WHAT CALIBER WERE BEECHER'S BIBLES?

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Although his moral light faded in later years, Henry Ward Beecher continues to be remembered for abolitionist work and his power in the pulpit.

Henry Ward Beecher became one of the best-known and most influential men in America during the mid-1800s. His family's legacy, his oratorical skills as a preacher, and his moral authority as a moderate abolitionist brought him fame and large audiences. He was so famous that at one point his name was borrowed for rifles used to fight the forces of slavery in Kansas. But his legacy became somewhat compromised by positions he took in post-war politics and by a love affair that went public toward the end of his life.

Beecher's Beginnings

Born in Litchfield, Connecticut, Henry was the son of Lyman Beecher, a prominent religious leader. The elder Beecher later headed Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, which exposed Henry to activity at a key stop on the Underground Railroad. His sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, penned the famous antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Henry was critical of slavery and actively spread the message of emancipation. He attended Amherst College and Lane Seminary to prepare for a life in the church. By 1837, Beecher had joined the ministry, gotten married, and started preaching at a small Presbyterian church in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

A Preacher's Life

Beecher quickly advanced within his profession, moving to a larger church in Indianapolis and then on to New York. He also earned a reputation on the speakers' circuit. In Brooklyn, Beecher served Plymouth Church and delivered a series of speeches entitled "Lectures to Young Men" that gained great popularity. His message

both from his pulpit and while on tour was keeping moral values, with emphasis on the sins to be avoided. Each week, hundreds of young men came to hear him. By the end of the 1850s, Beecher's church regularly filled to capacity. He also learned to use the growing press, writing books and regular newspaper columns.

Political Pursuits

Beecher's efforts to emancipate slaves went beyond the moral message from his rostrum and into the political arena. He was an early backer of the Republicans and an ardent supporter of abolitionism. As the sectional conflict heightened and as abolitionists and proslavery transients flooded into Bloody Kansas to stack the vote on slavery, Beecher raised money to send 25 guns and just as many Bibles in with abolitionist immigrants. These guns, and soon any others used in the conflict, became known as "Beecher's Bibles," an ironic reference to a unique form of moral persuasion.

Soon after Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina clubbed abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts in the Capitol, Beecher joined the controversy and painted Sumner as a martyr in the fight to rid the country of slavery. In similar fashion, he branded Brooks a villain, comparing his physical assault on Sumner to attacking a blind man, and sarcastically noting the Southern "chivalry of the man Brooks." He publicly wondered if Brooks might also enter "the sleeping room of a woman" to "bludgeon" her to death.

Taking Up the Union Cause

Once the actual war broke out, Beecher took the side of the Union, supported Lincoln, and traveled to England to persuade British audiences and the government not to side with the Confederacy. On more than one occasion he held slave auctions at his church to purchase the freedom of slaves. After introducing one chattel for sale, he asked, "May she read liberty in your eyes? Shall she go free? Let the plates be passed and we will see." Those in the congregation wept and donated to the cause.

Though he and Lincoln did not see eye to eye throughout the war, Beecher gained greater respect for the President after he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln recalled Beecher's efforts in England and asked him to deliver a commemorative address at Fort Sumter after the war's end.

Postwar Positions

During Reconstruction, Beecher did not always agree with the reigning Radical Republicans in terms of suppressing the South and the civil rights of freed slaves. He opposed federal protection of blacks and wanted instead to persuade Southern public opinion to move in favor of equal treatment of former slaves. Also, though many public figures saw the appointment as an abomination, Beecher supported Confederate General Robert E. Lee's selection as president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, asking, "When war ceased, and he laid down his arms... who could have been more modest, more manly, more true to his own word and honor than he was?" Beecher felt political practicality should replace radicalism and that the Christian approach was to accept Southerners as brothers. This position brought him great criticism from Northerners and Republicans alike.

A Legacy Tarnished

Beecher joined other religious movements in the latter half of the century and took moderate positions on temperance, women's rights, and evolution. His final days, however, are remembered for something else altogether. Beecher's national reputation as a civic leader and moral authority began to fade after Theodore Tilton, a radical writer and editor and friend of Beecher, accused the preacher of having an affair with his wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth Tilton confessed to the affair and recanted several times, and a church trial in 1874 and a civil suit in 1875 made it a giant media event, well catalogued in *The New York Times* and other urban newspapers. Beecher's church twice exonerated him, and the civil trial ended in a hung jury, but his reputation was sullied. Henry Ward Beecher died in 1887 at age 73 of a cerebral hemorrhage. More than 40,000 mourners came to pay their respects as he lay in state.

A STEP TOO FAR

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The Union occupation of New Orleans turned ugly when the city's women started their own resistance.

When Union General Benjamin Butler and Captain David Farragut captured New Orleans in late April 1862, federal troops occupied the city under Butler's command as military governor. The New Orleans citizenry was not happy with this turn of events, to say the least.

Women Let Their Feelings Be Known

Butler took a draconian approach to governing the city. New Orleans residents despised the federal occupation and Butler's tactics, but the men—particularly those who had fought against the Union—couldn't openly express their disdain for Butler and his soldiers without facing drastic punishment. But in the chivalrous mood of the era, women sometimes had more flexibility. If fathers, husbands, and brothers couldn't express their feelings, wives, sisters, and daughters could.

When Union soldiers passed on the streets, the usually genteel Southern ladies contemptuously crossed streets to shun them, issued insulting remarks, and gathered their skirts as if walking through mud. Some Union troops suggested that the women wanted to lure federals into an unpleasant exchange that might rally local men to retaliate. At one point, in response to a group of ladies on a balcony who had turned their backs to him, General Butler said, "Those women evidently know which end of them looks best."

The Last Straw

The situation had gone too far when one woman in the French Quarter dumped the contents of a chamber pot onto Captain Farragut's head. Butler took action beyond snide remarks. On

May 15, 1862, he issued General Order 28, which declared: "When any female shall by word, gesture, or movement insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation." In other words, he authorized his soldiers to treat rude women as nothing more than prostitutes.

For the most part, as one might imagine, the insults ceased. Women who continued to be aggressive were sent to Ship Island on the Gulf Coast. This included one lady who laughed loudly when a Union soldier's funeral procession passed. The response from locals and Southern newspapers, however, highlighted the fact that Butler had already been despised for his harsh rule of the city. Empowering his soldiers to treat disrespectful women as prostitutes struck at Southern womanhood and angered those beyond Louisiana's borders. He was soon dubbed "Beast Butler." Jefferson Davis branded Butler and his lot "outlaws" and promised to hang the general if he were captured. The *Daily Mississippian* offered a reward for Butler's head, and others joined the cause. "I will be good for $5,000," one reader submitted. "Let the money go to the family of the party who succeeds in the undertaking, if he should forfeit his life in so doing."

Butler's tenure in New Orleans remained controversial, and not surprisingly, his regard among the populace never improved. President Lincoln, of course, was faced with the challenge of bringing New Orleans and its residents back into the Union. Before the year was out, he had relieved Butler of his command of the city. General Order 28, however, was not rescinded.

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"America has no north, no south, no east, no west. The sun rises over the hills and sets over the mountains, the compass just points up and down, and we can laugh now at the absurd notion of there being a north and a south. We are one and undivided."

Sam Watkins, 1st Tennessee

A LITERARY LOOK AT THE WAR

★ ★ ★ ★

Walt Whitman, one of America's most famous writers, had unique experiences during the Civil War. He left behind his interpretation of the conflict in his poetry.

Walt Whitman was born in 1819 and lived most of his life in New York. Early in his career, he worked as a printer, a journalist, and an occasional teacher. In the 1850s, Whitman embarked on a path as a poet among transcendentalists, publishing the first version of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. (He continued to add to and revise it throughout the rest of his life.) As the Civil War approached, Whitman believed it was more important to preserve the Union than to emancipate slaves. He hated both the fire-eaters of the South and the aggressive abolitionists of the North, feeling that extremists threatened the harmony of the Union. The South's greatest sin, Whitman felt, was secession, and the North's greatest virtue was devotion to the Union.

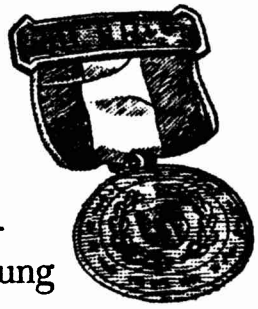
A Lasting Impression

The Civil War fascinated Whitman, and his experiences during the conflict transformed him as a writer: He left behind a catalog of colorful descriptions of both the political dispute and the conflict on the battlefield. For example, after the First Battle of Bull Run, he penned "Beat! Beat! Drums!" In this poem, Whitman calls on the drums and bugles to "scatter the congregations" and to take groom away from bride and "peaceful farmer [from] any peace" so they will serve in the war.

In the Thick of Things

In late 1862, Whitman learned through newspaper reports that his brother, George, was wounded in battle at Fredericksburg, Virginia. He immediately left New York for Virginia. While looking for his brother, he passed through a makeshift field hospital where he saw a

heap of amputated human limbs and wondered if any of these belonged to his brother. He finally found George—all in one piece—with his regiment, recovering from a bullet wound that had pierced his cheek. Spending time with his brother and the war-hardened soldiers, Whitman was enraptured by the stories he heard. He also helped the young soldiers of the ranks bury the dead.



From the field in Virginia, Whitman decided to take up residence in the nation's capital and take a job copying material in the Army Paymaster's Office. He also volunteered as a nurse's assistant in the local hospitals, performing small acts of kindness to the wounded: reading to them, writing letters for them, and bringing them small gifts. It was this experience that inspired *Drum-Taps,* Whitman's collection of 43 poems that captures the emotional experiences of the war. These poems, such as "The Wound Dresser," show the nation's transformation from patriotic militarism to a sense of compassion and grief for the wounded and dead.

An Ode to Lincoln

Also among Whitman's most celebrated writings are those that define the commander in chief, Abraham Lincoln. While in Washington, D.C., Whitman lived within walking distance of the White House and crossed President Lincoln's path several times. He even attended the reception for his second inauguration, but he never actually met the President.

Although Whitman was unable to express his fondness for Lincoln in person, he left a written record of poetry that shows a great deal of respect and admiration for his President. He confirmed their common ideology, "We are afloat on the same stream—we are rooted in the same ground." Whitman understood Lincoln's struggle and witnessed what the war did to him on a personal and physical level, writing that the president looked "worn and tired; the lines, indeed, of vast responsibilities, intricate question, and demands of life and death, cut deeper than ever upon his dark brown face; yet all the old goodness, tenderness, sadness, and canny shrewdness,

underneath the furrows." He also complimented Lincoln's "purest, heartiest tenderness, and native western form of manliness."

After the Union victory and Lincoln's assassination, Whitman wrote what is probably his most famous ode to his hero Lincoln.

"O Captain! My Captain!"

1

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
  But O heart! heart! heart!
    O the bleeding drops of red,
      Where on the deck my Captain lies,
        Fallen cold and dead.

2

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores
  a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
  Here Captain! dear father!
    This arm beneath your head;
      It is some dream that on the deck,
        You've fallen cold and dead.

3

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
  Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
    But I, with mournful tread,
      Walk the deck my Captain lies,
        Fallen cold and dead.