



**THE HONORS PROGRAM**

**The Social Integration of  
Civil War Veterans with Hearing Loss:  
The Roles of Government and Media**

*An Honors Capstone Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Graduation with University Honors*

*By: Corinna S. Hill*

---

*Committee Chair: Jeffrey Brune, PhD  
Second Reader: William Ennis, MA*

*Honors Director: Shirley Shultz Myers, PhD  
Honors Coordinator: Geoffrey Whitebread, MA*

May 14, 2014

## Abstract

The end of the Civil War at 1865 came with a staggering cost of six hundred twenty five thousand lives and a sizable number of deafened veterans. The deafened veterans who left the war faced a unique dilemma with their disability, hearing loss. The path to proving their disability and obtaining benefits would prove arduous. Before the Civil War, disability was considered *less*. After the war wrought its damage, disability was seen as *free-riders*. This morphing of the disability stigma can be attributed to the reactions from the government and media. The well-intentioned federal government's policies and resources for disabled veterans in the years following the Civil War changed the perception of disability but also exacerbated the stigma for veterans who were disabled. People started to realize that disabled veterans were getting more aid than anyone else. The large numbers of disabled veterans frightened the public; the result was that fear of malingering spread. Disabled people came to be viewed as leeches who were dragging the country down. Complicating the situation, disability was tough to prove in the years after the Civil War due to the limited medical advances made in that time, which greatly increased the fear of malingering among the American public. All of those issues and perception contributed to the negative experiences of Civil War disabled veterans with hearing loss.

## **Acknowledgements**

I owe my sincerest thanks to all members of my Capstone Committee. Dr. Myers, Mr.

Whitebread, Mr. Ennis, thank you all for guiding me to this point.

Dr. Brune, thank you for all you have done and all the work you have contributed to this project. I remember when I originally proposed to cover veterans with hearing loss in three different wars and you wisely steered me away from that. I humbly thank you for all your support and advice; it has been an honor to work with you.

And to my family, who has been my source of strength and support, I love you.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Relevant Scholarship of Civil War and Disability Studies .....</i>	<i>8</i>
<b>2. Civil War Disability Policy and Resources .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Legislation .....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Disabled Veterans in the Workforce: Barriers .....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Where Was the Money Coming From? .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Analysis of the Government's Response .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<b>3. Media Influence on Changes in Public Attitude .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Why was the Public Angry? .....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Why don't they work? .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Fear of Malingering .....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Transformation of the Stigma of Disability .....</i>	<i>28</i>
<b>4. Veterans with Hearing Loss .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Documentation of Hearing Loss .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Pensions for Veterans with Hearing Loss .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Lonely Existence .....</i>	<i>37</i>
<b>5. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>43</b>

## 1. Introduction

In the year of 1861, the first shots of the American Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Those shots spurred one of the most destructive wars in the Western world—still the highest death toll of any war on U.S. soil. Out of every four soldiers that marched to war, at least one and sometimes two would never return home. The end of the Civil War in 1865 came with a staggering cost of six hundred twenty five thousand lives and thousands of disabled veterans. Because of incomplete records and possible under-reporting, we will never know the accurate count of disabled veterans from the war, but records do allow us to know that their war experiences and, equally important, their public treatment after the war transformed their lives in unprecedented ways.

Veterans left the war with a wide array of disabilities. Some had amputations, some were blinded, some suffered with infections and wounds. And then there were the deafened veterans. The Civil War's weaponry and the lack of medical advances resulted in ear diseases for many veterans. This hearing loss impacted veterans socially and economically.<sup>1</sup> What kinds of benefits were deafened veterans getting? What kind of medical treatment did they receive? How did the public treat them? These questions are significant because their answers reflect the social, economic, and political outcomes regarding the treatment of disabled veterans.

Before the war started, disabled citizens were considered “less” than their non-disabled citizens. Responsibility for disabled individuals fell to the families and

---

<sup>1</sup> The deafened veterans will be referred to using terms such as “hearing loss”, “deafened”, or “ear diseases”. “Deaf” will not be used to refer to them because they were not culturally deaf or immersed within the deaf community, so the term “deaf” will not be used to apply to them.

communities they lived in. Although stigmatized as “less-than,” nonetheless disabled individuals lived as part of the community who cared for them. After the Civil War wrought its damage and thousands of newly disabled persons swelled the pension list, the meaning of disability changed. Although still stigmatized the content of the stigma differed. Prior to the war, stigmas of disability concerned a sense of the individual’s inferiority and families and their surrounding community looked after these individuals voluntarily. After the Civil War, disability from war wounds inspired patriotic respect that mitigated that older sense of inferiority; care of the disabled veterans became a national responsibility. In the face of scarce employment and employment discrimination against disabled veterans, the federal government passed the General Law of 1862 and the Dependent and Disability Pensions Act of 1890 to provide pensions to those who were disabled. However, stigma arose in a new form. Disabled people, whether veteran or not, were no longer inferior because of the disability but a drain on the national treasury instead, Americans began to perceive disabled persons as free-riders.<sup>2</sup>

The well-intentioned federal government’s policies and resources for disabled veterans in the years following the Civil War changed the content but also exacerbated the severity of stigmas for disabled veterans. The diversion of significant amounts of income tax and media campaigns attempting exhorting these veterans to enter or re-enter the workforce contributed to the intensity of the

---

<sup>2</sup> The term “free-riders” is chosen in lieu of the contemporary term “free-loaders” because of three reasons. One, this is an historical term; it was used in the nineteenth century. It is also an economical term, which refers to those who consume more than their fair share of a public resource, or shoulder less than a fair share of the costs of its production. Three, to avoid applying modern perceptions and ideas, the term “free-loaders” is not used.

backlash. Also, although the federal government collected taxes from the whole country even though Confederate veterans often eschewed the idea of depending on the federal government for pensions. Hence evidence about pensions and veterans refer to soldiers who served in the Union Army.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Union soldiers primarily benefitted from pensions, rumblings began from all parts of the country since all paid taxes. People started to realize that a disabled veteran was getting more governmental aid than anyone else. The large numbers of disabled veterans frightened the public and exacerbated the growing resentment. Congressional leaders and the Pension Bureau did not contain the situation in time; the result was that fear of malingering spread. Disabled people came to be viewed as leeches who were dragging the country down. Complicating the situation, disability was very tough to prove in the years after the Civil War due to the limited diagnostic equipment, which greatly increased the fear of malingering among the American public.

Today, when one envisions disability or disability benefits, it is likely that a concept of “leech” may still come to mind. Indeed, the birth of this stigma of disability can be traced to the Civil War pension system. Although the Civil War ended, one of the main reasons the country remained divided culturally and economically concerned disabled veterans.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey E. Vogel, “Redefining Reconciliation: Confederate Veterans and the Southern Responses to Federal Civil War Pensions,” *Civil War History* 51:1 (March 2005), 67. The reasons for this anathema are complex and outside the scope of the present research.

*Relevant Scholarship of Civil War and Disability Studies*

The Civil War has become one of the most documented wars in history, and this documentation includes information about disabled veterans. Historians have covered disability and the Civil War extensively such as Rebecca Edwards and her focus on the Welfare Home for disabled veterans. However, historians have only briefly touched upon the topic of veterans with hearing loss, perhaps in part because little documentation has come to light. One work, "Hearing Loss in Union Army Vets" by Ryan Sewell, et. al, addresses deafened veterans with the focus solely on the employment outcomes and pension benefits for veterans with hearing loss from the Union Army. It elaborates on the compensation for veterans with hearing loss and compares it with modern-day compensations. Describing only the occupational outcomes for deafened veterans, Sewell's research differs from the current study of the social experiences of deafened veterans. The work makes the claim that hearing loss was a common disability amongst UA Civil War veterans and that veterans received higher compensation for hearing loss following the Civil War than they would today.<sup>4</sup>

Some scholarship on disabled Civil War veterans does look at social experiences of disabled veterans generally, but not deafened veterans apart from the general category. Peter Blanck is one of the frontrunners in the disability civil war research; his work with Chen Song brings attention towards pensions for Union

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," *Ohio State Law Journal* 62 (2001), Ryan K. Sewell, et al., "Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920", *The Laryngoscope*, 114 (2004), Peter Blanck and Chen Song. "With Malice Toward None; With Charity Toward All: Civil War Pensions for Native and Foreign-Born Union Army Veterans", *Transnational law Journal* 4 (2001).



Army veterans. Another of Blanck's notable work included the "Civil War Pensions and Disability," which raises the claim that one hundred years after the Civil War, disabled people faced the same criticism the disabled veterans did. Apart from the larger category of disability, which Blanck focuses on, deafened veterans and the ways society reacted to them have not received attention. Deafness created an invisible disability, which makes a different experience and struggle than the general experiences of those with visible disabilities. In particular, government policy and contemporary media intersected with antebellum social attitudes toward disability in shaping the experience of deafened Civil War veterans. Veterans received government support to build lives after the War, but it was the media reaction to these benefits and the large numbers receiving them, that fostered public resentment toward disabled veterans generally and deafened veterans specifically.

The government and media played a role in exacerbating the severity of stigmas for disabled veterans, including the deafened veterans. Rumblings in the media that a disabled veteran was getting more aid than anyone else gradually increased over the next twenty-five years to vigorous attacks; as a result, the public began to view disabled veterans as leeches and malingerers. For veterans with hearing loss, their invisible disability was very tough to prove in the years after the Civil War due to the limited medical advances made in that time, which no doubt greatly increased the fear of malingering among the American public. All of that combined contributed to the negative experiences of Civil War deafened veterans.

## 2. Civil War Disability Policy and Resources

“Every other person you meet has a pistol in his hand.”<sup>5</sup> This diary entry indicates why the Civil War remains the bloodiest conflict on American soil. Not only the bloodiest, the Civil War also left many soldiers disabled. Inadequate records make it impossible to discern the exact number of disabled veterans from the war, but existing records indicate that thousands of soldiers survived the war with some form of disability.<sup>6</sup> The American government granted pensions to these disabled veterans, escalating the number of pension benefits dramatically. During the beginning of the Civil War the number on the disabled roll was only 8, 159, mostly from former wars. Twelve months after the close of the Civil War it had reached 126, 722.<sup>7</sup>

Because of these pensions, the government was a powerful, if not the most powerful, influence on shaping the path of the country and disability policy. The government’s decisions reverberated for years to come. With the country in emotional and physical shambles, the people were looking to the government for guidance. Congress thus enacted pensions to bolster nationalist sentiment among the people. But implementation brought undesirable results as well. Congress increased the number of pensions available, but the increased taxes needed to fund these pensions provided few benefits to other taxpayers. As a result, Americans came to resent disabled veterans as a drain on the economy. The pensions allocated

---

<sup>5</sup> David Homer Bates (1843-1926). November 1863–June 1865 diary, December 26, 1864 entry. Alfred Whital Stern Collection, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress

<sup>6</sup> Peter Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” *Ohio State Law Journal* 62 (2001): 116.

<sup>7</sup> “The Uprising For Pensions,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 1890.

by the government became one of the two most dominant and influencing factors—the other was media influence—that shaped the stigma of disability. However, it is important to acknowledge the social and political climate after the civil war played a role in the negative reaction to the pension laws passed by the government. The social and military conflict created an environment ripe for the public to direct their anger at an easier target, namely those receiving more government benefits than the rest of the public.

The military solution to the conflict between North and South which forced Southern surrender, coupled with the unique and profound pain of a civil war, Americans killing Americans, all contributed to the tense climate after the war. This situation posed a major difficulty for the government in its efforts to ease the country into recovery. In such a climate the young nation linked the concept of disability with limitations on citizenship. The nation wanted to ensure the survival of the republic by making sure the citizens were mentally capable of political decisions.<sup>8</sup>

### *Legislation*

Government legislation played a major role in shaping disabled veterans' experience beginning during the War and continuing all the way to World War, which saw new laws passed. Two major legislative acts, The General Law of 1862 and the Disability Act of 1890, passed during this time period, which increased pensions for disabled veterans. The period of 1862-1890 is referred to as the "Disability Pension System," in which pensions were handed out based on war-

---

<sup>8</sup> Kim Nielsen, *Disability History of the United States*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), 50.

related injuries. During a second phase, 1890-1907, called the “Service-Based Pension System,” pensions became more broadly available to all veterans.<sup>9</sup>

The first step by Congress towards enacting pensions was taken in 1861 with the 1861 Pension Act. This Act was established to allocate pensions for disabled veterans. This was limited in scope and the outcry for increased pensions from soldiers led Congress to pass the General Law of 1862. Congress wanted to revive the nationalist hopes among soldiers, and the 1861 Pension Act was not doing the trick.

The General Law of 1862 “provided benefits to soldiers who were directly disabled by war injuries.”<sup>10</sup> This act limited the availability of benefits to white males who could prove that their disability was a direct result of wartime fighting. This act also established a medical screening system for rating and compensating disabilities; this was the first time this came into action for government pensions.<sup>11</sup> This Act was designed specifically to respond to Civil War veterans. This 1862 Act made pensions available to veterans based on the severity of their disability.<sup>12</sup> The more the disability disrupted a veteran’s ability to perform manual labor, the more benefits the veteran received in their pension.<sup>13</sup> Many veterans considered this unfair because this created a system that distributed benefits disproportionately.

For example, if one veteran possessed an “invisible” disability, the veteran was often given relatively low benefits. Invisible disabilities come in many different

---

<sup>9</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan K. Sewell, et al., “Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920,” *The Laryngoscope*, 114 (2004): 2147.

<sup>11</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 116.

<sup>12</sup> Sewell, “Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920,” 2147.

<sup>13</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 117.

forms; some examples include vision problems or severe back pain, whereas disabilities that were highly visible—amputations, for instance—were rewarded more. Pensions for veterans with hearing loss ranged on the spectrum, and some who obviously suffered high levels of hearing loss were rewarded more than veterans with moderately low levels of hearing loss. Keep in mind that the surgeons across the country varied in their diagnosis. The medical technology available to physicians in the late nineteenth century was very limited, especially with diagnosing hearing loss.<sup>14</sup> It often was a guessing game for physicians; they did not possess the advanced auditory testing equipment available to us today. This Law of 1862 was brief in scope and benefits for disabled veterans and Congress would follow up with a second Act.

The second major legislative act to follow was the Dependent and Disability Pensions Act of 1890, which made pensions available to all veterans identified as disabled, regardless of whether the disability occurred during wartime fighting. To qualify for these benefits, veterans had to be white, male, and have proof of their disability. The screening for benefits occurred through the administrative process, applicants had to meet those qualifications before they were eligible for pensions. Already a sizable group, this group of veterans receiving pensions expanded all the more after the pension acts to include other American citizens as well. For example, widows and children of veterans, among others, would be granted pensions. Furthermore, this second act increased pensions for those unemployed disabled

---

<sup>14</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 199.

veterans to improve the quality of life, and in many cases it provided many disabled veterans with their livelihood.

*Disabled Veterans in the Workforce: Barriers*

Disabled veterans often relied on pensions as their income because of the inaccessible workforce. Our country prides itself on citizens' economic independence and capitalist ventures; Americans were expected to support themselves financially. However, the employment struggles faced by disabled veterans created a difficult transition into the workforce and a high level of dependency on pensions.

The years after the war saw the Civil War disabled veterans entering an inaccessible and unsupportive job market after the war. The cottage industry was vanishing, replaced by the rise of the factories of industrialization. The jobs available to returning veterans were industrialized jobs, which greatly diminished the opportunities and accessibility for disabled veterans.

On top of this, the 1860s were a time of mass industrialization and the new industrial machines were not friendly to the disabled. The disabled veterans returned home to an increasingly urbanized and industrialized workplace. The industrialization separated home and the workplace, it created a new job force for the disabled veterans to enter. Professions had to scramble to figure out to accommodate the influx of veterans and this created an unequal job market. The veterans were not afforded the legal protection of today and often had difficulty finding employment.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Kanjanapipatkul, Tayatat, "Pensions and labor force participation of Civil War vet-

The government attempted to rectify this manner with enacting pensions. Labor force programs were enacted, but findings show that there were a low number of veterans entering the workforce; rather the pensions provided most of their income.<sup>16</sup> In many cases, the pensions became the only source of income available to disabled veterans, yet the veterans often still struggled with surviving on the pension benefits.

As a result, pension rolls expanded to unforeseen proportions. Not only were veterans receiving pension benefits, but so were the widows and children. Congress passed the two acts as a way to soothe the nation and rebuild from the chaos that was the Civil War. Congress' aim with those pension laws was to bolster nationalist sentiment among the people by providing assistance and passing legislative acts for the disabled veterans. These laws were attempts to unify all veterans together and strengthen the nation as one.

#### *Where Was the Money Coming From?*

The number of funds needed for the nation to provide these pensions was exorbitantly high. As a result, Congress began to discuss how to collect the money. In order to get the funding needed for the nation's spending, particularly the high quantity of pensions, Congress formed the Internal Revenue Service.

The nation was now adding more social service benefits for citizens, which required increases in taxes. Thus, the United States Congress passed The Revenue

---

erans," in *Health and Labor Force Participation over the Life Cycle*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 231.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 237.

Act of 1862 in July of 1862.<sup>17</sup> This law established the office of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), a formal department that was entrusted with collecting taxes. This department represented a national effort to collect taxes with the goal of raising millions of dollars for the war effort, including veteran care. Imposed on July 1, 1862 in the midst of the Civil War as an emergency measure, this Civil War Income Tax was the first tax to be based on individual incomes of United States citizens.<sup>18</sup> This tax was imposed on states and territories not seceded from the nation, namely the Union states and territories.

The government publicized the taxes as a patriotic effort; those who paid their income taxes were true patriots and Americans. As Morison and Commager mention, one “role model” by the name of A. T. Stewart paid four hundred thousand dollars in taxes which equals around six million today according to the Consumer Price Index of the U.S. dollar. Countrymen and women quickly revered his action. The story of his willingness to donate or pay taxes became widespread. He embodied what Americans considered a true patriot of his time; he was making a sacrifice for his country.<sup>19</sup> This public reaction reflects the patriotic climate of America at the time; Americans were starting to view economic sacrifices as a necessity for their country. However, this idea of economic freedom and donations in wartime ultimately clashed with the economic dependence of the Civil War veterans. In a wartime climate promoting nationalism and economic independence,

---

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia G. Fox, “Income Tax Records of the Civil War Years,” *Prologue Magazine* Winter 1986, Vol. 18, No. 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, Vol. 1 (1962), 748.



Americans were expected to work and donate what they could for the nation. This attitude became widespread, so when the veterans started lining up for pensions after the war, their taking government funds went against the values of economic independence and economic sacrifice brought on by the Civil War taxing system.

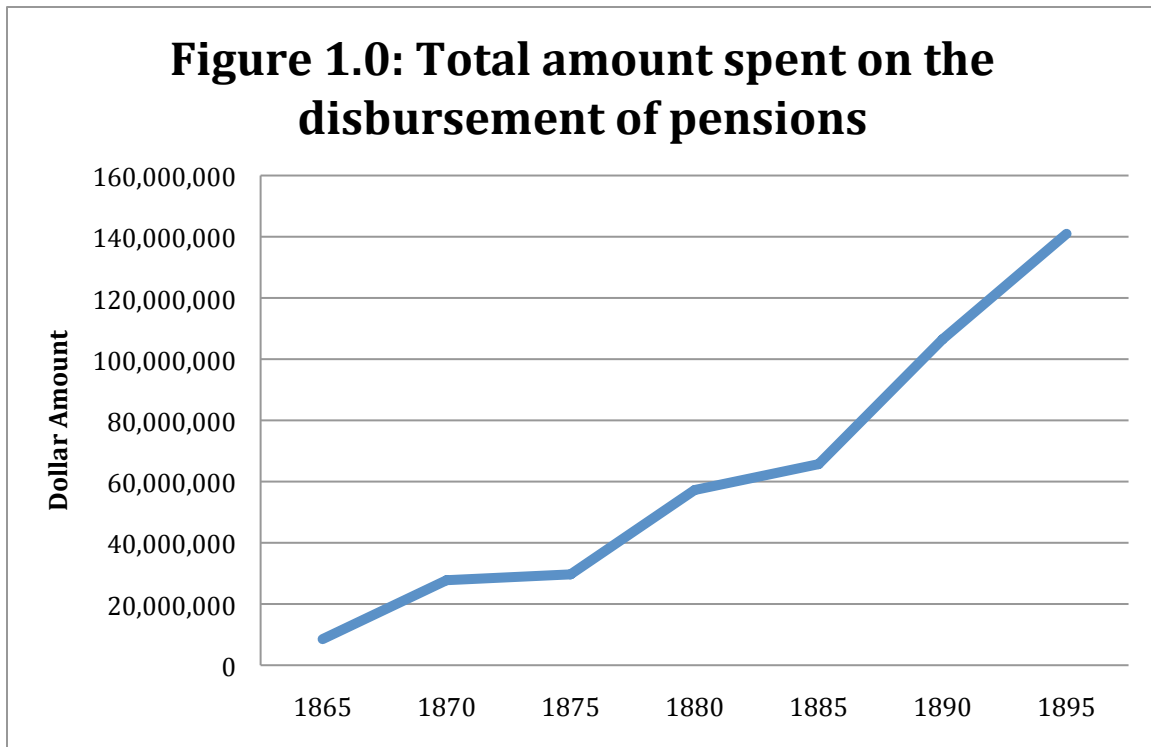
Building on this sense of obligation, the government followed the first income tax law in 1862 with the Internal Revenue Act of June 30, 1864. This Act raised tax rates and gave the government more power to tax. Moreover, the 1864 Act made the taxes the responsibility of the taxpayer. They were to file a list of their household income and property before the deadline; failure to do so before the deadline resulted in a penalty. The 1862 taxes initially were three percent of individual annual incomes over \$600 and a tax of 5 percent on any income over \$10,000.<sup>20</sup> However, that percent quickly increased as the nation's debts and demands mounted. By 1864, the rates increased to 5 percent for individual annual incomes over \$600 and 10 percent for those over \$5,000.<sup>21</sup>

Tax rates quickly increased and continued to increase as the years passed because other areas of devastation lingered, debts mounted and pensioners increased greatly. The number of pensioners at the end of the war in 1865 was 126,722, but rose to one million by 1893 after the Act of 1890. Such an increase in pensioners meant the amount of money needed by the government also increased exponentially. Taxes took an enormous hike as the war costs mounted and the pensions for veterans increased in scope.

---

<sup>20</sup> Cynthia G. Fox, "Income Tax Records of the Civil War Years".

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



22

The very steps the government took to unify the country and take care of its citizens after the war also caused a backlash of resentment at how the government was using money it collected in taxes. Although other factors also played a role, the bitterness that spread among the people can be attributed in part to how poorly the government handled the situation.

#### *Analysis of the Government's Response*

The Government had an immediate solution in mind, which was to enact increased pensions and collect higher taxes. They were trying to put a Band-Aid over the large gaping cut left by the Civil War. Their short-term solutions ultimately

---

<sup>22</sup> Figure 1.0 illustrates how much pensions increased in five-year increments, revealing the increase of pensions post the Act of 1890 and the increase of demand for funding to support those pensions.

fell apart and the government scrambled to heal the wound, but with their scrambling they inadvertently created more problems for themselves.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the government and the media influenced the attitude and exclusion of disabled veterans.<sup>23</sup> The political factors included political turmoil including the re-integration of the South into the union and the assassination of President Lincoln, as well as the profound effects of emancipation on economic and social structures in society. The war just finished and slaves were “freed,” the economy was poor, and there was a weak unification process taken by the government. These conditions made dissent ripe to happen and the disabled “free-riders” became the target of that frustration.

In implementing pension benefits, Congress did not effectively address the growing numbers of disabled veterans. The lack of response to these growing numbers led to the amplification of the stigma of disability. Congress and the Pension Bureau did not attempt to contain the public reaction. Simply handing out pensions was not an effective response, since it hurt as much as it helped veterans in that it led in the end to the widespread transformation of the stigma of disability.

However, one way to look at this situation is acknowledging that Congress was stuck between a rock and a hard place. The multitude of Civil War veterans who had served tirelessly and left the battlefield damaged felt they deserved pensions. Congress saw that the nation was in shambles, so they immediately granted pensions to the veterans. This action was honorable and provided many veterans with their only source of livelihood. Yet, with this action, there was backlash. The

---

<sup>23</sup> Blanck, “Civil War Pensions and Disability,” 114.

veterans ultimately suffered extreme backlash from the public and media and more often than not were branded as malingering individuals. The public felt the government was creating an environment of helplessness; as a result, the public grew bitter and the government's mishandling of the situations fueled the media backlash that only further exacerbated the public's frustration.

Providing pensions caused problems, but, at the same time, had Congress denied or decreased pensions for veterans, it could have created conditions for a different kind of backlash. If Congress failed to provide pensions for veterans, the country could have been in an uproar as well.

The root of the problem is that Congress failed to implement polices and provisions effectively, which made dissent against the disabled veterans ripe to happen. This was a sensitive time for our country and a very difficult time for the government to navigate. Unfortunately, what Congress did manage unknowingly contributed to the backlash and negative attitudes towards an emerging social category of individuals with disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

By 1893, the disabled consumed 42% of the federal government's funding.<sup>25</sup> This is almost half of the government's spending. The public was paying high levels of taxes to see it go to people who did not have obvious disabilities. The near majority of their own tax money was not going to benefit the rest of the public, only the veterans. This seemingly disproportionate share of tax dollars created an uproar, and Congress failed to speedily react to the public's resentment.

Congress did not sail the country through this difficult time effectively,

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 200.

<sup>25</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 114.

thereby transforming the stigma towards disability to one of freeriding. Its start in this significant period of American history helps explain the strength of this conceptualization of disability that persists.

### 3. Media Influence on Changes in Public Attitude

Newspaper articles from the 1860-1920 contain various articles regarding the Civil War pension system. Beginning in 1860, articles were published applauding the enactment of pensions and the heroic acts of the veterans. But as 1890 rolled in, the tide would turn. The newspapers began to blast the veterans and pensions system. The changing public opinion and transformation of the stigma of disability is reflected in and fed by newspaper articles.

One example of the backlash is this statement in a *New York Times* editorial of 1894: “The evidence shows that the pension rolls of the Government are blackened with fraud, and it is due to the good name of the country, to the honor of our veterans, and to the interest of the Public Treasury that they be purged.”<sup>26</sup> Eventually the media-influenced public claimed that the pensions encouraged dependence and lavish spending.<sup>27</sup> The media continued to publish articles using telling words such as “lavish,” “generous,” and “dependent”—language reflecting the negative attitudes towards veterans. The media backlash resulted from public frustration with increasing taxes and weak governmental implementation.

The public outrage and media sensationalizing feeding off each other enabled the newspapers to continue publishing against the veterans and the pension system. The public’s bitterness grew as they learned more about the government’s mishandling of the situation; in particular, articles, which targeted disabled veterans, increased the public’s animosity towards the pension system and the veterans who received these pensions. This vicious cycle continued for years.

---

<sup>26</sup> “Purge the Pension Rolls,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1894.

<sup>27</sup> “The Dependent Pension Scheme,” *The New York Times*, Dec 7, 1889.

Although building for almost thirty years, animosity directed towards the disabled veterans became markedly visible in the articles after 1890 and prominent in American homes. The public was very direct in their dissent with the disability as reflected in this editorial:

*What are disabilities? . . . There are very few men who could not have got a certificate of disability. . . . [T]he door of fraud was thrown wide open to let in those who were not incapacitated for self-support, and to make this virtually a service pension for all who would testify that they had some kind of a disease in their system. . . . It is safe to say that only a fraction of these "disabilities" were such as were intended by the law, loose and liberal as it was, to give title to a pension. –Editorial, New York Times, 1894.<sup>28</sup>*

This passage typifies the alarm over the expansively changing definition of disability. Not only did the numbers of the disabled grew exponentially, but also these growing numbers of disabled persons had become, in the form of tax-supported pensions, the nation's burden.

#### *Why was the Public Angry?*

The nation's government did not take an approach that reaped long-term benefits for the nation. Rather, the government was focused on immediate solutions that quickly fell apart. This lack of a long-term response our easily left the door open for backlash which the media fed. Helped by media, the backlash from the public ultimately targeted disabled veterans.

---

<sup>28</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 113.

The public felt provoked that the government took a veteran-first approach as the Civil War was winding down.<sup>29</sup> Understandably grateful to maimed soldiers, the government quickly prioritized their needs among the multitude of needs the nation was demanding. However understandable, this priority did not sit well with a citizenry that had suffered greatly in other ways—lost family members, lack of supplies, displacement from their homes, and more. Exacerbating their sense of continuing sacrifice was the Dependent and Disability Pensions Act of 1890 which required a massive increase in taxes these hard working, tax-paying Americans had to pay yet saw little return compared to the massive aid going to leeching veterans.

The media reported that the public saw Congress scrambling for the soldier vote;<sup>30</sup> one editorial stated Congressmen “have vied with each other in bids for the ‘soldier vote’ by going to greater and greater lengths in legislative lavishness. Many applications rejected by the Pension Bureau have been specifically granted in Congress. The rates on class after class of pensions have increased...”<sup>31</sup> This same editorial makes it clear that the ease of claiming disability after the Act of 1890 exponentially increased resentment and created some nostalgia for the first system: “Up to that time [the years before the Act of 1890] the growth of the pension system had been normal, and the country took the greatest pride in it....”<sup>32</sup> The earlier system requiring more stringent proof and thus resulting in comparatively low number of pensions seemed ideal. With the disabled veterans consuming nearly half

---

<sup>29</sup> “The Uprising For Pensions,” *The New York Times*, August 19, 1890.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



of the government's funds, the opposition towards the pension system became widespread.<sup>33</sup>

The public was angry with the government, but the government was not an easy target for them to address their frustrations. Their anger was not originally directed at the veterans, but the availability of the veterans became their easiest target. What becomes evident throughout many newspaper articles is that the public felt their own government ignored and abandoned them. They raised points such as why were the veterans getting financial support and not other Americans. *Why don't they work?*

The grumblings about financial support incited comments about why the veterans depended on pensions rather than getting gainful employment. The veterans' economic dependence clashed with the economic independence and wartime donations; the media amplified this clash. In this period, the public viewed and defined disability as the inability to perform manual labor.<sup>34</sup> If veterans could not work, they were a public burden.

One example of this clash between patriotic gratitude and denigration of dependence is reflected in Lieutenant Allen R Foote. Lieutenant Foote served in the Civil War; he entered the Union Army in 1851 and served for four years until the war's end.<sup>35</sup> He was disabled at Fair Oaks, but his disability was not specified. Although he had made this sacrifice for his country, he raised the message that

---

<sup>33</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 114.

<sup>34</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 116.

<sup>35</sup> "Degradation by Pension," *The New York Times*, December 2, 1891.

pensions were not a reward for the veterans, but an insult:<sup>36</sup> “It involves the notion that loyalty can be paid for, and therefore it can be hired. It makes of those who freely and without question gave their service, their time, their strength to the country, and exposed their lives for its sake, mere mercenaries.”<sup>37</sup> Protesting loudly about the increased pensions as added insult, Foote cites his own case in which he was disabled but perfectly capable of supporting himself financially.

Foote shared this sentiment with the general public. He was employed and disabled, so why couldn't the other disabled veterans do the same? The problem with Foote's story is that his disability is not clearly specified; therefore, it is possible he possessed a minor disability. On top of that, the way the public used Foote's success as a measuring stick for other disabled veterans was damaging and degrading to those who did need some assistance and deserved compensation for their sacrifices. The public ignored the disabled veteran's struggles to find employment. Foote was only one example and his example was rare. Yet, the public considered Foote as the rule while the unemployed veterans the exception. His exceptional example created unrealistic expectations for all veterans and even diminished the worth of their military service. Instead of honoring their service, the public saw their disabilities as a way to get out of work. People were crying out for the veterans to go find employment and for the government to stop feeding off their laziness.

These attitudes explain why government support veterans received seemed unfair. For example, one complainant pointed out in an editorial that, “Twenty-four

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

years after the contest we are paying... nearly one-third of the revenue drawn from the people, for the support of disabled soldiers..."<sup>38</sup> Unsubstantiated claims were made that no other country had ever treated the veterans of any war with the lavish generosity that characterized the Civil War pension policy.

### *Fear of Malingering*

The fact that a high percentage of federal funding was spent on those veterans increased the fear of malingering. Malingering is a nineteenth century word that refers to one exaggerating or feigning illness in order to escape duty or work. Fear of malingering amplified the public's reaction towards disabled veterans and ultimately re-shaped the stigma of disability.

The massive growth in pensions after 1890 led to new claims and suspicions published in the press regarding excess, fraud, and corruption by the veterans:

The recent official statement that there have already been nearly 320,000 pension applications under the new disability law is somewhat startling. As the act allows at the maximum \$12 a month, or \$144 a year, for the disabled veteran... The rally of the pensioners has been made with a promptness and vigor even greater than expected.<sup>39</sup>

The rush to get pension awards led to their portrayal as payments to "undeserving" individuals who faked their disabilities.

Some members of the public contended that pensions should not be granted to all of those who were eligible under the Act of 1890 merely by virtue of claiming a disability occurred during wartime. One article argued that disabled veterans and

---

<sup>38</sup> "The Uprising For Pensions," *The New York Times*, August 19, 1890.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

citizens disabled through other causes deserved the same treatment: “The plain question raised by this recommendation is whether disease of casualty incurred in the contests of civil life affords ground for a claim of support by the National Government. If it doesn’t, why should a discrimination be made between those persons who served in the army and those who did not?”<sup>40</sup> As it was, however, veterans who claimed disability and therefore government aid were more than enough to incite public resentment and contribute directly to a changed perception of disability.

#### *Transformation of the Stigma of Disability*

Prior to the Civil War, disabled persons were “less” than their non-disabled citizens, but still contributed to society or were cared for by their families. They were measured by their ability to contribute financially and if they could not, families were expected to care for them. The pension system from the Civil War changed that. That is, disabled people were not just receiving medical assistance and support, but were now seen as taking money from other taxpayers.

After the Civil War, the stigma of disability concerned leeching free-riders. For years afterward, the public worried over getting these free-riders productive again, as indicated in this 1918 article: “the problem of putting the crippled or the disabled soldier or sailor back into self-supporting civil life is one... have been struggling for years with only partial success in its solution.”<sup>41</sup> Disability has long been defined regarding one’s economic productivity. The public viewed one as

---

<sup>40</sup> “The Dependent Pension Scheme,” *The New York Times*, Dec 7, 1889.

<sup>41</sup> Frank Parker Stockbridge, “Putting our War Cripples Back on the Payroll”, *New York Times*, May 12, 1918.

severely disabled when that person was no longer able to support him/herself financially.<sup>42</sup> Once the government introduced pensions and provided them liberally, this idea of how much financial support the nation should provide entered the equation of disability attitudes. This relationship between disability and economy promoted the stigma of disability.

By 1907, the 1890 Pension Act had cost the nation and taxpayers over one billion dollars.<sup>43</sup> Before the Civil War, disability cost the communities very little. Afterward, disability had an enormous price tag, which only grew.

Economics is not the only factor. The change in attitudes began and was accelerated by the state of the country following the civil war in that the morale of the country was low. These conditions became a catalyst that influenced the people's view of disability and shaped the public's reaction to government pensions. Moreover, the newspaper was one of the quickest ways to quickly distribute information in the late nineteenth century; making it one of the two most powerful factors that changed the nation's attitude towards disability.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Blanck, "Civil War Pensions and Disability," 123.

## 4. Veterans with Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is not unique to modern society; millions of people around the world have some form of hearing loss. However, one cannot apply the same modern definition and diagnosis of deafness to the late nineteenth century. The experience and treatment of hearing loss was drastically different in the nineteenth century compared to modern perceptions. Government aid also affected the conditions for deaf veterans in particular.

### *Causes of Hearing Loss*

The weapons used in the Civil War were conducive for deafness. New types of weaponry used in the civil war undoubtedly had an impact on the number of veterans who were deafened from this war. The new weapons of the day included many advances to rifled weaponry. The Civil War happened before the invention and implementation of airplanes, military tanks, and radios in warfare.<sup>44</sup> However, many consider the Civil War the first “modern” war in America because of the advances using steel and iron technology.<sup>45</sup> The Civil War increased military efficiency with their cutting-edge weapons, but the result was a high death rate.

There were several major changes in weaponry by the 1860s. One of them being the invention of the conical bullet.<sup>46</sup> The shift from round bullets that lacked in strong projectile to the conical bullet would prove deadly. The accuracy in rifle weapons increased with the addition of the conical bullets. With the new bullets, the rifle blasts were still extremely deafening.

---

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Dupstadt, “The “Modern” Civil War: Advances in Military and Naval Technology,” *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 50:2, Spring 2011, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The rifled muskets became the weapon choice for both the Union and Confederate sides, and as the war raged on, the weapons were one of the causes of hearing loss among soldiers. Rifles were formerly only used for hunting, but it became a war weapon by the time the 1860's began. Its accuracy and shooting power became desirable for the war effort. However, the rifles were placed in close proximity to the ear region, which inadvertently caused hearing loss. Many veterans experienced severe hearing loss in one ear; they often did not have bilateral hearing loss.<sup>47</sup> This is attributed to how the rifle weaponry was held. Often it was held near one ear and thus it tended to greatly impact one side. Rifles were not the only cause of hearing loss from the Civil War, but the weapon itself was one major cause nonetheless. The use of landmines and torpedoes became another factor in the spread of hearing loss. Rifle cannons also contributed to the spread of hearing loss.

The Civil War was a great time of transition and experiments in terms of military technology. One side effect of their new and powerful weapons was hearing loss. However, symptoms of hearing loss did not appear overnight. This gradual loss was one reason diagnosing hearing loss in the late nineteenth century was based on human emotion and intuition. For example, it was later realized that presbycusis was found in many veterans. Presbycusis is the age-related decline of auditory performance.<sup>48</sup>

During wartime, the link between weaponry and hearing loss had not been made. It was not until after the war ended and signs of hearing loss became widespread that the connection between the two was discovered. Medical advances

---

<sup>47</sup> Sewell, "Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920," 2149.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 2147.

in the 1860's did not discern the connection between Civil War weaponry and hearing loss, so the exposure of Civil War veterans to ear splintering weapons was not diminished or discouraged.

As Dale Smith mentions, the “medical ideas of the mid-nineteenth century were in transition from the ancient to the modern.”<sup>49</sup> The medical climate in that time period was changing and opening to new ideas. The mass establishment of medical schools or hospitals was not widespread in that time period.<sup>50</sup> Fast-forward to modern day times where we have extensive medical and scientific equipment to prevent and diagnose hearing loss. This medical and technological advance is significant because the technology available in the mid-nineteenth century impacts the documentation we have regarding veterans with hearing loss and their levels of hearing loss.

#### *Documentation of Hearing Loss*

According to Surgeon Certificates reported to the Pension Bureau from the Civil War, 4% of the total reported complaints of disabilities by veterans from the Civil War were related to ear conditions.<sup>51</sup> This is significant because this percentage is high enough to raise an alarm for the nation to do something in response.

---

<sup>49</sup> Dale C. Smith, “Military Medical History: The American Civil War”, *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 19, No. 5, Medicine and History (Sep., 2005), 17.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Fogel RW. *Public Use Tape on the Aging of Veterans of the Union Army: Surgeon's Certificates, 1862-1940, Version S-1 Standardized*. Center for Population Economics, University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and Department of Economics, Brigham Young University; 2001, 1.



Sewell raises the claim that compared to average annual income, veterans from the Civil War received higher compensation for their disability of hearing loss following the Civil War than they would today.<sup>52</sup> The average veteran with hearing loss received approximately \$10-20 dollars a month, depending on their level of deafness. This information comes from a report compiled on hearing loss found in Union Army veterans. Several authors contributed to this piece of work, which researched into the characteristics and compensations for disabled veterans with hearing loss post the Civil War. This piece of work is significant because they use the CPE database and they have paved the way for historical research on deafened veterans from the Civil War.

The Center for Population Economics at the University of Chicago created a comprehensive database of pension, census, and surgeon certificate records. The primary sample for this database contains of 35,747 white males entered into the Union Army during the Civil War, and their military, socio-economic, and medical information have been collected.<sup>53</sup> However, the database excluded records pertaining to African American soldiers, commissioned officers, or soldiers from other branches of the military. The data collected regarding veterans with hearing loss is only relative to Union Army white disabled veterans that served in the Civil War. This database contains three datasets that provide extensive information on veterans with hearing loss.

This database provided a wealth of information in one place; the ability to access all three records in the same source makes for expedient research. The CPE

---

<sup>52</sup> Sewell, "Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920," 2147.

<sup>53</sup> Fogel RW. *Union Army: Surgeon's Certificates: 1862-1940*, 1.

database is comprised of three principal datasets. The first dataset, which is the "Military, Pension, and Medical Records," contains military records and pension applications, the bulk of the information coming from the National Archives. This is the largest category of data.

The second category of data, "Surgeon's Certificates," is the medical records used by the Pension Bureau to evaluate pension applications. Along with the pension applications, included are the physical examinations that contain information of any disability found in veterans. Associated with these pension applications are detailed physical examinations completed by physicians, certifying the veteran's health and disability status.<sup>54</sup> The physicians were appointed by the Pension Bureau to examine disabled veterans while adhering to guidelines provided by the government. A typical Surgeon's Certificate details information such as age, occupation, place of residence, and military experience. The certificates also contain the veteran's statement about his health, disability with the findings, diagnoses, and observations of the examining physicians.<sup>55</sup>

The medical information from the Surgeon's Certificates provides the bulk of data regarding deafened veterans. In total, the CPE sample includes 87,224 exams on 17,721 pensioners. The sample has been shown to be proportionally representative of the population that served in the Union Army.<sup>56</sup> However, medical equipment during the years after the Civil War were lacking in quality and that affects the knowledge we have regarding the numbers of veterans with hearing loss.

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Sewell, "Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920," 15.

The final dataset category is the “Census Records” dataset. This contains all information that gathered from the Federal Censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, 1900, and 1910.<sup>57</sup> Those three datasets are part of the major CPE database that provides the bulk of findings of disabled veterans for this project. As we combine findings from all three datasets, we are able to compile a picture of veterans with hearing loss. The three datasets provide the statistics of veterans with hearing loss and what kind of pensions they received. Findings from the datasets show that hearing loss was a common disability amongst Union Army Civil War veterans.<sup>58</sup> Sewell focuses on occupational outcomes and leaves the door open for research regarding the social and political experiences of disabled veterans.

As the war drew to an end the original number of veterans diagnosed with hearing loss that also received monetary benefits was less than five percent.<sup>59</sup> As the years passed, it increased to over thirty percent. Not only that, the 1890 Pension Act increased pension benefits, which in itself increased availability for veterans to get checked. So this increased the number of physician examinations, which is another factor that contributed to the expansion of veteran benefits for those with hearing loss. The 1890 Pension Act was crucial in shaping the benefits for veterans with hearing loss.

#### *Pensions for Veterans with Hearing Loss*

In not requiring a veteran to prove the injury occurred during wartime, the more accommodating 1890 law particularly benefitted some late-deafened veterans

---

<sup>57</sup> Fogel RW. *Union Army: Surgeon's Certificates: 1862-1940*, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Sewell, “Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920,” 2148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 2147.

since they also did not have to prove their deafness occurred during wartime fighting. Although records established the firing of weapons as a cause of hearing loss in military combat, the 1890 law removed the need to prove hearing loss had occurred during wartime. As a result, deafened veterans faced an easier time applying for pensions than before this law. Nonetheless, not having to prove wartime hearing loss did not remove all difficulties for deafened veterans since proving hearing loss at all was difficult and class-based restrictions affected pension amounts as well.

Despite the subjective judgment involved, pension bureaus relied on these diagnoses to determine pension amounts. The quantity of benefits varied based on the loss of hearing itself. Those with “total deafness” as ascribed by the physician were more likely receive more compensation. According to pension records, the maximum pension for ear disease in the late 1880s was thirty dollars a month while veterans with partial hearing loss received partial compensation proportional to the degree of their hearing loss.<sup>60</sup> Because thirty dollars was the maximum quantity, many veterans with partial hearing loss earned much less.<sup>61</sup>

The numbers of veterans diagnosed with hearing loss varied among states and physicians because of the subjectivity factor. But proving deafness, particularly the extent of deafness, was not the only consideration in determining benefits for deafened veterans. A comparison of information used in the Surgeon Certificate dataset with pension records reveals that the number of benefits any veteran received also depended on the veteran’s economic situation or any money/property

---

<sup>60</sup> Sewell, “Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920,” 2148.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 2148.

possessed by that veteran. For example, a property owning totally deaf veteran received less than a totally deaf veteran without land.

Although pensions compensated for employment difficulties and the sacrifice deafened veterans has made for their country, their hearing loss created a lonely existence.

### *Lonely Existence*

Veterans with hearing loss experience a unique form of disability. Their disability affects their social interactions, their job opportunities, and communication. They are often isolated from social encounters and communication becomes a barrier for them. This created a sense of isolation and loneliness. To state the obvious, hearing loss is not clearly noticeable. It does not show as a missing limb nor does it manifest itself like a gunshot wound. Hearing loss is considered an invisible disability in the way it is not easily detected physically. Post the Civil War, many could pass a veteran with hearing loss and have no idea. Hearing loss was not a concrete disability; it was not something easily identifiable like a gunshot wound or amputation.

Hearing loss was a form of disability that greatly impacted the veteran's life. One of the factors that make hearing loss unique is that it was not an easily identified or easily defined disability. Hearing loss varies from person to person, there is not set similarity between all forms of hearing loss, which did create a struggle for deafened veterans. Contrasting popular belief, hearing loss can be detected without conversation. Many seem to think hearing loss is totally invisible and that it can be detected only through oral communication; however others can

notice when a deafened person doesn't respond to auditory cues. One can't see hearing loss, but one can be aware of it. This claim that hearing loss is completely invisible is farfetched. However, the claim that hearing loss is an invisible disability can be made with the context that this particular disability did not inspire patriotic respect in comparison to other disabilities. Its lack of manifestation and the nineteenth century medical equipment created a shroud of invisibility for this disability.

This lack of concrete visibility impacted the treatment of veterans. Veterans with hearing loss were not broadcast or splayed across newspapers. Their disability did not become a symbol of war or heroism; it became invisible in the way it was not celebrated like amputations or other visual disabilities. This created a sense of isolation and invisibility for their disability. Hearing loss did not mark a veteran as a hero who greatly sacrificed, thus this influenced the treatment of veterans with hearing loss. Those with a pronounced limp or those using a wheelchair quickly roused an "*oh you poor thing*" from the media. Yet, veterans with hearing loss who experienced real barriers and obstacles often did not receive the same community response in the newspaper articles. Indeed, they are not mentioned in the articles that have survived.

They were emerging with their disability in a time where the meaning of disability became broad and the pension rolls were swelling, This created a tense environment for deafened veterans; this fear of malingering shaped their experiences with the government and media. Presbycusis, a very common form of hearing loss among disabled veterans, must have complicated public understanding

and probably fueled fears of malingering since it meant the hearing loss took a few years to set in. As the public became skeptical of whether everyone who was identified as disabled was disabled, those with “invisible” disabilities such as deafness probably suffered the most opprobrium.

Hearing loss occurs at various levels, and the disability resulting from hearing loss is not immediately apparent, so people often doubted their disability and felt the veterans with hearing loss could work in a factory. There was not an understanding of the many ways that deafness impaired communication or made it harder for a deafened veteran to get a job. The lack of understanding and communication most probably affected the public’s attitudes towards disabled veterans.

Although some attitudes—particularly about leeching and malingering—persist and justify these speculations of the post Civil War treatment of deafened veterans, it is also true that the definition of deafness in the 1860s and the 2010s cannot be compared. One cannot apply the modern definition of deafness and communication to the Civil War era. What has been documented is that the Civil War caused the numbers of Americans with hearing loss to expand. Furthermore, despite this expansion, the very lack of documentation indicates that those with hearing loss were not turning to American Sign Language or deaf culture. The disabled veterans of the Civil War do not fall into twenty first century expected molds of deafness.

Besides the persistent general attitudes toward disability of leeching and malingering, the attitudes towards deafness in contemporary times differ from the

1860s. Today, discrimination and audism still run free, but opinions have become more favorable towards those with hearing loss. However, in the 1860s, the deaf could not buy insurance or vote in political elections because they were seen as inferior.<sup>62</sup> No doubt this sense of superiority over deaf people provided additional identity issues for veterans with hearing loss. If these late-deafened people were not part of deaf communities, which is likely, then their social interactions were limited to non-signing hearing people. The 1860s were not a time of mass sharing; information regarding the deaf and ASL did not travel across the nation. Hence, veterans deafened from war experienced a unique kind of trauma. Not only was their disability “invisible,” it created a communication barrier between them everyone else. It made for a very lonely experience.

---

<sup>62</sup> Nielsen, Kim E. "Deaf History and the U.S. Historical Narrative." *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 4 (2003): 596.



## 5. Conclusion

Deafened veterans experienced special circumstances that probably exacerbated their difficulties, but, like the other disabled veterans, their deafness did not cause stigma of malingering free-riders. Rather, it was the mishandling and lack of effective responses from the Pension Bureau and Congress that made veterans prime targets. Nonetheless, the isolation of deafness created barriers for veterans, socially and economically.

The environment surrounding the conception of disability in that particular time period became the catalyst for people's evolving views for the concept of disability itself. The country was still bitterly divided politically and socially, the workforce was becoming industrialized, and the economy continued to suffer because of the devastation from the war. Those are the factors that surrounded the deafened veterans and shaped their experiences.

The lack of employment opportunities created roadblocks for disabled veterans. Also, veterans received limited medical treatment and this created a sense of isolation for veterans. All of this combined created a sense of loneliness. The struggle veterans faced with their "invisible" disability in that time period meant that it was hard to prove they *actually* had a disability. Pensions were contemptuously looked down upon and soldiers who benefit from pensions are seen as "weak" or "leeches. As the war wrought its damage and the veterans settled in civilian life, the stigma of disability deepened—they were not just inferiors to be pitied but freeloaders—a view that has carried down through time.

Today talks about cuts in bloated government spending quietly evoke images of freeloaders when they picture disabled persons, an attitude towards disability originating from the disability pensions after the Civil War. For example, attitudes towards the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) or Social Security Income (SSI) parallel the post Civil War perception of disability. Media reinforces ideas of freeloading or leeching with talk of government aid as infantilizing citizens. People still ask questions such as, “why don’t they work?” or, “this is what our tax dollars fund?” Years have passed, wars have been fought, presidents have come and gone, but the stigma remains the same. Pensions for veterans goes to the heart of American values about the role of government and the responsibilities of citizens.

## Bibliography

Blanck, Peter. "Civil War Pensions and Disability." *Ohio State Law Journal* 62 (2001): 109–249.

Blanck, Peter and Song, Chen. "With Malice Toward None; With Charity Toward All: Civil War Pensions for Native and Foreign-Born Union Army Veterans", *Transnational law Journal* 4 (2001).

Blanck, Peter, and Larry M. Logue. *Race, Ethnicity, and Disability: Veterans and Benefits in Post-Civil War America*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Duppstadt, Andrew . "The "Modern" Civil War: Advances in Military and Naval Technology," *Tar Heel Junior Historian* 50:2, Spring 2011.

Edwards, Rebecca. "Oh Give Me A Home? Disabled Civil War Veterans and the Welfare State." *Reviews in American History* (1998): 711-716.

Fogel RW. *Public Use Tape on the Aging of Veterans of the Union Army: Surgeon's Certificates, 1862-1940, Version S-1 Standardized*. Center for Population Economics, University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and Department of Economics, Brigham Young University; 2001.

Fox, Cynthia G. "Income Tax Records of the Civil War Years." *Prologue Magazine* Winter 1986, Vol. 18, No. 4.

Gerber, David A., ed. *Disabled Veterans in History*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Hutt, Cecil William. "The Future of the Disabled Solider". London, University of Toronto Library, 1981.

Kanjanapitakul, Tayatat. "Pensions and labor force participation of Civil War

- Veterans," in Dora L. Costa (ed.) *Health and Labor Force Participation over the Life Cycle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 231–51.
- Longmore, Paul and Umansky, Lauri Umansky. "The new disability history: American perspectives". New York University Press, 2001.
- Marten, James. "Exempt from the Ordinary Rules of Life: Researching Postwar Adjustment Problems of Union Veterans." *Civil War History* 47, no. 1 (2001): 57-70. <http://muse.jhu.edu/> (Last accessed March 5, 2014).
- Morison, Samuel Eliot and Commager, Henry Steele. *The Growth of the American Republic*. Vol. 1 (1962).
- Nielsen, Kim E. "Deaf History and the U.S. Historical Narrative." *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 4 (2003): 596-602.
- Sewell, Ryan; Song, Chen; Bauman, Nancy M.; Smith, Richard J.H.; Blanck, Peter. "Hearing Loss in Union Army Veterans from 1862-1920", *The Laryngoscope*, 114 (2004).
- Shephard, Ben. "A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century." Cambridge, Mass: *Harvard University Press*, 2001.
- Skocpol Theda. "Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in United States." Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1995.
- Smith, Dale C. "Military Medical History: The American Civil War." *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 19, No. 5, Medicine and History. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25161973> (Last accessed on April 6, 2014).
- Stockbridge, Frank Parker. "Putting our War Cripples Back on the Payroll." *The New York Times*, May 12, 1918.

The New York Times Editorial, "The Uprising For Pensions", August 19, 1890.

The New York Times Editorial, "The Dependent Pension Scheme", December 7,  
1889.

The New York Times Editorial, "Purge the Pension Rolls", March 21, 1894.