Drew Gilpin Faust

This Republic of Suffering:
Death and the American Civil War

January 9, 2008

On January 9, 2008, Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust spoke on her newest book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. Faust's book is an illuminating study of the American struggle to comprehend the meaning and practicalities of death in the face of the unprecedented carnage of the Civil War. Dr. Faust took audience questions after her talk.

Allen Weinstein: Good evening. I'm Allen Weinstein. I'm the Archivist of the United States as a few of you know and I'm absolutely ecstatic about being here tonight to introduce a great historian, a great educator and, most importantly, a great person -- Drew Gilpin Faust. A few things about this evening. I don't think I have to tell anybody in this audience that Dr. Drew Gilpin Faust is the 28th president of some small university on the Charles called Harvard. She's a very distinguished historian of the U.S. Civil War and the American South and will be talking about her latest book which has just appeared which is called "The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War." She also is the Lincoln Professor of History in Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. I'll go into a little bit of her background in a minute except to say at this point that we are very grateful for our friends at C-SPAN for being with us tonight so that her remarks can be covered by the entire country and heard by the entire country. Thank you, C-SPAN, as always, eh?

[Applause]

In the remarks that she made at her installation as President -- that's a $5.00 Cambridge word for inauguration -- Dr. Faust said that -- I quote her here -- "Universities make commitments to the timeless and these investments have yields we cannot predict and then cannot measure. Universities are stewards of living tradition." This statement resonated with me and with my colleagues here at the National Archives in Washington because we like to think the same of our institution. We're focused in on educational

issues at all levels and civic literacy issues at all levels as a key goal within our mission to serve the public. A little word on her background, Dr. Faust's background. She served, before her current post as the founding dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies from 2001 to 2007. She has held a number of other academic posts -- University of Pennsylvania and elsewhere, Radcliffe -- and she has written six books, all well-received all establishing her as a master of her field. I could go on about all of her other achievements but I want to take a few minutes to talk about her as a person. She began her career in education and public service at the early age on nine. How? She wrote a letter to then-President Dwight Eisenhower in 1957 expressing her deep opposition to racial segregation. Quote, "Why should people feel that way because of the color of one's skin? It went on and on in this eloquent fashion Please, Mr. Eisenhower, please try and have schools and other things accept colored children colored people." It's a very eloquent letter, very eloquent letter, indeed. She also has been a remarkable scholar of a very painful subject and that's the subject that she will be talking about tonight the subject of her books and she has come to terms as a scholar with the academic importance of death in American history not an easy thing to do. I won't try to go to use her lines -- I'll let her do this herself -- but she did say something in an article she wrote earlier that I'd like to share with you. She said, "I remembered, I found myself as a historian returning to the past and, in particular to a document I encountered in my last year of graduate study." This, of course, was John Winthrops' famous diary. As John Winthrop sat on board the ship Arabella in 1630 sailing across the Atlantic to found the Massachusetts Bay colony he wrote a charge to his band of settlers a charter for their new beginnings. He offered what he considered, quoting her "a compass to steer by, a model but not a set of explicit orders. Instead, Winthrop sought to focus his followers on the broader significance of their project on the spirit in which they should undertake their shared work. I aim," she wrote, "to offer such a compass today one for us at Harvard and one I hope will have meaning for all of us who care about higher education for we are, inevitably as Winthrop urged his settlers to be knit together in this work as one."

As she prepares to take the stage let me say a word about the background that she has had to deal with, if I can find the word. It comes from another Massachusetts scholar Henry Adams and from the wonderful "Education of Henry Adams." What Adams said Basically was that when Lincoln and the others got to Washington -- 1860, '61 -- the war began. No one knew what to do. I won't go through all the comments. Not a man there knew what his task was to be or was fitted for it everyone without exception, Northern or Southern was to learn his business at the cost of the public. Lincoln, Seward, Sumner, the others could give no help to the young man seeking education. Their education was to cost a million lives -- not quite a million, but close enough -- and $10,000 million, more or less, North and South before the country could recover its balance and movement.

The history of that tragic war and the deaths it caused was recounted in brilliant form by our current speaker and it's with great pleasure that I invite the President of Harvard University Dr. Faust, to join us.

[Applause]

DR. DREW GILPIN FAUST: Thank you so much. That was so good. Thank you. Thank you so much for that very generous introduction Professor Weinstein, and thank you all for being here tonight. It's a great pleasure and a great honor for me to talk for the first time since its publication yesterday about this book because so much of it depends on materials I was able to use in the National Archives so it seems fitting and proper that I should return to the National Archives to say what it all amounted to -- all that help I got, all that advice all those wonderful documents -- and I just want to begin by thanking two people in particular. The first is Mike Musik, who, for many, many years presided over the Civil War materials in the Archives and got me launched on this project and the second is Trevor Plante who's sitting over here, who helped me when I was trying to really get this project done and came back to revisit some of the materials I'd already seen and try to get the book together and get it written. I think it was about three summers ago and I know he's now a celebrity because he found a Lincoln letter that no one had seen before but then, he was just Trevor helping me out in the Archives. So, that's what makes it possible for historians to do history and what the National Archives has within it also makes it possible for historians to do history and for us to think about what the past means to us. What I'd like to do tonight is to tell you a little bit about how I came to write the book the questions that motivated me then to tell you a little bit about some of the answers I found to those questions and then I want to leave you with two stories two stories about individuals stories that, as far as I'm aware have never been told before and stories that live here in the treasures of the National Archives stories that I found within the materials I used when I was doing my research here. They're stories of individuals, but they're stories that illustrate much larger themes about the work and so I think we can see reflected in some individual lives much bigger currents of life and death in Civil War America. The idea for this book grew out of earlier work I had done researching the experience of white Southern women in the Civil War South and as I read their diaries and letters -- and many of those letters were, in fact, here in the National Archives so this is not the first project that I have turned to the National Archives to support -- many of these letters from white Southern women are in the papers of the Confederate Secretary of War and women would write to the Confederate Secretary of War describing the desperation they felt and often asking that their husbands or brothers or sons be detailed home be permitted to have a leave be permitted to help in other ways and so in those letters, there's a very rich rendering of some of the demands and challenges and traumas of war and as I read those letters and the many other diaries and letters that made up the bulk of my research for my earlier book, I began to realize that at the heart of these women's experience was death -- the loss of their loved ones the fear of losing their loved ones the

economic consequences of losing their loved ones and the impact of deaths on their families on their communities, and on the nation as a whole -- and as I listened to the women telling me about these experiences I thought about what I had learned reading history of the Civil War and I realized that most of what I'd read had focused on the pursuit of military victory or, perhaps, the struggle over Southern independence or, perhaps, on the coming of emancipation but these were not the topics that appeared at the heart of these letters and of these women's experience. These were not the subjects that loomed largest in their renderings of their own lives and so as I listened to these voices I began to think about what it was they were telling me and about what their perceptions should mean for historians.

620,000 soldiers died in the American Civil War. Now, there are many ways of thinking about this. It is more than the total of war deaths from the American Revolution through the Korean War. The rate of death -- that's the incidence in comparison to the size of the population -- was six times the rate of death in World War II. A similar rate of death today, two percent, would mean six million people dead. Now, as I began to think about what it would mean to have six million people killed by war in the United States today I began to understand more fully why these women saw death as at the heart of their experience but military deaths, the 620,000 that has become the kind of accepted number when we talk about Civil War death tolls military deaths are only a part of the story. There are uncounted numbers of civilians who also died in the Civil War in ways that were undocumented -- from epidemic disease that was spread by movements of population armies and other population movements as a result of the war deaths from guerrilla conflict deaths from food shortages deaths from what we today might call collateral damage families that lived near battlefields other sorts of instances of military action that had an impact on civilian lives so that death -- its threat, its proximity, its actuality -- became the very most widely shared of the war's experiences.

For Americans in both North and South death was the warp and woof of the Civil War they lived through. So, I began to wonder, given those realities "How did the nation cope with such loss and how did individuals themselves cope with such loss?" and as I thought about this question I realized it had a variety of levels on which it ought to be considered from the very most logistical ones. What on earth did they do with all those bodies? How were they prepared, or were they prepared or how did they make themselves prepared to deal with that level of carnage? I wondered about the psychological impact of these deaths how human beings adapt to such levels of loss and how they understand the meaning of humanity in the face of such destruction.

I began to wonder, too, about the spiritual impact of such slaughter and such death. Sidney Lanier, a poet a Confederate soldier and a poet from the South framed this very eloquently, I think. He said, "How does God have the heart to allow it?" He represented those who began to ask questions about the benevolence of God about the

responsiveness of God in a world where such horror could take place. And then I asked, too, about the political meaning of this level of sacrifice. How does such loss shape the identity and the responsibilities of a nation state that has been the cause of the sacrifice and the cause of the loss? Civil War Americans often wrote about what they called the work of death, and that phrase itself seemed striking to me as I saw it again and again in the materials that I was reading and Civil War Americans meant two different but closely related things by this. They meant the duties of soldiers to fight and kill and die -- that was the work of soldiers what they were supposed to be doing -- but when they talked about the work of death they often meant, as well the impact of battle's consequences. They would look at the aftermath of a battle at the dead lying across the field and they would say, "There lies the work of death. "There is the work of death." So, work -- as a concept, as a word, as a term -- incorporated in their minds the notion of both effort and of impact and of the relationship between these. Now, that phrase, "work of death" reminds us, I think, that death in war doesn't just happen. It requires action, and it requires agents and it requires a variety of kinds of work.

This book is about the work that death required of all Civil War Americans. They had to learn to die. They had to learn to kill. They had to learn to bury the dead and to cope with the rent that the loss of loved ones introduced into the fabric of family and community. They had to mourn and they had to explain to themselves the meaning of the devastation that they faced and then they had to work to figure out the best ways to remember those that they had lost. Now, this work involved Americans individually as they dealt with their own bereavements but it also involved them collectively as they coped with the meaning of the dead for the nation more generally.

Now let me elaborate on some of the dimensions of that work of death and let me begin with the grim, logistical one -- what to do with the bodies. The unexpected and escalating level of destruction that the Civil War introduced posed challenges of capacity that produced even broader challenges of value. In the Mexican War, there were an estimated total of 2,000 battle deaths. The first Bull Run, in the summer of 1861 shocked the nation with 900 killed and 2,700 wounded. By the Battle of Shiloh, in April of 1862 yet less than a year later, there were 24,000 casualties including 1,700 dead on each side. By Gettysburg, the Union army alone had 23,000 casualties that included approximately 3,000 killed. It has been said that after Gettysburg there was an estimated six million pounds of animal and human flesh to be disposed of on the battlefield. When you read about Civil War battles and their aftermath you find a trope that appears again and again. Soldiers write about being able to walk from one side of the battlefield to the other without ever stepping on the ground stepping only on the dead bodies that were strewn across the field. One soldier wrote, "They paved the earth." Civil War armies had no regular burial details. They had no graves registration units. They had no dog tags or other formal identification procedures. There was no formal next-of-kin notification and there were very rudimentary ambulance services. In the Union army, for example there was no regular

ambulance service until towards the end of 1864 so that burial was an act of improvisation. The notion of "to the victor belongs the spoils" was often the reality of Civil War battles. The victor would be the one who held the ground. The victor, therefore, had the ground that was so strewn with the casualties of war and so it became, somehow, the responsibility of that army to figure out what to do with those who had died in battle. A week after Antietam, a Union surgeon reported and I quote, "The dead were almost wholly unburied and the stench arising from it such as to breed a pestilence."

Descriptions of Civil War battle indicate that often, it took days for the dead to be interred. Armies would be reeling with shock from the terrible experience of battle itself. To get themselves organized to figure out who was going to bury the dead took time took attention that, often, they didn't have and took a kind of focus that soldiers in the immediate aftermath of battle did not often display and so it was often quite a lengthy period, in our terms that occurred between when a soldier died and when he was buried. American soldiers, North and South resorted to mass burials, usually for the enemy in trenches and sometimes in other improvised ways, as well. There's a story after Antietam of a Union unit just throwing graves down a farmer's well because the farmer had evacuated and wasn't possessing his property so a kind of desperate Union unit trying to get rid of bodies threw them down his well. It was often the case that units that had not been in the battle were assigned to burial duties. Often, prisoners of war were given that duty. It was a way of demeaning them and forcing them to confront the often horrible, almost always horrible work of burying the dead. At the same time, civilians were usually swarming onto the battlefields to look for loved ones whose fate they did not know about and wanted to find out but also, civilians swarmed battlefields out of curiosity. There was a sense in the nineteenth century that a battle was a sublime event that it was a historic event and gawkers came to see what that meant. Often, they were horrified by what they saw and fled from it but, nevertheless, soldiers often commented on how having all those civilians around just made the realities of dealing with the aftermath of battle all the more difficult. The desperate kinds of measures to which soldiers turned in the effort to bury the dead -- "throwing them into pits like dead chickens" as one soldier described it -- led individuals to begin to ask what they had come to. What did this mean about their humanity?

What did this mean about decent burial as a concept to which human beings should be dedicated? What did it mean about their religious obligations and their obligations to their fellow soldiers, as well? So, you find early in the war in face of these terrible realities the emergence of an effort on the part of tens of thousands of individuals to resist this dehumanization that the conditions of mass slaughter and mass armies in the Civil War had introduced. Soldiers would try to identify their comrades to record their burial places, to write to their loved ones and tell them the fate of their husbands, brothers, and sons to improvise ways of interring individuals so that later, perhaps, a family member could come back and find that body and recognize it.

There are examples of soldiers who would be buried with a bottle into which their comrades had put on a piece of paper their name and any identifying information and the hope was that eventually someone might come back and disinter that soldier and find the bottle and know who that individual was. Soldiers often took very detailed notes about where their closest comrades were buried. They'd write down information like an individual was buried underneath an apple tree a hundred yards east of the railroad track three miles out of such and such a town and, once again, they hoped that loved ones might, after the war, be able to come back and reclaim the body. Families with means tried to come or arrange for come and identify bodies and claim them or arrange for the bodies to be shipped home. This is an era in which embalming becomes a part of treatment of dead bodies in a way it never was before the Civil War. Here are individuals dying away from home individuals dying under dubious conditions of identity. Families both wanted their loved ones back just to have them in the midst but also to be sure it really was their loved one that had died.

Soldiers also, by the middle of the war began to purchase I.D. badges, and a small industry of creating these I.D. badges emerged and you can find advertisements for them in Civil War publications but soldiers didn't have to have a purchased I.D. badge. They found other ways of making sure they could be identified -- writing information about themselves and their addresses on a Bible or a testament that they carried with them. One soldier said, "I always made sure to carry an envelope with me so that my name would be on that envelope and I could be identified if I was killed" and then there are the legends of soldiers before engagements that they expected to be especially bloody pinning their names onto their uniforms writing their names on pieces of paper and pinning them onto their uniforms. I was very moved to find in the archives of the law school at Harvard a piece of paper that Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote his name on after he was injured early in the war. He feared that he might become unconscious and be lost and no one would know who he was and so he wrote, "I am Oliver Wendell Holmes" and he wrote his father's name and address and, interestingly, Oliver Wendell Holmes kept this piece of paper his entire life which is why it ended up in the Harvard archives but it's a magnificent testimony, I think both to the meaningfulness that Holmes attributed to having undertaken to identifying himself but also to the desperation that required someone to turn to a measure like that to make sure that he did not die nameless and without sure knowledge being imparted to his family.

Another way in which soldiers and civilians together began to work for the assurance of humanity in death in the midst of war was the creation of cemeteries by the federal government in the course of the war. Gettysburg is probably the one that is best known. There were four others erected, established at battle sites during the war. This was an emerging acknowledgement of something new, which was that the dead were not simply the responsibility of their families, but also the responsibility of the nation for which they

died and when you think about the measures that I listed a few minutes ago -- no next-of-kin notification no burial, regular burial units, and so forth -- you can see that there wasn't that sense on the part of the nation at the beginning of the war and yet it begins to emerge and establishes itself most visibly during the war in the creation of these cemeteries and yet still, about half of the Civil War dead were never identified. This created, in the words of one resident of Gettysburg "a dread void of uncertainty for the kin they left behind." There were many errors in information. There were men who were reported dead who then walked in the front doors of their houses. There were also wives, mothers, and children who wondered for the rest of their lives about a family member who never came home.

Jane Mitchell received a letter after Gettysburg from a soldier who described burying a corpse wrapped in a blanket with her son's name pinned to it but Jane Mitchell never saw the body and she was never convinced it was her son. She wrote, "I would like to find that grave. It was years before I gave up the hope that he would someday appear. I got it into my head he would make his way back to me. This, I knew, was very silly of me but the hope was there, nevertheless." The absence of identifiable bodies left many Americans with a biding uncertainty and fantastical hopes illusions that, in some measure, made their world endurable. As we think about civilians and about their work as mourners it's important to remember how many of the bereaved did not have sure knowledge about the fate of a loved one. We often talk today about closure. Any sort of closure was elusive for tens of thousands of bereaved Americans who had no certain knowledge about the outcome of the lives of their lost soldiers. Mourning is, in considerable measure accepting the reality of death and loss of coming through a process that enables one to come to terms with the reality of a life's end. It's very hard to do that when the reality you are supposed to confront is so uncertain.

Historians are interested in change and historians usually find change occurring over decades or even centuries. One of the reasons that war is so compelling as a historical subject is that it accelerates change not just change in national boundaries or political regimes but change in fundamental values and assumptions change in aspects of human experience that are not so susceptible to rapid shifts or alterations.

We can see in the Civil War period both powerful continuities and significant changes in many assumptions about death and we can see very dramatic shifts in official policies toward the dead. There appeared a new sense of national obligation to these citizens who had died in the nation's service. Sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined. Citizen soldiers snatched from the midst of life generated obligations for a nation that was defining its purposes and its polity through military struggle. A war that was about union, Citizenship freedom, and human dignity required that the government attend to the needs of those who died in its service. Execution of these newly recognized responsibilities

would prove an important vehicle for the expansion of federal power that transformed the postwar nation.

The establishment of national cemeteries and the emergence of a new Civil War pension system to care for the dead and their survivors yielded programs of a scale and a reach that was unimaginable before the war. Death created the modern American union not just by ensuring national but by shaping enduring national structures and commitments. The postwar effort to secure respectful treatment of the dead -- a commitment that the real urgency of war had not permitted, had postponed -- seemed inseparable from the principles for which the war had been fought. An author writing in "Harper's" magazine framed it this way. He said, "A democratic republic like ours based on the equality of the race and affirming justice for all cannot afford to pass by unheeded, however humble those who have proven themselves by fierce and sturdy warfare at once its best citizens and brave defenders."

Between 1865 and 1871 there was a massive federal reburial program. Union soldiers scoured the Southern countryside looking on battlefields, roads, byways, villages in search of every Union soldier's grave. Ultimately, they located and reburied more than 300,000 Union dead. They made every effort to identify these bodies as they reburied them, and they succeeded in doing so with fifty-four percent of that total. They created, in the course of this seventy-four new national cemeteries. The scale of this effort and its location in the federal government -- not in the states, not in localities -- would've been just unthinkable before the war. It was meant to be an affirmation of the values of humanity that, during the war itself had been more often honored in the breach than the observance. Now, this program was only for Union soldiers and that was much resented by white Southerners. Under the lead of Southern women another voluntary effort for the South was undertaken and these women worked to gather bodies from the countryside around Richmond around Atlanta, in small towns across the South and the scale of this effort is remarkable in many ways, too because it was a private effort. Just to give you an example, in Petersburg, Virginia 30,000 dead Confederates into the Blandford Cemetery. When you think that the prewar population of Petersburg was 18,000, the cemetery was larger than the city's population before the war. These cemeteries for Civil War dead were unlike any cemeteries Americans had ever seen. They weren't churchyards with clusters of family gravestones. They weren't garden cemeteries meant to inspire you with elevated thoughts about nature and religion and death. Instead, they were ordered rows of tombstones almost like soldiers gathered in formation and many of them without names.

Now let me tell you the two stories that I mentioned at the outset. The first is a story that is illustrative of the power and longevity of hope among those whose kin were missing in the war. It's the story of a dead Union soldier with a face but without a name and it's a story

that lives in a box in consolidated correspondence file of the Quartermaster General and it was a box that Mike Musik brought me the first day I arrived here and said I was interested in this subject. In 1868 U.S. Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs decided to publish in Northern magazines a drawing of a soldier who had died unidentified in a Washington military hospital in 1864. The man had arrived in the hospital too weak to give any information about himself and he would've been very quickly forgotten if he hadn't had on his person the considerable sum of $360. So, the surgeon on duty in the hospital arranged to have him photographed after his death and the likeness was copied at the behest of the War Department. The War Department had this published in a number of periodicals a drawing made from the photograph, an engraving and the announcements about this soldier also mentioned that he had left not just the money but an ambrotype of a young child. Now, letters streamed into Montgomery Meigs' office. Some of these letters may, indeed have been from fortune hunters, but when you read the letters the majority display such poignant desperation it's very difficult to doubt their sincerity. A Mrs. Jenny McConkey of Illinois seemed to recognize the futility of her hopes when she wrote -- She suggested that the man might be her son whom she'd last heard from in 1862 but it was hard to explain the photo as her son had been childless but he liked children very much, she said so maybe he would've carried this photo around. A woman in Pennsylvania whose husband had last been heard of as a prisoner at Andersonville wrote that she was in "a constant daze of anxiety” -- those were her words, “a constant daze of anxiety" -- and she hoped very much to see the ambrotype and to see whether this child might've been someone associated with her.

A Martha Dort wrote that she had been told her husband had been shot while he was being transferred from one prison camp to another, but, she wrote "That may not be true. Mistakes so often occur." She was very encouraged by the picture of the little child because they had a son. She and her husband had a son who was between three and four years old and her husband carried a picture of him in plaid pants. So, she enclosed fifty cents for Montgomery Meigs and asked him to please send her a copy of the photograph but Meigs returned her fifty cents because the child in the picture was not wearing plaid pants. The mysterious soldier was never identified but he had been a catalyst for an outpouring of despair from women who represented the many thousands bereft not just of their loved ones but of the kind of information that might enable them to truly mourn.

I think it's chilling to note the hope that inflects these letters because what these women were hoping for was not a live husband or a live son. They were hoping for a dead one. To know was itself to be a relief. They had passed the moment where to hope for the actual living person had been possible. It was, in some sense, information as much as individuals that was missing in Civil War America.

Now, the second story is of a man who, for half a decade at the end of the war devoted himself to trying to end that incapacitating uncertainty for tens of thousands of families. I first encountered him as the unnamed author of a document called "Journal of a Trip Through Parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia Made to Locate the Scattered Graves of Union Soldiers " in Record Group 92, which, I think, is my favorite record group. I learned later, through my research that this journal was the work of Edmund Whitman who was a wartime quartermaster whose efforts locating bodies all across the western theater became critical in the evolution of the reburial program and in the discovery, in his theater alone of more than 100,000 Union soldiers who were eventually relocated to federal cemeteries. Whitman tells how he undertook this task -- his procedures for gathering information for locating graves, for discovering identities. He describes the enormous hostility of white Southerners to these efforts to honor the Union dead. He also describes the support of black Southerners many of whom had been tending Union graves and burying Northern soldiers throughout the war at no small peril to their own safety. Whitman believed, as he wrote that "the government held a stewardship "the account of which must be rendered to the spirit of humanity and Christian patriotism to the friends of republican liberty of human freedom and progress throughout the world." He saw his undertaking as a kind of sacred act honoring those who'd sacrificed their lives. Now, as I became more and more interested in this man and his efforts I began to try to figure out who Edmund Whitman was. Well, it's a small world. Turns out, he went to Harvard. He graduated in 1838. He was a schoolteacher, and he was an abolitionist and he migrated to Kansas to combat slavery in Kansas when the fate of Kansas as a new state was in question. He was closely allied with John Brown and then he became a quartermaster at the outset of the war. He regarded his ministrations to the dead as the fulfillment of an obligation to those who fought on behalf of the cause for which he had struggled for so long. Whitman, Edmund Whitman, was a survivor of the war but his life was indelibly shaped by his experience in it. Ambrose Bierce, the writer and soldier, said that after the war, he thought of himself as "sentenced to life." Sidney Lanier, looking back on the war from his experience in the Confederacy said that for most of his generation in the South life since the war was, as he described it "Pretty much, the whole of life has been not dying." We are all, in some sense, Civil War survivors because we have all inherited its legacy of death and sacrifice.

I would like to close by reading the two final paragraphs of the book, which, I think, makes this point about why we are all the survivors of this war. "We still live in the world of death the Civil War created. We take for granted the obligation of the state to account for the lives it claims in its service. The absence of next-of-kin notification of graves registration procedures of official provision for decent burial all seem to us unimaginable, even barbaric. The Civil War ended this neglect and established policies that led to today's commitment to identify and return every soldier killed in the line of duty. But even as the Civil War brought new humanity in the management of death so too it introduced a level of

carnage that foreshadowed the wars of the century to come. Even as individuals and their fates assumed new significance so those individuals threatened to disappear into the bureaucracy and mass slaughter of modern warfare, we still struggle to understand how to preserve our humanity and our selves within such a world. We still seek to use our deaths to create meaning where we are not sure any exists. The Civil War generation glimpsed the fear that still defines us -- the sense that death is the only end. We still work to live with the riddle that they -- the Civil War dead and their survivors alike -- had to solve so long ago."

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Thank you.

WEINSTEIN: Thank you.

FAUST: Thank you.

WEINSTEIN: Dr. Faust has agreed to answer some questions. We have microphones on both sides. If you'd like to ask a question, please go to the microphone. We'll take it from there. Yes, sir?

MAN: David Dulles, HLS '61. In the opinion of President Faust could the Civil War have been prevented by better American statesmanship in the 1850s with the remedies of emancipation compensation, and taxation given that the economies of some of the Yankee states were deeply implicated in slavery?

FAUST: There's --

[Laughter]

There's a whole historiographical literature about was the Civil War preventable. I can't wander around? Can I wander? I have a microphone. There's a whole Civil War literature about was the Civil War preventable the irrepressible conflict and it's something I had to study for my Ph. D. exams. It's something I've taught graduate students. It's too elaborate to really go into here but one of the things I've always found as a historian is, I've always been troubled by counterfactual questions you know, go back and redo it over again and then say how it would've turned out. I'm much more interested in how it did turn out and what the various choices were and how people saw their decision trees. Whether or not we had to have a war I think you could take it right up to the moment of decision-making on the eve of Fort Sumter and still say, "Perhaps the war could've been repressed so I

think it's just a question that we'd have to go through piece by piece and you raised a number of very important issues that could've gone one way or another that might've had a different set of influences and it's just, I think, more than we can bite off right here tonight, but thank you very much.

WEINSTEIN: Take a question there.

MAN: I gather the big-city newspapers did print lists of casualties. If so, how was that information gleaned and disseminated?

FAUST: The casualty lists were, themselves, an improvisation and you can find individuals saying, "All right. Did the chaplain send in the casualty list? Whoops, he didn't do it, so maybe the captain will do it and then there were agents who came down and found themselves the representatives of voluntary organizations who tried to put together the casualty lists. There are also many casualty lists here in the National Archives but you can find that they were often compiled well after the battles themselves and were incomplete and inaccurate and were not necessarily the basis for the ones that were printed in the newspapers. So, there was a failure of attentiveness to the bureaucracies of this mass warfare. There's a wonderful quote from Thomas Wentworth Higginson as he undertook a project at the end of the war to count the Massachusetts dead of the war and he talks about how the people who were good at red tape didn't understand military matters and the people who understood military matters didn't understand red tape and so the reporting of the casualties and other statistic of the war was confounding to him and very to determine the accuracy of.

MAN: Madam President, John Newmar Harvard College, Class of '74. I salute our very first Southern Civil War historian president and that makes it absolutely irresistible to ask you how, as President, you feel about the fact that the Civil War is the only major American conflict whose Harvard graduates on the losing side are not yet remembered in any sort of memorial on the campus.

[Laughter]

FAUST: If you read my book you'll find I don't talk about that explicitly but the arguments that have occurred over whether or not to honor the Confederate dead are arguments that had their origins in the very aftermath of the Civil War itself and you find someone like Ambrose Bierce, the writer. He has a poem that he writes about how the brave should honor the brave and "I, Ambrose Bierce, as a Union soldier have no hostility to the Confederate dead and we all need to understand and someone who cannot forgive and forget is a person who is not himself a truly brave person."

So, Ambrose Bierce was very eloquent. On the other side, you have Frederick Douglass saying, "It matters, what you fought for and death does not erase those differences" and I knew about the conflict at Harvard and so forth about whether the Southern dead should be included in Memorial Hall but when I was doing the research on this project I was so struck by seeing the origins of those arguments taking place more than a century earlier. I think it'd be really interesting to have a discussion of those arguments in a historical way and to raise them and see how the community feels about their relevance and their viability in the present time. So, it's a question that's been very much in my consciousness. Thank you for asking that.

WEINSTEIN:: First of all, I'd like to say that all Harvard historians Northern and Southern, are welcome at the National Archives.

[Laughter]

Yes?

MAN: Good evening, ma'am. As, I believe, the colonel mentioned Harvard does have a number of institutions that were brought about as memorials to the Civil War -- not just Memorial but also Henry Lee Higginson giving Soldiers Field and, within smaller institutions within the university plaques and other memorials. How did smaller institutions, be they municipalities or organizations like universities. commemorate the war dead, and is there a split between the North and the South or was it so cataclysmic for both sides that there wasn't the option to be for the Union or the Confederacy in your memorial?

FAUST: In your memorial? Well, I think we should remember that the loss of the South proportionally, was so much greater. Economic, in terms of individuals, and so forth the South was really reeling after the war and so it was hard-pressed to come up with the funds, often to build the memorials that the North could better afford and you can see this in the reburial movement where the ladies of Richmond, as they called themselves are trying to come up with headstones or with appropriate re-digging of the headboards of the graves to preserve them and so forth and so it's a much more difficult challenge in the South, where people are so strapped financially and otherwise but there are commonly shared memorials. There's a kind of soldiers memorial that you can find North and South in small towns. There was a manufacturer who did the kind of generic soldier and then adapted it for the region to which it was going and I think that the effort to name is a very important part of both sections' memorialization of the war. We think about Maya Lin, perhaps and about the Vietnam War Memorial naming and the very powerful impact that naming of names had and yet the naming of names, in my view begins with the Civil War memorialization of the dead and the recognition of the importance of the individual that is embodied in that naming of names and that was very much shared North and South so there are differences and similarities.

WEINSTEIN: Yes?

WOMAN: Debra Firenze, Radcliffe '67

FAUST: Good.

WOMAN: when it was still Radcliffe.

[Laughter]

WOMAN: Um It's a kind of complicated question but when I heard about your work, I was wondering - Why did the death in Civil War have such impact? Weren't we already living in a society where people died young of diseases? I guess my question is sort of, if the Civil War had happened in the middle of the eighteenth century or earlier than that when a lot of people died from other things would the level of death create the kind of angst? Were we already a healthier society where life expectancy was better so that it wasn't so awful then it was awful again in 1865? My question isn't making any sense. It's a little muddled.

FAUST: No. It makes a lot of sense. Partly, it's the demographic realities that you're asking about and then there's the nature of the death and Civil War Americans used a lot of words to say this death is different. They talked about ordinary death which meant death before the Civil War. They talked about death's peculiar conditions and necessities in the Civil War period so they had a very clear conception that this was different. How was it different? In the mid nineteenth century, individuals were under threat of survival when they were small when they were infants, but if they got through the very earliest years of life, they were likely to live through to middle age, at least, and so with individuals in their twenties or thirties or young adults those people were not supposed to die and there's the statistic I quote in the book that an individual was five times more likely to die if he went in the army than if he didn't so he -- you know, you're a young man -- increased his likelihood of death very dramatically under the circumstances of civil war so that seemed wrong to people even though infant mortality still was quite high and what we call the demographic transition did not really occur till the end of the nineteenth century. The kind of longevity the kind of early-life survival doesn't happen until later. We, nevertheless, have patterns that are violated by the nature of civil war death. The second part of what I would say is, I think people were also horrified that human beings were doing this to each other. Although most of the death in the Civil War was from disease -- twice as many people died from disease as from battle wounds -- nevertheless, you find someone like Garfield later became President, of whom it was said "He never got over seeing men who had died because other men had killed them" and so I think that notion of what does it mean to be human what are the conditions in which you die it was the kind of death as

well as the numbers of death and the departure from a good death to a death that often was unidentified anonymous, and terrible.

MAN: Good evening. Thank you for your presentation tonight. I'm Bob Willard. Like Mike Musik, who you mentioned in your presentation, I'm a former of the Abraham Lincoln Institute and we Lincoln enthusiasts are looking forward greatly to the symposium that Harvard is going to present in 2009 for the bicentennial. Here's in Washington, we're about to get the treat of a brand-new open Lincoln site when they open the Lincoln Cottage which we think of as Soldiers' Home or the Anderson Cottage where Lincoln went to escape the miseries of downtown Washington. I raise it because people are now going to learn that when he was out there, he was right next to a cemetery and about twenty or thirty burials a day, on average took place at that cemetery. I wonder if, in your research, you came across anything dealing with Lincoln's own perception of death because of that propinquity or just in general. We all associate him with the major speech he gave at Gettysburg but the cemetery was something he lived next to every day during the warm months of the year.

FAUST: That's really interesting. I wish I had. Makes me want to go and look again so I think we better go do some more research. Thank you for giving me that tip.

WEINSTEIN: We have four more people waiting to ask questions, after which those of you who'd like to purchase one of these books can have it autographed by the author but let's go ahead with the next question here.

WOMAN: Emma Lang, born-and-bred Cambridge townie.

[Laughter]

You talked a lot about the impact of the battle to us but I wondered if you could briefly address the impact of civilian deaths because those numbers also skyrocketed, both, as you said, from disease and I wondered if the reaction to them was different or whether it was sort of just incorporated into this whole mess that was taking place in people's minds.

FAUST: Some civilian deaths seemed directly associated with the war -- for example, the famous death of Jenny Wade when the bullet comes into her kitchen in Gettysburg -- so she seemed, in some ways a casualty of the war like a soldier. Other deaths -- deaths of children from epidemic disease as Longstreet brought his children to Richmond from one disease environment into another disease environment where they were exposed to epidemics that the army camps near Richmond were having -- no one knew quite how to think about that. Was that a war-related death? Was that just childhood and disease? Do you blame the war? So, I think it depends a little bit. I mean, we can look back and say "There are these different kinds of death all of which came as part of the war" but I think it

did contribute to a general sense of loss and of vulnerability and of a centrality of death and it was shared very broadly from the military deaths and the civilian deaths, as well. That's a really interesting question.

MAN: Thank you. Tom Adams, Harvard '63. It was a very thought-provoking presentation and some of the questions. On the question memorializing Civil War dead I understand -- someone from Georgetown may add to this -- but I understand that when they built the hall there at Georgetown University there's a deliberate color scheme of the blue and gray not so much to honor the Confederate soldiers as to emphasize reconciliation. It's sort of a different take on that. The question I want to ask you is about the impact of this tremendous difference between North and South and I was so impressed by your talking about the women at Petersburg having to dig up all these bodies and burying them. I remember Theda Skocpol talking about the Veterans Administration as kind of the founding of the welfare state, or a forerunner of it and I just wondered -- in your view, as a Southern historian -- does this experience impact on differences between North and South and the whole attitude towards government and it's functions?

FAUST: Yeah. It did not escape the South's notice that this tremendous amount of energy and governmental capacity was being invested exclusively in the North. I think it had a contribution, as you describe it to the perception of what the role of the state might be but I think it had another impact, as well which is, I think that the efforts undertaken by these Southern women to locate the dead and bury the dead and the ceremonies that went along with those efforts became the source of the Lost Cause movement and contributed in important ways to the ideology of continuing Southern resistance and continuing Southern nationalism and all the kinds of ideas that got caught up in the Lost Cause movement and you can see the statements made at commemorations of the dead in Magnolia Cemetery in Charleston, for example when the Gettysburg dead are brought back. That ceremony has some very, very aggressive political statements which women felt they could safely make whereas men may not have felt brave enough to do so under the political conditions of Radical Reconstruction for example, so it becomes a kind of source of things.

MAN: Hi there. Not too long ago, I heard a story. I was talking to a girl who had said that while walking through Gettysburg field she encountered the spirit of a dead soldier who had been engaged before he went off to war and she said he was still searching for his fiancee. I've never had that experience, but I've read a lot of stories of people who have. Do you have any perspective on that phenomenon?

[Laughter]

FAUST: I found those spirits late nights in the National Archives.

[Laughter and applause]

WOMAN: What sort of records of the dead were kept at the horrific prisoner of war camps such as Andersonville, the one you mentioned, if any?

FAUST: The Andersonville story is a very interesting one because there was a Union prisoner who was charged during his imprisonment to record the gravestones -- not the gravestones; there weren't any stones -- the burial places of the dead and after the war, he let it be known that he had copied this list which he wasn't supposed to do and had kept a record of it so this came to the knowledge of Clara Barton who brought it to the attention of Edwin Stanton the Secretary of War, and he established a mission that included Clara Barton and others to go down to Andersonville and see if they could use that list to identify the graves at Andersonville, and they, in fact did use the list and identified a very large percentage over 12,000 of the dead, in an excursion in the summer of 1865 immediately after the war. So, once again, there was a kind of improvised way of turning up a very wide identification of the dead at Andersonville, and that's an important story.

WEINSTEIN: Thank you, Dr. Faust. There are a couple more things before we close off the evening. First, I noticed a number of you have indicated your Harvard identities when you talk or your Radcliffe identities. Yale '67

[Laughter]

and this is a one-time offer to all the Yalies out there who would like to ask a question. No, actually. Too late. Too late. Mine is, I guess, a bit of a question, a bit not. We have this wonderful essay by Walt Whitman on the death of Abraham Lincoln in which he says "How often since that dark and dripping Saturday -- that chilly April day, now fifteen years bygone -- my heart has entertain'd the dream, the wish to give of Abraham Lincoln's death its own special thought and memorial" et cetera, et cetera. Is there a bit of poetry, a bit of something that has struck you and stayed with you in connection with all this work that you've done on death?

FAUST: There's a lot of poetry about death in the war Whitman's, perhaps, the best-known and, arguably, the most powerful. Emily Dickinson also wrote very eloquently about death in the context of the war It's been argued by some that she wasn't writing about the war. I completely disagree. I think that if you look at the kinds of metaphors she uses there, it's just infused with guns and battles and so forth and so I found those very memorable, as well. Melville also wrote a book of poems about the Civil War and I think that the piece of poetry that I will try to quote accurately in response to your request is very closely related to the very last words I read to you at the end of the book. Melville talked about "A riddle of death of which the slain Sole solvers are" and that has been very

much in my mind always as I thought about the riddle that we all face and those who've gone before who've solved it.

Thank you.

[Applause]