Foreword

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The concept of loyalty often provokes extensive analysis in times of national crisis. Competing definitions of loyalty, as well as debates about how far citizens can go in opposing their national government's policies, have arisen in every war in American history. During the Revolution, American Loyalists supported Britain against colonial rebels and paid a heavy price in treasure and influence during the conflict and especially after the Treaty of Paris in 1783. When war with France loomed at the end of the eighteenth century, Federalist politicians responded with the Alien and Sedition Acts, which criminalized a broad range of political thought and action and provoked Jeffersonian Republicans to push back with the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. Much of New England grew so disenchanted with Republican policy during the War of 1812 that some type of internal disruption of the republic seemed possible. At the Hartford Convention in 1814, delegates argued that true loyalty to the spirit of the Constitution required a firm stance against President James Madison and the Republican majority in Congress. Thirty years later, the outbreak of war with Mexico once again spawned heated wrangling over loyalty. Did citizens owe support to President James K. Polk, whose military actions against another American republic were deemed grasping and needlessly aggressive in many quarters? Did America's long celebration of the right of self-determination, wondered many critics, require opposition to Polk?

Nothing else in U.S. history has tested boundaries of loyalty as seriously as the secession crisis of 1860–61, the creation of the Confederacy, and the chillingly brutal war that followed. Most of the attention to loyalty during the era has focused on the white South, with Robert E. Lee representing a key example of someone torn by conflicting allegiances. Too often framed as a struggle between loyalties to home state and to nation, decisions about whether or not to support secession typically involved many other levels and kinds of loyalty—something David M. Potter explored a half-century ago, to our great good fortune, in his pathbreaking essay “The Historian's Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa.” Beyond the secession crisis, historians also have lavished attention on loyalty—and disloyalty—in the Confederacy. The scale of literature on unionism in the southern upcountry, the Appalachian highlands, and elsewhere, together with a long-standing scholarly

fascination with bitter political fights about the tension between central expansion and civil liberties, has created a sense that wartime loyalties were more hotly contested in the Rebel states than in the United States.

Greater attention to loyalty in the Confederacy grows out of an assumption that United States victory was somehow preordained—what I call the Appomattox Syndrome. It seems plausible that the winning side suffered less from internal divisions regarding loyalty than did the vanquished Rebels. And what attention has been given to those who questioned the Lincoln administration, denounced what they saw as transgressions against basic civil liberties, and argued for an expansive definition of loyalty in wartime, traditionally has either played down the importance of the opposition or lumped all Democrats under the rubric of toxically racist Copperheads who deserve little serious notice. Indeed, reading *The Old Guard* or other Copperhead sheets cannot help but encourage an impulse to treat their editors and readers as thoroughly repellant characters out of step with the mass of the loyal population.

In fact, the citizens of the United States engaged in protracted and complex discussions of loyalty throughout the war. Every bit as heated and widespread as comparable discussions in the Confederacy, they remind us how fragile the Union cause seemed at various moments. More to the point, they underscore how much work remains to be done regarding the topic of loyalty in the United States during the conflict. There has been refreshing recent evidence of greater scholarly attention to this dimension of the war—an emerging sub-literature that promises, at last, to redress a serious imbalance in the literature. Anyone seeking an introduction to the topic now has an obvious place to go. In *Contested Loyalty: Debates over Patriotism in the Civil War North*, ten essays by an impressive group of contributors effectively capture both the dimensions and character of attempts to define, and live with, a definition of loyalty that could sustain a great war effort while also maintaining basic civil rights and liberties. The Civil War generation wrestled with timeless questions that seem as pertinent today as they did 150 years ago, reminding us that our republic always has been, and remains, a work in progress.

CONTESTED LOYALTY