

“This Insolent and Inhuman Race”: White Union Soldiers’ Thoughts about White Southerners during the Civil War Era

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Question:

What were ordinary white Union soldiers’ attitudes towards white Southerners during the Civil War?

Methods:

I tell you what it is, the South hate us. they look upon us as invaders and will treat us accordingly. that is will fight us as long as there is a particle of sight for them. Even the woman of this lovely valley express their hatred of us in more ways than one, by words and actions. They tell us that we are destined to defeat and some of the lovely maidens in Winchester go so far as to spit in the faces of our soldiers. We are just rejoicing because of news of the fall of New Orleans, and



The ladies of New Orleans before Gen. Butler's Proclamation 2 ugly women spitting in face of Union officer; After ... Proclamation Officer tipping hat to 2 attractive women. Cartoon concerning Benjamin Butler's so-called "Woman Order," as military governor of New Orleans, to prevent local women from insulting U.S. soldiers. Issued, 1862. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006691867/>.

“Even the women of this lovely valley express their hatred of us in more ways than one, by words and actions. They tell us we are destined to defeat and some of the lovely maidens in Winchester go so far as to spit in the faces of our soldiers.”-John Emerson Anderson

I swear just what you read of the poor class of Ark. Very ignorant, shiftless & simple in habits except the habit of using tobacco which both men & women use to a very disgusting degree. I dont know whether Thomas uses tobacco now or not - but if he does & was to see some families here in the south I will warrant he would never want to touch any again, Father I do

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Discussion:

- White Union soldiers discover the South has a completely different culture than the North, as if it was a foreign country.
- Some white Union soldiers go as far as to call poor whites a separate race.
- White Union soldiers come to the realization that the North and South are culturally incompatible.

“The old couple, the husband seventy-five, the wife seventy years of age, belong to that class known as “poor whites”. They own the house they live in and about fifty acres of good land, with a few cattle, hogs, and chickens, and yet I don’t believe you could find in the whole north a mechanic’s family, if the husband was sober and industrious, so devoid of comforts as this family seemed to be. And so ignorant too.”-Newton T. Colby

Findings:

- White Union soldiers believed poor whites were duped into fighting the war.
 - “These people (poor Southern whites) had a worn look, as if something was wanting in the needs of both mind and body....Absolutely, there was a moral slavery of prejudice and ignorance, and all springing from “the institution” belonging to a few, whose injustices and evil these neglected ones fought so well to sustain”-Fiske

- White Union soldiers found women to be particularly problematic and unladylike.
 - “I hardly see how they (Southern women) live, in fact they do not live they merely exist, they are poor sickly looking wretches, the women almost invariably chew tobacco, and our 1st Sergt Crittenden told me the other day that he actually saw one chew snuff...”-Donald Benham

- White Union soldiers encounter what they perceive as a deep cultural divide between the North and the South.
 - “There are also many of the “poor whites” who are in even more desperate conditions. These Fla. Crackers are much less human than the negroes, more ignorant, dirty and lifeless-many of them look as if they had already been buried for months-their hair and skin and dirty, faded butternut clothes, look all of a piece. Even the negroes have great contempt for them.”-Esther Hill Hawk

Significance:

While originally fighting the war to reunite the Union, the comments made by white Union soldiers towards white Southerners suggest that the Union was never truly united to begin with.

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