coping mechanisms as violations of Victorian character, deeming them unworthy of assistance.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 148-149.

¹⁶⁸ Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 182.

Conclusion:

Pension Bureau officials held veterans to ideal standards of Victorian morality. No matter how obvious the injury, a man's character and habits could be the deciding factors in his pension case. Veterans were left to choose between fulfilling their social roles as men, fighting through pain, or submitting themselves to the mercy of the Pension Bureau, with no guarantee of assistance. However, veterans did achieve a partial victory. Eligibility under the general law had strict requirements and was initially based on rank. By the end of the nineteenth century, disabled veterans and their allies had secured arrears as well as eliminated the need to prove an injury resulted from wartime service to receive a pension.

With that victory also came further criticism. Spearheaded by President Cleveland, the resistance to pensions for veterans gained traction significantly after the passage of the Dependent Pension Act of 1890. Rising anti-pension, muckraker style journalists such as Walter Hines Page and William Hale continued to attack the system as the more lenient rules saw Progressive Era reformers swoop in to reduce costs. Hale argued that after those who abused the system tarnished the legacy of deserving veterans and by 1910, the pensioner was more likely to be corrupt and lazy rather than one deserving a payment.¹⁶⁹ Supporting his argument, the cost of the pension system exceeded the cost of the Civil War by 1916.¹⁷⁰ The work of critics like Page and Hale helped to create a new system for aiding veterans returning from the battlefield.

The poor execution of the Civil War pension program provided American officials with the motivation to create a much less costly assistance program during the first World War. The

¹⁶⁹ Aaron Jackson, "Reforming the Veteran: Propaganda and Agency in the First World War Reconstruction Hospitals," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 107, no. 4 (January 2019), <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.743>, 483.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

price of federal Civil War pensions, which one historian estimates to be around five billion dollars, was a decision that may have given Progressive Era government officials nightmares.¹⁷¹ After World War I, assistance offered to new veterans focused on employment, thus avoiding the problems that had arisen with regard to Civil War pensions. While this post-World War I rehabilitation system had its own combination of social norms and judgement of veterans, its entire existence, and the subsequent propaganda campaign to support it, was a direct result of the burdens of the Civil War Pension system. The director of the Red Cross Institute for Disabled and Crippled Men in New York, Douglas C. McMurtrie, captures this sentiment by saying, “[t]he [Civil War] pension has never been enough to support in decency the average disabled soldier, but it has been just large enough to act as an incentive to idleness and semi-dependence on relatives or friends.”¹⁷² The pension system developed after the Civil War was a failure in the eyes of those charged with guiding the assistance of World War I veterans. The focus on rehabilitation, which included the subsequent development of institutions, such as Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, designed for large-scale treatment of veterans, were the early stages of America’s current Veteran Affairs system, according to scholar Jessica Adler in her book, *Burdens of War: Creating the United States Veterans Health System*.¹⁷³ So, while the pension system developed during the Civil War failed to properly aid many suffering veterans, it was also the mechanism that sparked the development of modern care for our soldiers.

However, the current systems and ideologies are still far from perfect. For homeless veterans, the lack of care is unacceptable. We have known of the difficulties of PTSD and other

¹⁷¹ Beth Linker, *War’s Waste: Rehabilitation in World War I America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.) 2-3.

¹⁷² McMurtrie, Douglas C. "The Duty of The Employer in the Reconstruction of the Crippled Soldier." *The Mathematics Teacher* 10, no. 4 (1918): 189-93. www.jstor.org/stable/27950142.

¹⁷³ Jessica L. Adler, *Burdens of War: Creating the United States Veterans Health System* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 2.

war trauma for at least a century and pension files examined here showcase the struggles decades before these investigations. Despite familiarity with these struggles, current systems in place continue to fail those who deserve help the most. From the newest, “National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report,” veterans accounted for 13.8% of suicides while only making up 8% of the population in 2018.¹⁷⁴ Soldiers continue to battle long after their last encounter.

What, then, is the legacy of the Civil War pension system? Should it be remembered as a massive and corrupt social agency? I think it depends on your perspective. From being the first major test of the Union to being the first modern war (and dealing with the resulting impacts), to creating the “First Social Security System,” America will likely never experience such a wide variety of changes in such a short amount of time. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time where the wonders of the modern world were just beginning to take shape. Medicine was in the early stages of becoming what it is today as germ theory and the development of the U.S. Department of Sanitation would change the way we treat the sick and injured. The Civil War pension system was the first of its kind around the world. Disabled veterans and their injuries were only just beginning to be examined and well documented.¹⁷⁵ While the pension system was used to throw many veterans into the gutters of society, by its end it was the most liberal social security system in the world. The system should best be remembered as an attempt, albeit poorly executed, at aiding veterans for their sacrifice.

We live in a time where our past mistakes are being erased from the past. There is of course an obvious distinction between what is presented in this paper and a memorial to people who believe the color of your skin makes you better than someone else, but it is important to

¹⁷⁴ Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs, “2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report,” 13.

¹⁷⁵ For an exploration of this, see Handley-Cousins’ *Bodies in Blue* chapter 3, pages 51-70.

recognize the power in examining history for what it was. Topics that touch on the wrongs of our ancestors are important to recognize how far (or how little, especially for veterans struggling with suicide) we have come. I am not saying we should be proud of our past sins but erasing them is destroying the reminders to never treat people, especially those who fought for the continuation of this country, as inferior. We may no longer call people with disabilities invalids, but words do not matter if practices remain the same. This paper should be a reminder of how far we have come, but also how much is still left to go.

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