“THAT BOLD AMERICAN:” THE CONSTRUCTION OF RACE IN THE LETTERS OF CHRISTOPHER WREN BUNKER

by

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(Under the Direction of Cody Marrs)

ABSTRACT

Often undervalued in literary studies, Civil War letters encapsulate personal and private exchanges amid a time of national conflict. The letters of Christopher Wren Bunker, a Chinese-Thai American fighting for the Confederacy in the U.S. Civil War, fashion a narrative of assimilation that attempts to defy his ambiguous racialized status, aligning the Bunker family with the planter class of the U.S. South. In his adoption of nineteenth-century letter conventions and the meticulous, performative nature of his writing, Bunker demonstrates his own ideas of whiteness, synonymous with economic privilege and citizenship. He additionally conforms to normative ideas of fraternity and masculinity in response to the distinct Otherness of his family, especially his father and uncle, the Siamese Twins. Viewing these letters as a literary object thus yields a complex account of one individual’s motivations for fighting to defend the perpetuation of an established racial hierarchy to which he does not conform.

INDEX WORDS: Civil War Letters, Nineteenth-Century Letters, Civil War, Whiteness, Race, U.S. South, Christopher Wren Bunker, Siamese Twins

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Bunker family, the Kammer family, my own family, and all of the families that have adopted me as their own.

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INTRODUCTION

On November 2nd, 1863, Christopher Wren Bunker penned a letter in response to his sister's previous missive, which informed him of the birth of another sister at their plantation home in North Carolina.[1] Bunker, stationed somewhere between Arlington, Virginia and "the edge of Tennysee" while writing, was miles away from his family, fighting in the U.S. Civil War.[2] Fearing the country to be on the verge of a "big fight,"[3] Bunker happily distracted himself from the violence at hand, imploring the elder sister to write and "give [him] all the news" of the child.[4] Instead of referring to the infant as a baby or even calling her by her name, however, Bunker chose a different branding within his letter, stating that he would "like very much to see the Bold American."[5] Certainly, the child was bold to come into the world at a time of turmoil and uncertainty, but such patriotic branding of the baby erases other possible identity markers, placing her life in a narrative of loyal dedication to cause and country. This curious labeling of an infant, not even old enough to declare allegiance to one side of the conflict or another, illuminates the complexity of Bunker's position as an Asian-American man in the nineteenth-century United States South.

The son of Chang Bunker, one-half of the internationally famous Siamese Twins, Christopher Wren Bunker enlisted in the Confederate army shortly after the beginning of the

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[1] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Coll. 04822-z, Christopher Wren Bunker Letters, The Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University North Carolina Chapel Hill, 8.
[2] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 8.
[3] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 6.
[4] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 8.
[5] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7-8.

war.[6] Though their outward appearance (Chinese-Thai descent) signaled minority status, Chang and Eng Bunker raised their children to sympathize with the Confederate cause after integrating into the planter class of the U.S. South through the purchase of a 110-acre estate.[7] Their North Carolina plantation was a successful business venture for many years, relying on the cultivation of tobacco that was harvested by black slaves.[8] Such a remarkable situation was unimaginable for most Asian immigrants living in the United States during the nineteenth century. Christopher's father and uncle, Chang and Eng Bunker, were also naturalized as United States citizens, "inexplicably, at a time when naturalization was available only to free white persons," defying the norm for Asian immigrants.[9] The conjoined twins each married white sisters from the Yates family, Sarah and Adelaide, and sired twenty-two children, two of which (Stephen Bunker and Christopher Wren Bunker) fought in the U.S. Civil War.[10] As scholar Cynthia Wu submits, it is "unclear how two Asian men with extraordinarily unusual anatomy could have been accepted into one of the antebellum South's more prominent plantation families," allowed to live and work freely amongst and within a white community that waged war for the propagation of slavery, an institution of racial hierarchy.[11] Considering these questions, I wish to investigate how the letters of Christopher Wren Bunker fashion a narrative of assimilation that attempts to defy his ambiguous racialized status and align the Bunker family with the planter class of the South.

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[6] Stuart Heaver, "The Chinese Soldiers who Fought in the American Civil War." *Post Magazine: South China Morning Post* (2013), http://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/article/1270170/gettysburg-redress.
[7] Gordon Kwok, "Christopher Wren Bunker and Stephen Decatur Bunker." *Association to commemorate the Chinese serving in the American Civil War*, last modified January 18, 2009, https://sites.google.com/site/accsacw/Home/confederate-1.
[8] Kwok, "Christopher Wren Bunker and Stephen Decatur Bunker."
[9] Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 4.
[10] Kwok, "Christopher Wren Bunker and Stephen Decatur Bunker."
[11] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 4.

The nineteenth century letter is often categorized as a transparent historical artifact, para-literary at best. While letters can be studied as vehicles for recorded facts, such an understanding severely underrepresents the intricacy of the genre. As outlined by Elizabeth Hewitt, the epistolary form "emphasizes social mediation," in which words exchanged across distances must negotiate numerous underlying intentions and desires when communicating ideas.[12] According to Hewitt, letters are a "literary form whose function is to congregate aggregates," bringing people together not only for the transmission of information but also for the development of community, bonding over similar devotion and anxiety for their soldiers on the frontlines.[13] For Bunker's purposes, letters were not only a means of communication with his sister. The missives of Christopher Wren Bunker acted as a narrative of identity that he wrote into existence. Refusing to accept an ambiguous mixed-race identity, Bunker constructed a narrative of whiteness that promoted economic stability and security for him and the Bunker family in the claiming of white identity.

As a soldier for the Confederate States of America, Bunker's letters home provided him with an excellent vehicle for this narrative of assimilation. As Christopher Hager notes in *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters,* the "personal letters that millions of Civil War soldiers and their families wrote to each other between 1861 and 1865 number somewhere close to half a billion."[14] These letters told the story of day-to-day instances of war from the perspective of those who lived it, giving a soldier like Bunker space to create his own narrative of events through pen and ink. Though some scholars may disparage the letters of the nineteenth

[12] Elizabeth Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.
[13] Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865,* 173.
[14] Christopher Hager, *I Remain Yours: Common Lives in Civil War Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 2.

century for their "repetitive and hollow" tendencies, the formulaic nature of the genre conveys a variety of intentions that can only be understood through concentrated analysis, ultimately attesting to its place in literary study.[15] Christopher Wren Bunker's use of nineteenth-century letter conventions and the meticulous, performative nature of his writing demonstrates a cultivation of identity in written form. Epistolary device provides Bunker the medium through which he develops his own ideas of whiteness, synonymous with the economic privilege and citizenship he enjoyed in North Carolina. Viewing these letters as a literary object thus yields a complex account of one individual's motivations for taking up arms to defend the perpetuation of an established racial hierarchy to which he does not conform.

[15] Hager, 5.

FOLLOWING CONVENTION: WRITING AS PERFORMANCE

Taken as a holistic literary text, Christopher Wren Bunker's letters exemplify many of the conventions characteristic of the nineteenth century letter as a genre. William Merrill Decker notes that nineteenth century letters have received much attention in the scholarly community as archived documents, potential sources of information that follow a prescriptive form.[16] But viewing these missives as "performative" and "personally inscribed" literary texts reveals a complex use of convention for personal benefit.[17] In content, style, and even penmanship, Bunker's writing narrativizes his vested interest in assimilating into the white, planter class in which his family resides. His letters function similarly to Fredric Jameson's notion of narrative in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,* with their attention to social class (though with an attitude of assimilation instead of deconstruction) and their understanding of narrative as the telling of historical sequences that cultivate their own historical significance by and through their retelling.[18] Bunker's use of formulaic convention constructs a narrative not only of a correspondent "in the world that surrounds [him]" but also of a writer wishing to "explore and construct [his] relation to that world," repurposing convention as he sees fit to access his self-given identity.[19] Bunker's meticulous dedication to convention is, in fact, a

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[16] William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 4.
[17] Decker, 4.
[18] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 28.
[19] Theresa S. Gaul and Sharon M. Harris, introduction to *Letters and Cultural Transformations in the United States, 1760-1860,* ed. Theresa S. Gaul and Sharon M. Harris (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 2.

negotiation of social hierarchy through the performative nature of the written word, portraying a narrative of whiteness to secure his family's station as part of the planter class of the American South.[20]

Though Civil War letters often conveyed information related to the larger conflict, the transmission of personal experience comprised the bulk of a letter's content. In many of his letters, Bunker documented the direction of his marching, the towns that he passed, and the people he saw. Bunker's July 1st letter, for example, mentioned that they were "now on the march," though he was not sure "where [they] are going too."[21] In this same letter, Bunker thanked his sister for the ribbons that she enclosed, presumably as a gift sent from home.[22] The inclusion of personal information, though different for each individual writer, results in no real deviation from formulaic convention or the expectations of the genre: a greeting, an expression of personal health, and a mention of whereabouts, before signing off with some signal of affection. As Decker suggests, even "the invention and expressiveness that accomplished writers infuse into the genre conform by and large to period expectations."[23] Though correspondents adhered to genre conventions within their letters for a variety of reasons, it should be noted that conventionality was not simply an uninspired attempt at putting words on a page, but a labored process by which correspondents conveyed social station and authority through the genre's expectations and guidelines.

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[20] My understanding of class has been greatly influenced by Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism,* which describes class as an "economic order" based on "material well-being" and "racial consciousness" in the nineteenth century. The property that the Bunker family owned (land and slaves) not only provided economic stability but also gave the family higher status within their community. For more information on class, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 201.
[21] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[22] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[23] Decker, 26.

For many nineteenth century writers, like Christopher Wren Bunker, conventionality was a vehicle for communicating one's aspirations towards a higher social station. Writers who "copied" other texts or relied heavily on guidelines of a genre, like letter correspondents and conventional nineteenth-century poets, employed conventions to place themselves within the literary world or high society.[24] Their adoptive conventions then imitated the social stature that they wished to acquire in their own lives. Poet-copyist Lucretia Davidson's specialization in "maternal prayer and the infant elegy," for example, allowed her to imagine and create the vision of the woman she wanted to become through the use of standard poetic trope.[25] In a similar way, an expression of gratitude for the small gifts exchanged between writers, like the ribbons Bunker received in his July 1st letter, worked within genre expectations to create an affluent persona accustomed to gift-giving culture.[26] Though most soldiers could only enclose a few dollars to keep their families from starvation,[27] the Bunker family's sharing of ribbons, like Emily Dickinson's inclusion of flowers or leaves within her missives, showed an attention to matters more delicate and nuanced than the harsh and brutal realities of war.[28] While the planter class was ravenous for wartime news, gift-giving and verbose thanks within letters represented an air of sophistication that Bunker wished to acquire. Bunker's utilization of conventional letter-writing patterns similarly expressed his familiarity with planter class expectations, an art once contained to the literate upper classes. His participation in this tradition, then, encouraged the acceptance of Bunker's written narrative of identification with the white, landowning gentry of the planter class.

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[24] Claudia Stokes, "The Poetics of Unoriginality: The Case of Lucretia Davidson," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 32, no. 1 (2015): 42, accessed January 20, 2019, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/581827.
[25] Stokes, 33.
[26] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[27] Hager, 129.
[28] Decker, 161.

Though the content of Bunker's missives may seem trite or unoriginal to the modern reader, Bunker's letters were filled with material and information that accompanied the genre's conventions, fulfilling both societal and familial expectations. During the U.S. Civil War, soldiers often penned letters filled with "marching, loss of sleep, poor food or no food, bad water, lack of shelter and exposure to extremes of heat and cold, dust and mud, and the torments of insects;" essentially, the agonizing and deprived experience of camp life.[29] Such discomforts appeared in Bunker's letters as well, as evidenced by his November 18th, 1863 letter in which he petitioned for warmer clothing from his sister. Bunker stated that he must have "socks and a pair of gloves" if he was "ever [to] survive the weather," fearing the elements more than potential battle injury.[30] Similarly, in his November 2nd letter, Bunker admitted that he had not been able to draw any money from his services as a soldier due to the Confederacy's lack of funds, leaving him without the resources to acquire proper clothes.[31] The repetition of daily troubles and personal complaints comprised much of war letters as a genre, existing not only to inform family members of a person's health but also to distract loves ones from the greater fears of war that soldiers may have grappled with while in the field.[32] As Christopher Hager explains, Bunker's expressions of frustration, like the appearance of listlessness and other emotions, "may become as significant as any strident declaration or vivid description of battle" in understanding Bunker's attitude towards the war by reading through the lines of convention.[33] The appearance of such complaint and banality in Bunker's missives, however, does fall within the genre; while communicating to his sister within the conventions of the time, Bunker attempted to construct a

[29] James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 163.
[30] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5.
[31] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7.
[32] Hager, 42.
[33] Hager, 42.

narrative of conformity that would align the Bunker family with the white, planter community of North Carolina, securing their position despite their ambiguous racialized appearance.

Dismal recordings of camp experience were often accompanied by daily ruminations that, again, may seem banal or unnecessary to the modern reader. In his November 18th letter, Bunker worried that the soldiers had only taken the "saddles off the horses but once or twice a day," hardly healthy for the animals.[34] His concern for the horses extends throughout the collection of letters, appearing again in the June missive when Bunker remarked that the horses did not have much time to graze.[35] Neither a direct complaint nor a plea for assistance, these comments exemplify the true ordinary qualities of Civil War writing. The soldiers and recipients of their letters exchanged bits of information, simple details like "their health, the weather, and what milk and butter cost" to fill the vacuum of conversation created when a family member or loved one went off to war.[36] No matter the content, the letter as a genre "straddles the gulf between presence and absence," acting in the space "halfway between the possibility of total communication and the risk of no communication at all."[37] In his scrupulous efforts of assimilation, Bunker fashioned a self that also acts within this between space, narrativizing his experiences of the mundane and the ordinary that claim their own significance in their retelling.[38] Bunker's written expression of his own ordinary contributes to a narrative of white identity in which Bunker continued to place himself.

The style in which Bunker wrote his letters conforms to that of his white Confederate brothers-in-arms as well. In most of his letters to his sister, Bunker communicated a certain

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[34] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 4.
[35] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 15.
[36] Hager, 6.
[37] Janet G. Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 43.
[38] Jameson, 28.

amount of cheer, stating that it was "with pleasure" that he had "the present opportunity to write" to his loved ones.[39] This phrase, appearing in almost every Bunker letter examined, was a staple opening line for letters during the nineteenth century, not only acting within the parameters of letter-writing etiquette but also serving to boost soldier and recipient morale. Gary Gallagher in *The Confederate War* notes that this kind of positivity and determination can be seen "well into the last year of the war" in Confederate as well as Union soldier letters.[40] Expressing the pleasure of writing to family or friends displays a writer's keen understanding of the emotional and psychological impact one's letters can have on their recipients, resulting in a hopefulness that shaped the conventions of the genre. Such hope may wane in times of desperation, but the dedication to convention during such a turbulent time may also be a textual expression of commitment to their cause and the protection of their loved ones. As David Henkin explains, "Civil War correspondence underscores how the post could provide access to distant friends and family in mid-nineteenth-century America," an optimistic fact despite the carnage that surrounded soldiers daily.[41] Letters, as a connection to the people that soldiers fought to defend, created a space of hope for the war's end.

Many soldiers needed guidance to create legible, coherent, and meaningful prose, necessitating some form or guide that soldiers could follow in order to develop their written communication skills.[42] While writing his missives, Bunker may have had access to the grammar books and dictionaries he studied from in his youth. Compositional books like the 1839 *A Practical Guide to Composition* "prefaced a letter to a sister with the familiar 'I take this

[39] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 3.
[40] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 40.
[41] David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 142.
[42] Hager, 83.

opportunity to write you a few lines,'" a formal greeting Bunker often used.[43] These materials were often replaced on the front, however, by "letter writing manuals" made popular during the surge in writing that accompanied the Civil War.[44] *The New Universal Letter-Writer*, a popular letter guide in the nineteenth century, demanded that writers avoid penning letters of shameful quality, rebuking those whose education, or lack of education, left their spelling and written construction deficient.[45] Such manuals were mostly likely used by many of Bunker's brothers-in-arms, considering that an estimated one in seven people in North Carolina struggled with illiteracy.[46] Acutely aware of their shame, many war letters contained painful apologies for their poor writing, making "[s]ome variant of the phrase 'please excuse bad writing'… nearly as ubiquitous as 'I take this opportunity to write you a few lines.'"[47]

Though Bunker's education probably rivaled many of his fellow soldiers, there is evidence that he made use of manuals in his personal letter writing. Bunker began his June 26th, 1864 and July 1st, 1864 letters by declaring how happy he was to "drop…a few lines," a phrase he most likely borrowed from a letter writing manual or composition guide.[48] As an educated and literate man of the planter class, manuals like *The New Universal Letter-Writer* not only offered conventional phrasing but also aided Bunker in composing letters practically free of grammatical error. His meticulousness in this regard resulted in a constructed identity associated with other educated gentlemen of the American South, revealing yet another facet of Bunker's exceptional loyalty to the Confederacy and, by extension, the planter class. Many wealthy members of the planter class were exempted from military service to oversee their land and property, leaving the

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[43] Hager, 116.
[44] Hager, 30.
[45] Hager, 33.
[46] Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 370.
[47] Hager, 34.
[48] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 15, 17.

war to be fought by the poor.[49] Bunker chose to forego such an arrangement, exemplifying his dedication to the Confederate cause by fighting alongside other white soldiers. Utilizing letter writing manuals additionally gave Bunker access to the social experience of sharing such guides, placing Bunker in association and direct communication with other letter writers in camp and providing them with the opportunity to bond over shared devotion.

Furthermore, imitating and obeying conventional styles associated with letter writing during this time proved the authenticity and credibility of the missive's author. The genre of letter writing "is the form best suited to convey sincerity, the genuine expression of self and soul," as many theorists have astutely discerned.[50] Its sanction of personal and private information as valid and valuable text allows the correspondent to divulge information freely and without fear of judgement from the intended recipient. This notion of unadulterated sentiment, however, could be manipulated at the writer's discretion, leading Hewitt to assert that the letter, more accurately, is "the vehicle of social exchange that demanded and assumed the full faith of its creditors."[51] Bunker's letters were not deceitful in their employment of genre convention but were produced with the "self-conscious use of language" to craft the identity Bunker desired.[52] Generic "stock gestures," like the conventional greetings and salutations that Bunker used, often signaled a letter's conformity to social norms.[53] For Bunker, such adaptation became necessary, not only in his personal life, but in the life of his letters as well. Similarly, for most letter writers of the nineteenth century, "the clichés of the genre are part of its condition and are instrumental

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[49] Hager, 4.

[50] Elizabeth Hewitt, "The Authentic Fictional Letters of Charles Brockden Brown," in *Letters and Cultural Transformations in the United States, 1760-1860,* ed. Theresa S. Gaul and Sharon M. Harris (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 79.
[51] See note 49.
[52] Decker, 94.
[53] Decker, 95.

in articulating epistolary relationships."[54] Bunker's construction of his own identity as a white, landowning male fighting for the Confederacy relied on imitative clichés as textual mirrors for the lifestyle of imitation to social expectations Bunker wished to express to his white community.

Bunker's flowing script in each epistle is not discernibly unique for his social station, but further represents Bunker's detailed attempt at assimilation. His words are clean, neat on the page, and only sparsely interrupted by the removal of a letter or the crossing out of a word, indicative of his editing tendencies. In his November 18th letter, for instance, Bunker originally wrote that he had "travelled three knights and days" with his battalion.[55] Bunker apparently noticed his error, for he drew three diagonal lines through the "k," proofreading that required knowledge of these homophones and their usage. He made the same mistake in the following line, writing "second knight" but then correcting his error with the same three diagonal lines.[56] Given their proximity on the page and the repetition of the same mistake, Bunker most likely wrote the letter, or at least this section, in its entirety and then read through the entire document again before submitting his message to the mail. As David Henkin notes, "letters were typically displays of writing skill and performances of good taste," and family members were often quick to correct spelling mistakes and errors in their loves one's missives.[57] Such revision allows for a greater display of style and, thus, a better reputation for Bunker and his family. Bunker's scrupulousness when writing his letters exemplifies a process of social self-grooming, a careful attention to appearances that betrays Bunker's anxiety regarding his assimilation into the planter class.

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[54] Decker, 95.
[55] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 3.
[56] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 3.
[57] Henkin, 104.

Though Bunker most likely received an education that would only approve of standard spelling and conventions, the nineteenth century attitude towards bad penmanship additionally encouraged Bunker to devote extra time to each letter's formation and flourish. According to Hager, handwriting in the nineteenth century was a reflection of character; during this time, it was even suggested "that handwriting, especially in a letter, attested to one's integrity."[58] Bunker's curving letters and words danced over the page with an air of confidence, as if he was aware of their beauty or proud of the effort and practice that each letter represented. Bunker must also have anticipated that his patient formation of each letter reflected favorably on him as a person and engendered pride from his family, not only for the beauty of his penmanship, but also for Bunker's successful assimilation into the ranks of white Confederate soldiers. Many scholars suggest that "popular interest in handwriting hinged on the ideological equation of writing and selfhood" and the ability to recreate the person in print.[59] In this way, Bunker's meticulous and flowing script additionally constructed the self he wished to fashion with its attention to detail and its testament to his character.

[58] Hager, 36.
[59] Henkin, 55.

NARRATIVE OF NORMALCY

Bunker's adherence to the era's epistolary conventions suggests an allegiance to the social expectations of the white, landowning planter class of the nineteenth century. This seems especially true considering Bunker's loyalty to the Confederate States of America, a government founded on chattel slavery. But a study of letter conventions alone does not reveal much about Bunker nor his personal motivations for adopting white identity. To fully understand Bunker's Confederate devotion, readers must assume the role of a literary critic, working to "illuminate individual literary works, not only in relation to the sociohistorical contexts from which they arise, but also relative to the structures of knowledge through which these texts are channeled."[60] The Bunker family defied numerous structures of racialized power as "landed antebellum slaveholders," citizens of the United States who were granted property rights by the state of North Carolina.[61] They were afforded many liberties not extended to other Asian Americans during the nineteenth century, partially due to the celebrity status and the physical difference of patriarchs Chang and Eng Bunker. Their complex station, dubbed "exceptional" but full of contradiction by Cynthia Wu, presents an ever-ambiguous relationship between the Bunker family and "the complicated landscape of American culture."[62] A study of Bunker's family history and the sociohistorical context in which he wrote informs and clarifies his potential motivations for assuming white identity in the U.S. South.

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[60] Rachel C. Lee, introduction to *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), viii.
[61] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 35.
[62] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 34, 35.

As previously stated, the celebrity of the Siamese twins afforded the Bunker family privileges not accessible to most Asians in America during this time. A perfunctory survey of the status of Asian Americans quickly reveals the ambiguous position they held within society. While many associate initial Asian migration into the United States with the gold miners and railroad laborers on the West Coast, Asian coolies were transported to the British West Indies, Cuba, and the U.S. South to work on sugar plantations throughout the nineteenth century.[63] The term 'coolie' is itself ambiguous, as it is not a particular social group but acts as a "conglomeration of racial imaginings…a product of the imaginers rather than the imagined."[64] The Asian coolie, a racialized designation created to identify the individual as a laborer, maintained an ambiguous position between "slavery and freedom, black and white," a distinction that ultimately served the plantation owners and the white structures of power at work before and after Emancipation.[65] Asian and black laborers were "severely tested by the capitalist system" of the plantation, "which deliberately pitted African against Asian workers, whereby Asians were used to discipline African workers and to depress their wages."[66] This idea is extended by Cedric Robinson's theory of "racial capitalism," in which European (and then American) powers exploited racial distinctions for economic profit.[67] Paradoxically, coolie labor was both championed as progress from the institution of slavery and demonized for the perpetuation of the conditions within that very system, leading to both the anticipation of coolies as indentured labor and the enacting of legislation designed to ban coolie labor in the United States.[68] White

[63] Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 4.
[64] Jung, 5.
[65] Jung, 5.
[66] Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 54.
[67] Robinson, 26.
[68] Jung, 63.

plantation owners were eager for workers, but they were often unwilling to give up the dominating power they exercised during slavery, leaving their relationship to coolies frequently tumultuous.[69] Such contradictory reactions underlie the precariousness of Asian and Asian American identity in the American South.

The ambiguity of Asian Americans is further extended when placed on a racialized spectrum privileging whiteness. Asian immigrants during the nineteenth century were characterized as "almost white (and not black)," a position of mitigated privilege, if any.[70] While Asian immigrants were lauded for their stereotyped intelligence,[71] they were barred from citizenship by the 1790 Naturalization Law because of their perceived "racial incapacity for republican citizenship."[72] While Southern plantation owners expected Asian labor to create competition for freed slaves, inciting conflict between Asian and black workers, Asians and Asian Americans "held neither the power nor the inclination to undermine black political [and economic] gains," lacking the naturalization and voting rights that had been given to the emancipated slaves after the Civil War.[73] In this way, Asians in America were "metaphorically darkened and likened to African Americans, subject to similar vilification based on hatred and fear."[74] Such "darkening" of Asians in America is complicated by Colleen Lye's understanding of the "Afro-Asian analogy;" Lye postulates that such analogies are, in fact, a limitation to a complete understanding of Asian American identity "when Asian racialization is attributed to a white supremacy that is by temporal and conceptual priority antiblack."[75] Comparing Asian and

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[69] Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 82.
[70] Jung, 116.
[71] Jung, 115.
[72] Jung, 139.
[73] Jung, 204.
[74] Jennifer A. Ho, *Racial Ambiguity in Asian American Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 12-13.
[75] Colleen Lye, "The Afro-Asian Analogy," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1734, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www-mlajournals-org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/doi/pdf/10.1632/pmla.2008.123.5.1732.

black experiences in the United States "risks falling into an ahistorical framework of formal equivalence" further demonstrating the usefulness of an ambiguous understanding of Asian American identity during this time.[76]

Unlike the coolies of the American South and the miners and railroad workers in the U.S. West, Chang and Eng Bunker constructed much of their own social identity, a privilege that extended to their family members, including Christopher Wren Bunker. Chang and Eng secured their position as landowners and citizens of the United States at a time when Asian citizenship had been outlawed, assisted greatly by their celebrity status.[77] Given their Chinese-Thai heritage, the Bunker twins were clearly of an ethnicity that constituted the Other of the American South; however, their marriage to two sisters of a landowning family provided a gateway for Chang and Eng Bunker to act and live within the privileged white community of the planter class in Mount Airy, North Carolina with little to no incident.[78] By marrying Sarah Ann and Adelaide Yates, "the 'normal' and unimpeachably 'white' daughters of a local clergyman-farmer," the twins secured a place in white social circles for their mixed-race children and created for their posterity the opportunity of class mobility and passing.[79] Christopher Wren Bunker's narrative of white identity within his letters was constructed in part because of his access to these privileges.

As Jennifer Ho explains, "the performance of passing, like that of gender construction, destabilizes notions of race and ethnicity through the continuous reinforcement that identity entails exhibition rather than essence."[80] This destabilization reveals the unsound nature and

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[76] Hsuan L. Hsu, *Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6.
[77] Yunte Huang, *Inseparable: The Original Siamese Twins and Their Rendezvous with American History* (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 2018), 202.
[78] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 4.
[79] Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 213.
[80] Ho, 110.

brokenness of a system that barred humans from citizenship and other rights based on outward appearances, but also allows for the construction of identity that defies such a system by cheating its rules. For individuals like Christopher Wren Bunker, appearances and even general mannerisms could be manipulated to conform to social expectations, undermining notions of racial superiority upheld in the American South. Bunker wrote his own narrative of whiteness by evoking his own interpretations of his identity and writing those into existence. Amy Ling notes that "assuming a persona is a form of defiance to free one's self from the fetters applied by a society."[81] Christopher Wren Bunker's narrative defiance is not manifested in a reaction against the conventions of the planter class, but in his assimilation and acceptance of societal expectations to which he does not biologically conform. Like Chang and Eng Bunker, Christopher Wren was able to create his own identity within the South's defined social hierarchy. Christopher Wren wove his own written narrative into his war letters, turning his ambiguous racialized status into a narrative of whiteness.

The obvious Otherness of Christopher Wren Bunker's family, despite their privileged status, weighed heavily on the narrative of normalcy and assimilation that Christopher attempted to construct. Before Christopher's birth, Chang and Eng contracted themselves as a spectacle to curious nineteenth century gawkers. The financial stability that Christopher Wren Bunker enjoyed throughout his childhood was only acquired after his father and uncle's exhibition on the "freak show circuit" under the direction of the white men who procured them from their native Siam.[82] The nineteenth century was characterized by an "obsession with abnormality," allowing predominantly white spectators to cultivate a vision of "other humans as monsters," things to be

[81] Amy Ling, "Creating One's Self: The Eaton Sisters," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America*, ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 316.
[82] Cynthia Wu, "The Siamese Twins in Late-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Conflict and Reconciliation," *American Literature* 80, no. 1 (2008): 29-30, accessed November 5, 2017, doi: 10.1215/00029831-2007-061.

set apart and judged from a comfortable distance.[83] Such an environment provided Chang and Eng Bunker a venue in which to satisfy the nation's curiosity but confined the twins to an almost sub-human status not unlike the institution of slavery. The twins were purchased for $500 by Robert Hunter and Abel Coffin[84] and were transported to the United States as cargo, not even mentioned on the ship's passenger list.[85] Following on the heels of the popular minstrel shows, Chang and Eng were costumed in the supposed garb of their native land and exposed to gawkers paying their fifty-cent admission, revenue they were not allowed to manage themselves.[86] To quote Edward Said's *Orientalism*: "An Oriental man was first an Oriental and only second a man."[87] These twin boys were viewed as an exotic spectacle, representing an unknown land that produced unusual and terrifying beings.

As a public spectacle, the twins were the embodiment of Otherness, the fearful unknown. Because of their physical conjoinment, Chang and Eng fell under the Linnaean classification of "*Homo mostrosus*," a class of beings verified by Charles Darwin to be the "product of crossbreeding" between human and "other species."[88] The twins were often objects of medical experimentation and study that can be likened to the race theory and pseudo-scientific claims used to delegitimize the personhood of black slaves leading up to (and after) the Civil War.[89] Chang and Eng's conjoined bodies were additionally repurposed in literature and lore from the moment they appeared on an American stage, providing writers like Mark Twain and Darin Strauss "perfect raw material to work out [their] own issues or to fathom the mystery of the

[83] Huang, 5.
[84] Huang, 32.
[85] Huang, 39.
[86] Huang, 52.
[87] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 231.
[88] Huang, 53.
[89] Ho, 13.

human bond."[90] Their Otherness, the "ambiguities of freakishness" as Leslie Fiedler defined it, opened a space for the continuous repurposing of their memory in the creative imaginations of writers and readers as a spectacle for the amusement of others.[91] The enfreakment of abnormal bodies like the Siamese twins reflect a fascination for difference but also a fear of likeness to the Other, a racialized desire to maintain the social position of privilege. Chang and Eng's exhibitors were aware of these conflicting reactions to their charges' physical anomaly, and to heighten the effect, the twins were encouraged to do as they pleased while being displayed.[92] Without the carney tricks that often accompanied exhibitions, each twin could "act like a 'normal' human being," which "further intensified the sense of the uncanny: The monster is just like us, and yet so different."[93] The anomaly of the Bunkers' bodies exacerbated the already ambiguous reactions to Chang and Eng Bunker as the racial Other, generating even more ambiguity in the nineteenth century perception of the Bunker family.

Despite their physiological differences from paying onlookers, the "racial other" that the twins exemplified weighed heavily in the conversation of their personhood and identity, and thus, the personhood of their children.[94] Yunte Huang notes in his 2018 biography of Chang and Eng Bunker that the "presentation of exotic bodies belonging to 'inferior races' was…a staple of freak shows," giving the masses a view of something they considered so different from themselves that it was, in fact, terrifying.[95] On numerous tours of these travelling circuits, the twins appeared beside the famous Afong Moy, whose only "freakish" characteristic was her

[90] Huang, 106.
[91] Fiedler, 337.
[92] Huang, 54.
[93] Huang, 54.
[94] Huang, 82.
[95] Huang, 82. For a more in-depth discussion of freak shows, see Huang, 80-88. Though the twins had only a month-long contract to work at P.T. Barnum's American Museum, the success of freak shows as a form of entertainment is mostly accredited to Barnum, Prince of Humbugs. For more information on P.T. Barnum, see Huang, 252-267.

Chinese descent.[96] Noted as an "otherwise perfectly ordinary woman," Afong Moy's heritage was enough to distinguish her from white American citizens based on naturalization laws at that time. Such legal restrictions work as a lawful safeguard against white citizens interacting with the racial Other in daily life.[97] The fear of "being incorporated into an alien other"[98] was defined by Elizabeth Grosz as the "intolerable ambiguity," the "horror at the blurring of identities…that witness our chaotic and insecure identities."[99] In the exhibition, "the power and the authority of an audience member's privileged look is affirmed, usually at the expense of the novel 'primitive' objectified…Other."[100] Without those legal distinctions of race upheld during this time and this type of caged separation, the white citizens of the United States were left with nothing to create their privileged identity and status, making nonwhite persons a threat to their station.

Unlike Afong Moy and the majority of Asians in America in the nineteenth century, however, the Bunker twins' celebrity gave their family the opportunity to defy their racial subjugation. Over a period of several years, Chang and Eng developed financial independence and eventually became landowners, reaping the benefits of black slave labor on their own plantation. Yunte Huang claims that it is "unquestionably clear" that the twins made every effort to depart from their previous class status and integrate into the "oppressor class" of the American South, even accepting a black house servant as a wedding gift.[101] The twins' affluence at a time when most Asian Americans were employed as manual laborers illustrates the inextricable nature of race and class and the theory of "racial capitalism," in which racism pervades not only the

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[96] Huang, 83.
[97] Huang, 83.
[98]Huang, 87.
[99]Elizabeth Grosz, "Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body,* ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson and Leslie A. Fiedler (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 64-65.
[100]James S. Moy, "The Death of Asia on the American Field of Representation," in *Reading the Literatures of Asian America,* ed. Shirley Geok-lin Lim and Amy Ling (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 350.
[101] Huang, 238.

economic realm of capitalism but also all "social structures emergent from capitalism."[102] In the Bunkers' case, upward class mobility more accurately associates the twins with whiteness, granting them the privilege of "civic participation" and "identifications of power" within white communities.[103] Unlike their exhibition days, when the "association between Asianness and physical difference was enforced by public showings," the Bunker family's life in North Carolina was an "approximation of the lives of white, propertied, landowning" southerners, an assimilation that began with Chang and Eng and continued with Christopher Wren Bunker.[104] The income that the twins brought to their small North Carolinian town and their assimilation into the community reveals the "flexibility of southern culture to reconcile and incorporate difference" when it suited them.[105] This opportunity for assimilation initiated Christopher Wren Bunker's construction of white identity, a construction that carries over into his writing.

Christopher Wren Bunker's negotiation of race and social status during and after the Civil War was still precarious, even after his family's assimilation into the agrarian South. Named after the famous English architect, Christopher Wren Bunker expressed a solidarity to a white identity that his given name suggested.[106] Bunker was devoted to this narrative of whiteness, not only for himself but for his family as well. He worked on the plantation before and after his war service, overseeing an "economic affluence attained by…the [Bunker family's] increasing whiteness in the collective imagination."[107] His acts of sacrifice and wartime letters additionally paint a picture of conventionality, conforming to expectations present in his white community. This performed whiteness in Bunker's writing extends even after his safe return

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[102] Robinson, 2.
[103] Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 94.
[104] Bow, 45.
[105] Bow, 45.
[106] Kwok, "Christopher Wren Bunker and Stephen Decatur Bunker."
[107] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 31.

from war. Attempting to sustain the narrative of normalcy despite the economic suffering of the post-war South, Bunker wrote a letter to his father about the condition of their estate while Chang and Eng were away. The letter, dated February 13, 1866, states: "'We are getting along splendid with our out door's work. De has hired Jord to fix up the fences. He has done it quicker and better than when he belonged to us.'"[108] This letter participates in Bunker's further narrativization of his social world, analyzing and constructing the "evolution of [his] social life" through his own written text.[109] His documentation of Jord, a black man once enslaved by the Bunker family, reinforces Bunker's narrative construction of white identity by normalizing broken or interrupted plantation power structures that were disrupted after the Civil War.

Though the content of this missive may sound mundane and hardly worth the trouble of a letter, Christopher Wren Bunker's words exemplify a complex change in relationship between a master and a now-freed slave. Even though the Bunker family experienced financial setbacks after the emancipation of their slaves, Christopher's words in his 1866 letter remind Chang and Eng that the Bunker family maintained their role in the white "oppressor class" despite economic suffering.[110] Not only did Christopher Wren pay for the services rendered, he also commented on Jord's station as his family's former slave, restating the continued white superiority the Bunker family claimed even after Jord acquired freedom.[111] Bunker's letters conform with planter class conventions and expectations after the war as well, now commiserating with the other Southern slaveowners in economic ruin after the fall of the Confederacy. As thoroughly documented in the diaries of Mary Chesnut, one of the most stunning collections of writing to come out of the U.S. Civil War, the planter class recognized that "the end of the war [brought] no hope of peace and

[108] quoted in Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 31.
[109]Jameson, 105.
[110] Huang, 238.
[111] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 31.

security"[112] for the starving and looted South, but such a "crushed people" still had their honor and could fight to maintain some semblance of their old social hierarchies, a declaration Bunker would have most likely endorsed.[113]

As the 1866 letter suggests, Christopher Wren Bunker would tirelessly continue to fashion a narrative of whiteness within his writing, distancing himself from an ambiguous racialized status that haunted him. Though Bunker was described as "'a handsome blend of Chinese and European'" with black hair and a "tinted skin color," Bunker's letters and actions worked to negate his mixed-race status and his racialized ancestry, conforming instead to white ideals.[114] Bunker's overwhelming desire to identify with the planter class community of the South represents a fantasy of identification with the white upper echelon in which he resided. Samuels describes these "fantasies of identification" as "driven by a desire for incontrovertible physical identification so intense that it produces its own realization at the same time that it reinterprets that realization as natural and inevitable."[115] Writing such fantasy into reality, Bunker was able to place himself and his family into the white landowning citizen community of Mount Airy, North Carolina by clinging to a narrative of his own construction.

[112] Mary B. Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 747.
[113] Chesnut, 800.
[114] Huang, 291.
[115] Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 3.

DEVOTION TO CAUSE: CONSTRUCTED WHITE FRATERNITY

It cannot be denied that Chang and Eng Bunker's previous immigrant status and physiological abnormality carried over to their children, who most assuredly felt the need to highlight their American birth and devotion to their country during this time of war. Christopher himself traveled with his uncle and father on a few of their later exhibition shows, when the financially devastated Chang and Eng were forced to leave North Carolina in search of funds.[116] Christopher probably could not help but notice the way people gawked at his family members, the Other to be viewed and put on display. As he aged, Christopher was presumably aware of the rhetoric against Asian immigrants across the United States and the "threat of being repatriated 'home'" despite loyal ties to the U.S.[117] To distance himself from this reality and prove himself loyal to Southern white ideals, Christopher Bunker joined the Confederate Army.[118]

Of course, with their own plantation at stake, Bunker's decision to fight for the Confederacy was also economically motivated. As W.E.B. Du Bois proclaims in *Black Reconstruction,* the black worker was the "founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world."[119] The Bunker family relied on their slaves for the cultivation of their lands and the economic stability that they enjoyed. Their slave-holding status aligned them with the genteel planter class, but their mixed-race identity additionally meant that they were vulnerable to those who may question their citizenship and right to property, as

[116] Huang, 263.
[117] Lee, 30.
[118] Huang, 288.
[119] quoted in Robinson, 199.

evidenced by a singular incident of vandalism to the Bunker estate.[120] To maintain the approval of their Confederate neighbors and to legitimize their citizenship, Bunker went off to the "big fight in this country" as a true testament to his family's Southern blood and his willingness to defend the plantation system as the Southern way of life.[121] Christopher Wren's navigation of his ambiguous status, not only as an Asian American fighting for the Confederacy, but also as the son of a well-known Other, is exemplified in the letters that he pens, revealing a narrative of Confederate fraternity and the erasure of non-white ethnicity.

Christopher Wren Bunker himself was a slaveholding male, a demographic especially faithful to the idea of a separate Southern nation. As outlined in Gary Gallagher's *The Confederate War,* "the generation of young slaveholding men who matured during the 1850s may have been among the most ardent Confederates."[122] These men were "a cohort whose enthusiasm and fiery example probably enhanced feelings of nationalism within the armies and among civilians."[123] Another North Carolinian man within Bunker's age bracket, Stephen Dodson Ramseur, wrote that he "never knew a time free of concern that the white South and its slave-based system were under attack from the North," exemplifying the deep commitment these men professed to the preservation of their way of life.[124] These young men, intoxicated with the notion of duty (and possibly the glory of war-proven manhood), were looking for an opportunity to prove their loyalty and saw no reason to "compromise with an enemy…committed to destroying everything of value" to them.[125] Bunker was equally eager to protect his family and

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[120] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 4.

[121] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 6.
[122] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 72.
[123] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 72.
[124] Gary W. Gallagher, *Becoming Confederates: Paths to a New National Identity* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 6.
[125] Gary W. Gallagher, *Becoming Confederates,* 54.

their possessions, but he was additionally motivated by the desire to integrate himself into circles of white men of the planter class that he was to fight alongside. Bunker, who enlisted one week shy of his eighteenth birthday, felt the need to prove himself loyal, not only to earn acceptance and respect amongst his peers, but to secure his station despite being of mixed race.[126] There is evidence that Asian soldiers were welcomed on the battlefield, like George Dupont, who was Siamese and accepted into ranks of the 13th New Jersey Volunteers despite his "dark complexion."[127] But for Bunker, who was fighting for the South, loyalty to the white planter class could not be questioned and his narrative of white identity could be nothing but absolute.

Though it is difficult to be certain how Christopher Wren Bunker was received by other Confederate soldiers, his loyalty to the Confederate cause and his fraternity with his likeminded comrades is very apparent in his missives. In several of his letters, Bunker clearly identified the enemy, referring to Union troops only as "the Yankees" in each epistle.[128] On November 18th, 1863, Bunker wrote to his sister that on a "charge after the Yankees," he lost his gloves, leaving him with nothing to keep his hands warm.[129] In the same year, Bunker reported that Yankee soldiers "tore up the railroad" and "burnt all the bridges they could get to," leaving much destruction in their wake.[130] Such a tactic was typical of Union troops under the command of generals like Sherman and Grant, who wished to interfere with the supply of food and ammunition to other battalions stationed in more remote locales.[131] But the obstruction of roadways and bridges was also a severe detriment to the families of Confederate soldiers still

[126] Huang, 288.
[127]Huang, 290.
[128]Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5,7,15.
[129] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5.
[130] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7.
[131] John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 295.

living in the U.S. South, families like the Bunkers. From this perspective, Bunker's frustration and anger with the Union "Yankees" also represents his desire to protect his family from an enemy infiltration. On June 26th of the following year, Bunker confided that the Yankees had "come very near" to taking their camp, leaving Bunker with no choice but to "slip through their lines one time in the night" to avoid capture.[132] Even as the adversary drew closer, it is clear from Bunker's letters that he wanted nothing to do with the Union troops and their cause, affirming his true loyalty to his country and comrades.

When viewed as an effort to protect and support his family, Bunker's motivation for joining the Confederacy becomes clearer. In *For Cause and Comrades,* McPherson notes that "[s]tudies of the will of armies to fight have found defense of the homeland to be one of the strongest of combat motivations."[133] Christopher Wren Bunker's consistent correspondence with his sister shows a devotion to family that would precipitate going to war to defend them. And certainly, "without a firm base of support in the homes and communities from which these citizen soldiers came, their morale would have crumbled."[134] The protection of home emphasized a more localized allegiance, a "southern republic" as defined in *The Confederate War*.[135] Rather than a "loose knit collection of individuals" with distinct and separated loyalties, the southern republic brought together the ideals of a separate southern nation, a community into which the Bunker family wished to integrate themselves.[136] These communities developed around plantations, sites of class identity that have been defined by Matthew Pratt Guterl as "forward operating bases for ever-expanding empires"[137] and "homesteads in the global history of slavery

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[132] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 15.
[133] McPherson, 21.
[134] McPherson, 131.
[135] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 7.
[136] Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 7.
[137] Matthew P. Guterl, "Plantation," in *Keywords for Southern Studies,* ed. Scott Romine and Jennifer Rae Greeson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 27.

and empire."[138] Plantations not only grew wealth for the planter class from the labor of the enslaved, but they also provided fixity, acting as "stabilizing agents in a world marked by diffusion and movement" for those in power.[139] For a family attempting assimilation into a wealthy Southern genteel class, this idea of homeland and stability must certainly have been welcomed, resulting in devoted protection of that homeland in return for such comfort.

Within the development and protection of his "southern republic," Bunker participates in the nation-building project of the Confederate States of America. Benedict Anderson, in his groundbreaking *Imagined Communities*, defines the nation as a "community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail…the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[140] Bunker's willingness to fight for the Confederacy reiterates his desire for participation within and adoption into this community, but Bunker's motives additionally reveal the power dynamics that encouraged him to make this decision. Simply put, "America's domestic realm" cannot be separated from the "history of empire" that created space for the domestic to thrive.[141] These concerns of the domestic, the protection of family and possessions, ultimately favor the white landowners of the South, who have more possessions to defend and profit from the inequality of their economic structure. The Southern landowners would logically support a war that defended their assets and financial stability. In garnering support, such elite social circles may extend membership into their community more readily than before the war began, leading to the potential disregard for the ambiguous racial status of the Bunker family. To even further exhibit his family's eligibility and continued support, Bunker

[138] Guterl, 29.
[139] Guterl, 23.
[140] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.
[141] Lee, 7.

performed his own ideas of whiteness within his letters, preserving the Bunker family's claim to their way of life by participating in white fraternity on the battlefield.

Returning to the letters, Bunker aligns himself with other Confederate soldiers known in North Carolina in many of his missives, further exemplifying his connection and dedication to Confederate Southern ideals. In his November 18th letter, Bunker mentioned John Greenwood by name while comforting his family, stating that all the other "boys is well" too.[142] John Greenwood was potentially a family friend or someone that Bunker's sister knew and asked about in her responses back to her brother. In his November 2nd letter, Bunker again assured his family that "all the boys is well," but mentioned a man by the name of John Doss, who was sent elsewhere to await his trial for treason.[143] It might seem strange for Bunker to include this piece of news, a suspicious admission of knowing a potential traitor. But, upon relaying this information, Bunker was quick to point out that he had not "heard from him [Doss] in a long time," severing his ties to any unsavory social connections.[144] John Doss, a member of their social community, could have been a well-known acquaintance in the Bunker household, but by including a statement of his potential guilt, Bunker warns his family of the social dangers this connection could now hold. As Elizabeth Hewitt argues, the performative nature of letters results in the curation of identity for the letter's sender, but often lacks the ability to cultivate a similar performance from the letter's recipient.[145] Bunker's deliberate admission of John Doss' criminal status reveals a calculated effort to bind the family with others that will assist them in maintaining their social station within the planter class and distancing themselves from those who may prove detrimental to their goal. John Doss' potential treason blacklisted him within

[142] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 4.
[143] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7.
[144] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7.
[145] Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865,* 140.

their community, and by revealing this news to his family, Bunker subtly encouraged the letter's recipients to distance themselves from a questionable social relationship.

By April 20th, 1864, however, John Doss reappeared in Bunker's missives, indicating that he was not found guilty of treason and had continued fighting with his battalion, reinstating him within the good graces of the Southern planter class. The letter mentioned that Doss was feeling well, as if Bunker was responding to questions over the soldier's health from his sister or another member of the Bunker family.[146] Bunker somewhat offhandedly reported in this same letter, only a few lines apart from his mention of John Doss, that there was a man who will be shot the following Friday for desertion.[147] This man, having no connection to the Bunker family, offers a stark contrast to the restored status that Doss now enjoys. On June 26th, Bunker mentioned that John Doss' horse was "broken down and lame" and his own horse was in no better shape, again resurrecting fraternity between Bunker and Doss.[148] Bunker repeated a similar lament on July 1st of the same year, indicating that they were once again brothers despite previous doubts about Doss' social station.[149] By July 1st, the status of Doss' horse had become more severe, and Bunker feared that Doss would be forced to leave the horse to die in a few days.[150] These consistent statements on the welfare of John Doss assert his regained social status and position, making a connection to John Doss now an asset for the Bunker family. Bunker's letters in narrative form are themselves an "ideological act," allowing for the creation of "'solutions'" to seemingly "unresolvable social contradictions."[151] His identification of

[146] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 11.
[147] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 11.
[148] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 15.
[149] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 18.
[150] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 18.
[151] Jameson, 79.

individuals as advantageous to his social standing resolves any question of their loyalty or assimilation into his own narrative of white identity.

The value of friendship and association with John Doss became more apparent at the beginning of the July 1st letter, when Christopher mentioned that John Doss and an unnamed friend were taking time off from Congress to travel with the battalion to Lynchburg.[152] Though we cannot be sure whether the Bunker family was already aware of Doss' possible position at Congress, Christopher Bunker's mention of this prestigious occupation was certainly no accident. In this epistle, Bunker seemed to endorse a relationship with John Doss; he took care to remark that Doss had taken time away from his position to travel with his brothers in arms and fight with enemy troops. This admission exemplifies a cultivated image of fraternity with a white soldier of importance, a potential Congressman. Continued investigation into the life of John Doss reveals that he may have appeared before Congress on a separate occasion in 1875, this time working with the Buena Vista Democratic Conservative Club in efforts towards reconstruction in Buena Vista, Mississippi.[153] This information would indicate that John Doss survived the war and maintained a congressional standing in Mississippi. It even suggests that he represented the Democratic party, further demonstrating his allegiance to the South by supporting a party that opposed much of the Republican initiatives during the Reconstruction Era, even if his personal intentions are unclear in the government records. Regardless, during the time in which Bunker was writing his letters, a relationship with John Doss was advantageous to Christopher's efforts at preserving his family's station and way of life in North Carolina.

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[152] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[153] U.S. Congress, Senate, Government Printing Office, 1876, 44th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record and Appendix*, 4, pt. 6.

Bunker's missives also cultivated a remote and indirect discourse with other members of his community while in direct conversation with his sister. At the end of his November 2nd letter, Bunker signed off by imploring his sister to give his "respects to all enquiring friends."[154] This phrase was by no means uncommon in the letters of the war, but as Hager points out, "even as writers sent their respects to 'enquiring friends,' they usually were careful to reassert the letter's private, intimate function—the feelings they wanted their words to convey to the one person to whom it was addressed."[155] The November 2nd letter contains Bunker's reaction to the news of his newborn sister, an incredibly private and intimate moment for the immediate family. Though Bunker initially seemed jubilant, asking for more news about the baby girl, Bunker chose to simply call the baby a "Bold American," detaching the child from immediate connection with the Bunker family.[156] After briefly inquiring for more information, Bunker signed the letter by directing his sister to give his "respects" to friends that could be asking for his whereabouts or for news of his health and condition.[157] This shift in focus from the familial to the community demonstrates the attention Bunker paid to a larger audience beyond his sister. The community bonds that Bunker formed before the war are emphasized, reaffirming Bunker's loyalty to the community for which he wages war.

Extra-textual communication is also apparent in Bunker's June 26th letter, in which Bunker solidified social relations by providing a service to his fellow comrades. In this letter, Bunker remarked that he had "seen all of the boys" belonging to a regiment with which he was apparently very familiar.[158] One particular soldier by the name of Barnett told Bunker that "he

[154] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 8.
[155] Hager, 92.
[156] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7-8.
[157] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 8.
[158] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 16.

had not heard from his people in a long time," so Bunker took action.[159] Bunker commanded his sister to "tell [Barnett's] people…that he was well" and additionally inform the community that "all the boys is well from that neighborhood."[160] This favor that Bunker performed for his fellow soldier could simply be a sympathetic act of kindness, but it also bolstered the Barnett family's opinions of Christopher Wren Bunker and the Bunker family for providing them with information from their loved one. The exchange of letters presents a unique relationship between orality and print that existed in the nineteenth century, exemplified in the interaction we can suppose happened between these two families.[161] Information from letters was often shared between neighbors, resulting in a civic participation in which community members could aurally articulate news in print.[162] The Bunker daughter likely informed the Barnett family of the man's whereabouts, assuring them of his safety and possibly even providing Christopher's written words as proof. This not only encouraged interaction between families in the community, but it also reiterated the fraternity between white families and the Bunker family, encouraging a complete assimilation into this upper echelon Southern community.

Bunker's willingness to assist his comrades appeared within his letters as well. The textual evidence of sacrifice produces a document that verifies Bunker's dedication if questions were to arise about his social status and race loyalty. In 1864, after the war had waged for three long years and confidence may have waned, Bunker reported to his family that he participated in an attempted rescue mission for three of the captains in his regiment, all captured by enemy forces.[163] Bunker did not hesitate to mention that he and the other soldiers had "a hard time

[159]Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 16.
[160] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 16.
[161] Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865,* 10.
[162] Hager, 85.
[163] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 18.

searching" for the missing captains and that, during the rescue, his horse went lame and had to be left with a sympathetic gentleman to be nursed back to health.[164] This anecdote of adventure and daring was not simply a story meant to fill the pages of his letter; Bunker's anecdote acts as a testament to his devotion, revealing a calculated narrative of loyal, white identity that Bunker composed. If the letter was misplaced or intercepted by unknown readers, no one could question Christopher Wren Bunker's devotion. William Merrill Decker suggests that "the more literary or prominent the letter-writer, the more cognizant the write is apt to be of the potential interception or preservation of a holograph."[165] Bunker's acute awareness of this possibility may have provided him with additional incentive to fashion a narrative of willing sacrifice for his captains that could be read as devout even in the most public of settings.

Suspected espionage could have been a legitimate fear for Bunker, and his mail could easily have been read or tampered with as a result of his ethnicity. James M. McPherson notes that "Civil War armies did not subject soldiers' letters to censorship," a common practice during other American wars.[166] This lack of wartime censorship does, however, come with a qualification. Multiple sources claim that the South censored newspapers from the North for up to three decades before the Civil War even began, a practice that continued when the C.S.A. controlled the post offices of the American South.[167] The Confederacy and Union alike held the power to remove treasonous materials from circulation, staining the reputations of those whose letters were tossed out.[168] Hager additionally asserts that the Civil War "created abundant opportunities for reading other people's mail," and it was likely that Bunker was conscientious of

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[164] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 18.
[165] Decker, 25.
[166] McPherson, 12.
[167] Clement Eaton, "Censorship of the Southern Mails," *The American Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (1943): 278, accessed January 29, 2019, www.jstor.org/stable/1840768.
[168] Winifred Gallagher, *How the Post Office Created America: A History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 143.

this fact.[169] Hager goes on to suggest that it became a "great pastime" for soldiers to confiscate enemy letters on battlefields, scouring them for useful information or particularly romantic gushings.[170] Henkin also concludes that "postal relationships conformed rather imperfectly to the model of a sealed intimacy between two correspondents."[171] Letters written to one person were often shared throughout the house and, in some cases, "writers might renounce confidentiality in order to avoid the impression that they had something to hide."[172] Bunker's narrative was certainly meant for his sister, the intended recipient of the letters, but his narrative of conformity to white Southern ideals was also fashioned for the unintended readers of his letters, those who may question his mixed-race identity, and by extension, the legitimacy of his claim to citizenship and land in the Southern United States.

Christopher Wren Bunker's meticulousness is momentarily but significantly interrupted in his letter dated October 12th, 1864. Though the letter's penmanship and appearance dictate that Bunker toiled over each delicate word, the content of the letter reveals a certain desperation usually revised or detached from previous missives. The October 12th letter was penned to "Father, Mother, Brothers and Sisters" instead of his usual "Dear sister," emphasizing the magnitude of his impending words and instructing the entire family to bear witness to the news this letter contained.[173] In this missive, Bunker detailed his capture on the 7th of August, over three months before the letter was written.[174] To curtail family worry, Bunker quickly asserted that he had "no news of interest," but the lines that followed expressed a lack of clarity radically unlike his previous missives.[175] He wrote, "You must write to me as soon as you get this and let

[169] Hager, 86.
[170] Hager, 86.
[171] Henkin, 103.
[172] Henkin, 103.
[173] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[174] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[175] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.

me know how you are getting along. I would like to hear from you all as it has been a long time since I heard from you. But I hope it will not be very long before I hear from you…"[176] The stress and fatigue of capture are barely concealed in these circular lines, repeating the need to see his family multiple times in the span of one short paragraph. In his repetition, Bunker exemplifies one of the central tenets of war letter writing, that "letters are written across the distance of time and space in an effort to bring persons into textual proximity."[177] His circular ruminations provide a moment of transparency to the interior life of Christopher Wren Bunker. In that moment, Bunker expressed his yearning to see his family after over three months of imprisonment as a genuine, unrehearsed need.

Though he made his usual complaints, declaring that he only had "one suit and it is very thin" and that he was "drawing very light rashions" in the camp, Bunker divulged the seriousness of his medical condition during his imprisonment with a heightened sense of panic and fear.[178] Christopher Wren Bunker was wounded on a raid and was taken by Union troops to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio, where he was held from August 1864 to April 1865.[179] There, he contracted smallpox and a severe case of diarrhea, though he wrote to his family that he hoped to be well "in the course of a week."[180] In addition to these ailments, which kept Bunker in bed for three weeks at the time of his writing, Bunker battled hunger while in camp, stating that he was eating "just enough to keep breath and body together."[181] While the October 12th letter attempted to maintain a semblance of previously established order and normalcy, Bunker found himself in what Giorgio Agamben calls the "state of exception," the condition in which the encamped are

[176] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[177] Hewitt, *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865,* 2.
[178] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[179] Huang, 292-293.
[180] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[181] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.

reduced to their biological concerns associated with survival.[182] In this state of exception, individuals are deprived of personhood and agency, forced into the lawless space of statelessness. Such a destitute condition might have explained Bunker's continued fidelity to the South after the war as the homeland he suffered to protect, but in light of his multiple illnesses, wounds, and growling stomach, a cultivated image of whiteness was not Bunker's top priority as a prisoner of war.

Though he was in real physical pain, Bunker defied his state of exception and his bodily concerns at the end of his October 20th letter. In previous missives, Bunker carefully left space after the letter's conclusion to write "Yours as ever" before signing his name.[183] At the end of his October 20th letter, however, Bunker signed off by writing the phrase "I remain your son as ever, C.W. Bunker."[184] In this signature, Bunker claimed his father and the father-son relationship he had with Chang Bunker, a kinship with Otherness Christopher spent several years attempting to hide. Possibly in search of absolution in a time when death was near, Bunker reclaimed his connection to an Othered identity. Here, the phrase "as ever" indicates the irrefutability of his heritage, expanding the intended audience of his letters from just his sister, who was also of mixed heritage, to his father as well.[185]

After Bunker's negotiated release in March of 1865 and safe return home in April of that same year, Bunker was regarded as "a hero" by his family, reinstating the image of white conformity his previously letters so meticulously articulated.[186] Returning home, Bunker's status changed from soldier to wounded veteran, a man who sacrificed for his country. The physical

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[182] Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics,* trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 8.
[183] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5,8.
[184] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[185] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 20.
[186] Huang, 293.

scars that Bunker bore acted as a reminder to the Mount Airy community of Bunker's willingness to fight alongside their sons and fathers to protect the Southern way of life. Bunker's elevated status also acted as insurance for his family's continued acceptance into the white upper echelon planter class that Bunker was so willing to defend.

LANDOWNING MEN: CONSTRUCTED WHITE MASCULINITY

Bunker's fraternal devotion to members of the Southern planter class not only presents a construction of whiteness, but it additionally exemplifies the prescribed attributes of white masculinity. Christopher Wren Bunker, the product of a white woman and Chinese-Thai man, recognized the connotations of Asian or mixed-race masculinity, choosing instead to conform to the expectations of a white, landowning male. On sugarcane plantations in the U.S. South during the nineteenth century, two major theories existed in relation to male Asian immigrants. On one hand, Chinese migrant laborers were curiously neutered, characterized as "feminized men, unlike white and black men."[187] "In the popular imagination," Chinese coolies were often considered the "ideal migrant laborers, young men whose labor was always available without the added social, political, and economic costs of settled families" that encumbered the productivity of slavery.[188] Southern capitalists who imported Chinese labor expected capable, diligent workers who were not distracted by romantic or sexual desire, perpetuating the stereotype of the Chinese coolie as "a peculiar admixture of passivity and industry perfect for plantation labor."[189] A correspondent for the *West Baton Rouge Sugar Planter* corroborated this idea, maintaining that the "Chinese were 'a weak effeminate race.'"[190] Bunker, as an owner of slaves himself, could not afford a weak reputation if he and his family were to firmly root themselves in the planter class.

[187] Jung, 124.
[188] Jung, 124.
[189] Jung, 124.
[190] quoted in Jung, 171.

Paradoxically, Asian migrants were also viewed as a threat to white masculinity, not to be trusted with white plantation women.[191] Though Asian immigrant men were not charged with the "hypersexuality" associated with black men in the nineteenth century, anti-miscegenation laws often still applied to Asian men.[192] Such anti-miscegenation laws were ratified "to protect white men's exclusive access to white women," legally segregating the races to avoid contamination of the blood.[193] Bunker interestingly never mentioned a romantic interest in his own letters, and only asked his sister to relay his health and wellbeing to "all enquiring friends."[194] He specifically addressed his letters "Dear Sister," leaving no confusion for any audience about the type of relationship Bunker had with his letters' recipient.[195] The omission of a paramour may simply indicate that Bunker had no one on his mind during that time, but not including such information also eliminates any chance of scandal if Bunker's true racial status was discovered.[196] These two conflicting theories of Asian immigrant masculinity work to either neuter or demonize the individual, but both stereotypes ultimately bolstered white masculinity in popular culture, making a narrative of white identity even more attractive for Bunker.

Not only did Christopher Wren Bunker understand the social taboo and illegality of the interracial relations between his parents, he was also keenly aware of the curiosity surrounding his father and uncle's sexuality and masculinity. When the twins were younger, several doctors conducted medical examinations during which Chang and Eng were stripped naked for the purpose of examining the structure and regularity of their genitalia.[197] When the twins married,

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[191] Jung, 171.
[192] Ellen Lemire, *"Miscegenation:" Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 99.
[193] Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected,* 22.
[194] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 8.
[195] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[196] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 17.
[197] Huang, 86.

their union between two sisters sparked was could only be called "salacious speculation" about the sexual practices of their marriage beds and, then, complete shock when the "freaks" were able to procreate and produce "normal," nonconjoined children.[198] The prosperity and fertility of the twins was both blessing and curse, leaving the already highly visible Bunker family vulnerable to further scrutiny from their North Carolinian community. Christopher Wren Bunker's desire to protect his family and their social station mandated that he perform white masculinity, masking sexual Other or oddity and projecting likeness between himself and the young Confederate men that he fought alongside. By fashioning an identity of white masculinity, Bunker constructs an image that negates the hypersexualized, passive, and freakish and, instead, begets sameness and belonging.

Within his missives, Christopher Wren Bunker participated in the construction of white masculinity most clearly through his direct commands to his sister as the recipient of his letters. Bunker often wrote to his sister to ask for provisions and clothing during the winter months of his service, a common enough practice. In his November 18th letter, Bunker's words took the form of a command, telling his sister that she "must knit [Bunker] two or three pairs of socks and a pair of gloves" if he was ever to "survive the weather."[199] In the same letter, he demanded a blanket with the same word, "must," suggesting that this action was not a charitable goodness, but a predetermined duty that she was bound and expected to fulfill.[200] The word "must" surfaced again in Bunker's November 2nd letter, when he declared himself without the funds to procure proper winter clothing and simply must have some made for him.[201] It could be that the Bunker family was raised to respect the Confucian values from Chang and Eng's past, in which

[198] Bow, 43-45.
[199] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 4-5.
[200] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5.
[201] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7.

rigid social hierarchies dictated that male children were placed in a stratum above their sisters;[202] however, it seems more likely that the differing expectations between sexes would be attributed to social norms of the American South, where women did most of the knitting and household chores, the "domesticals" as Charles Beecher referred to them.[203] Bunker's written directions to his sister reveal his attempts at assertiveness, an attribute he considered vital to his construction of white masculinity. Bunker assumed this decisive and demanding front because it fits his own notions of how a white male of the planter class must behave, further enhancing his narrative of white identity.

Bunker's direct commands demonstrate an assertive and, at times, self-contradicting masculinity that was beginning to take shape during the nineteenth century and into the United States Civil War. As Christopher S. Stowe outlines, numerous scholars identify "the antebellum years as the collision point between two superficially incompatible forms of manhood:"[204]

> The first embraced public virtue, restraint, service, and self-abnegation—one well represented in the West Point model of "manliness"—while the other found feats of physical strength, emotive displays, and aggression as the yardstick of an emergent "primitive masculinity." These values contended for men's allegiances across cultures and classes and were not exclusive to time, place, or socioeconomic status.[205]

These definitions of masculinity align with the "two preeminent and dueling mid-century masculinities" featured in Amy Greenberg's *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum Empire*,

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[202] Tu Weiming, "Confucianism," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 7, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Confucianism#toc25454.

[203] quoted in Hager, 131.

[204] Christopher S. Stowe, "George Gordon Meade and the Boundaries of Nineteenth-Century Military Masculinity," *Civil War History* 61, no. 4 (2015): 373, accessed January 23, 2019, doi: 10.1353/cwh.2015.0072.

[205] Stowe, 373.

"*restricted manhood* and *martial manhood*."[206] "Whereas an early nineteenth-century ideal of manly behavior resided largely in the life of the mind," a characteristic of restricted manhood, these notions were supplanted by the championing of physical strength or martial manhood.[207] This transition resulted in middle class men conditioning their bodies to "successfully compete with men of less-refined classes and races."[208] Such willingness to participate in competition was arguably exaggerated in the South, where southern honor codes that encouraged violent solutions to confrontation became something of a "sectional phenomenon."[209] Mark Twain famously blamed ideals of Southern honor and romantic competition on Sir Walter Scott in his 1883 novel *Life on the Mississippi*, indicting the author of *Ivanhoe* for setting the South back a generation with his obsession for the past.[210] Though martial manhood was not, of course, restricted to the American South, southerners "embraced militarism as the pinnacle of masculine virtue," leading some to conclude that the southern involvement in the Civil War was a "'simple test of manhood.'"[211] As a male member of the planter class, Bunker's participation in the Civil War was an act of service that proved his devotion while also legitimizing his claims to white masculinity within his community.

Bunker's letters exhibit a careful mixture of these masculine trends, appealing to both representations of white masculinity associated with soldiers in the nineteenth century. This freedom of double association was, in fact, a claim to white identity, considering that "[w]hite American men of diverse occupations could and did embrace a wide range of masculine

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[206] Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.
[207] Greenberg, 9.
[208] Greenberg, 9.
[209] Greenberg, 139.
[210] Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Urbana, Illinois: Project Gutenberg, 2006), https://www.gutenberg.org/files/245/245-h/245-h.htm.
[211] Greenberg, 271-272.

practices in the middle decades of the century," but men of color had no such luxury.[212] Even when discussing the attributes of martial manhood, Greenberg asserts that any man, "northern or southern, Irish or native-born" could display these characteristics, excluding other ethnicities from the ability to perform masculinity at this time.[213] In some instances, Bunker's missives present the emotional detachment of restricted manhood when describing his services in war, casually reporting that a man was to be shot "for desertion" in his April 20th letter[214] or mentioning that he had participated in "four or five fights" since his last letter within his June 26th epistle.[215] Both instances in the letters dispassionately describe violence and gruesomeness in a tone expected from an experienced and hardened military man unphased by the carnage and acts of war surrounding him. Furthermore, when Bunker participated in a search and rescue mission for a few missing or captured captains, he impersonally contemplated the possibility of his own death, writing that if he was "killed or captured on this trip," his family had permission to collect his horse for him.[216] In each of these instances, Bunker seemed to recognize the services he performed for his country and even adopted a self-sacrificial devotion to his cause, which he believed was within public interest. This devotion bolstered Bunker's self-fashioned image of white masculinity by adhering to the reserved qualities of restricted manhood, a narrative only available to the white male.

Such discipline is one aspect of constructed masculinity evident in soldiers during this time, but the role of restricted manhood was balanced in Bunker's letters by the appearance of martial manhood, the more violent and emotive side of white masculinity in the nineteenth

[212] Greenberg, 10.
[213] Greenberg, 140.
[214] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 11.
[215] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 15.
[216] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 18.

century. Oftentimes, Bunker's complaints of cold and harsh conditions were highly charged, evidenced by his November 18th letter in which Bunker first stated that he and his comrades would "perish to death" from exposure.[217] In the same letter, Bunker repeated that he doubted they would "ever survive the weather," noting the extreme nature of camp lifestyle.[218] His reports of "long and tiresome marches"[219] over the "rockiest and muddiest road that [he] ever saw" were passionate grievances containing some of his most descriptive and connotative language.[220] By utilizing both forms of masculinity in his letters, Bunker created a three-dimensional representation of himself and his masculinity. While men of color at this time were confined to the parameters of stereotype, Bunker's seemingly contradicting emotions humanize him, further validating his narrative of white, masculine identity. In his stern but emotional demands of his sister, Bunker harnessed both contradicting expectations of white masculinity to create his own narrative of identity, one that employs emotion when it sees fit.

Not confined to letters, highly charged rhetoric was widely used for recruitment purposes and boosting morale during the war. Those same West Point graduates who embodied restrained manliness during their military training "resigned their commissions in the United States army to accept commissions in North Carolina regiments," responding to their heartfelt and overflowing devotion to the Confederacy and its way of life.[221] These men were likely swayed by war recruitment posters that appealed to the newer definitions of martial masculinity with messages like "100 Good Men Wanted. No Boys Need Apply."[222] Circulars were additionally printed to raise volunteer armies, raining fire on the North for its "long threatened attempt to invade

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[217] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 3.
[218] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 5.
[219] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 6.
[220] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 3.
[221] Barrett, 18.
[222] Brain Resnick, "U.S. Civil War Recruitment Posters," *The Atlantic*, October 28, 2011, https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/10/civil-war-recruitment-posters/247420/.

[Southern] homes and subjugate a free people."[223] Irony aside, these notices exemplify a pathos that provided motive for many soldiers fighting on both sides of the conflict, committing countless acts of violence as a physical representation of devotion to cause. Bunker could not have escaped the influence of this emotional appeal. Whether or not Bunker read these circulars or saw these specific posters, his motivations for joining the Confederate army stem largely from the emotional desire to protect his family. His touching connection to his loved ones, however, was certain not the only motivation for writing his letters. Bunker employed both the detached and the fervent and impassioned aspects of masculinity, impersonated both competing forms within his letters to produce a self-curated identity that aligns with the masculinity of the nineteenth century white man and the ideals of the planter class. Much like the recruitment posters and circulars that reminded Southern men of their duty to the cause, Bunker's letters are a constructed narrative, meant to cultivate the image of whiteness that Bunker wished to claim.

The letters of Christopher Wren Bunker display an attention to convention, fraternity and masculinity that simultaneously informs the reader while also constructing a narrative of assimilation into a class society that rejects Otherness. Bunker's scrupulous fashioning of his personal narrative defies boundaries that would normally confine him and his family to a racialized status restricted from citizenship and economic stability. The cultivated narrative that Bunker defined in each of his missives is not constrained by his biological reality; instead, he openly declared his allegiance to a homeland he boldly proclaimed his own. When, on November 2nd, 1863, Christopher rejoiced for the birth of another "Bold American" into the Bunker household, he legitimized his new sister's claim to the world that he was fighting to protect.[224] In

[223] quoted in Barrett, 18.
[224] Christopher Wren Bunker to sister, 1863-1864, Christopher Wren Bunker Papers, 7-8.

his assertion of a self-made identity, Bunker redefined what it means to be a “Bold American” in the nineteenth century American South.

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