Hostile Forces: The Battle of Hampton Roads and Nineteenth Century America's Industrial Nightmare

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This is for you. Thank you.
Abstract

Although primarily thought of as a land-based war, one of the most famous battles of the Civil War was fought on water: the Battle of Hampton Roads, which took place on March 8th and 9th, 1862, commonly understood as the first battle between ironclad warships: the USS Monitor and CSS Virginia. However, the true significance of the battle lies not in its tactical or military importance, but in the ways in which it encompassed many of the deeper fears and anxieties involved in the Civil War. These fears and anxieties were centered on the increasing industrialization of nineteenth-century America, and the ways in which new, modern technology linked American society to violence and death. This thesis explores presentations of the Battle of Hampton Roads and its major players (the Monitor and the Virginia) and draws out the ways in which Americans grappled with their nostalgia for the past, their fears and hopes for the future of the United States, and their feelings towards widespread violence and death. The media surveyed in this thesis include contemporary newspaper articles about the battle, mass-produced relief-block lithographic prints, traditional paintings, and the Battle-Pieces poetry of Herman Melville, who more than any other author acknowledged the ways in which Hampton Roads was a harbinger of frightening days to come. By analyzing popular media across genres and from across the United States, this thesis creates a full picture of the fears and hopes of nineteenth century America, including national reunification, Northern industrialism and its relationship to Southern industrialism, and the increasing efficiency and speed of violent death.
Introduction: The Battle of Hampton Roads

“No battle that was ever fought,” wrote William Harwar Parker of the Battle of Hampton Roads, “caused as great a sensation throughout the civilized world.”¹ Parker was looking back from 1883, a vantage point of twenty years on the battle and the war, and he might have been right: the Civil War was predominantly a land war, but one of its most iconic and enduring images comes from a naval conflict, the famous “first clash” of the ironclad warships, which pitted the USS Monitor and the CSS Virginia against one another on March 9th, 1862. The Battle of Hampton Roads took place over a two day stretch, March 8th and March 9th, and was one of the most dramatic events of the war up to that point – two days of military action in a highly public location, the course of naval history changing in front of the eyes of the entire country, and significant military and tactical concerns for both the North and the South hanging in the balance. Traditional histories of the war devote the bulk of their time to discussions of the military and tactical facts of the battle – what the Monitor did, what the Virginia did, what the consequences of the battle were for the Union and Confederate navies, and what ultimately happened to the two ships after their historic clash.

This thesis, however, is not about the events of the Battle of Hampton Roads, the tactics, or even the historic ironclads themselves. I intend to go beyond the standard depiction of the Battle of Hampton Roads to consider the ways in which the Monitor and the Virginia embodied early modernist fears about the increasing industrialization and violence of the American landscape. Drew Faust notes that “for those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War,

the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death.” What was
displayed at Hampton Roads was a new and terrible efficiency of death. While the amount of
death and violence at Hampton Roads was minimal compared to the horrors of the Civil War as a
whole, the battle serves as a perfect metaphor for the cultural forces of industrialization and
carnage that worked their way through the war. In the weeks, months, and years directly
following the battle, the two ships (as well as the gallant USS Cumberland, a wooden frigate
destroyed by the Virginia on March 8th, which symbolized the rapidly disappearing Age of Sail)
came to embody widespread fears and anxieties about the speed of the industrialization of the
American landscape, taking place in every level of life from the printing of books and
newspapers to the fighting of wars. In order to trace these concerns through the American
psyche, I will survey in-depth several different forms of nineteenth century media, looking for
similarities and differences in what they say about the battle, the ships, and the industrialization
of the United States. Each medium is significant in its own right, and must be considered both
independently and in conjunction with the others. In Section I, I use contemporary newspaper
reports, the first wave of information about the Monitor and the Virginia, and of the Battle of
Hampton Roads from both the North and the South. In Sections II and III, I look at the two forms
of visual representation used to depict the Battle of Hampton Roads, with Section II concerned
with mass-produced lithographs and Section III concerned with traditional paintings. Finally, in
Section IV, I look at the most famous poetic treatment of the battle and the one that deals most
explicitly and uniquely with the Monitor and Virginia and their dire consequences for American
society, Herman Melville’s Battle-Pieces, or Aspects of the War.

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However, in order to understand the issues and anxieties underlying the battle, it is first necessary to establish the details of what actually happened. On March 8th, 1862, a significant portion of the Union fleet, including the USS *Cumberland*, the USS *Congress*, and the USS *Minnesota*, was docked at Hampton Roads, a harbor located between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Virginia. These wooden vessels, the pride of the Union navy, were there as part of the blockade of the Southern coast, and played a major part in the early stages of General George McClellan's Peninsular Campaign. There had been rumors flying about a new ship under construction by the Confederate navy, an old Union frigate called the *Merrimack* (or *Merrimac*, depending on the source) that was raised from the bottom of the Elizabeth River, an estuary and part of Hampton Roads, and covered with armored plating to create an "ironclad" ship. The Union navy in response had set about the creation of their own ironclad, called the *Monitor*. The *Monitor* had been dispatched from Brooklyn to Hampton Roads in the beginning of March, but had not yet arrived on the morning of March 8th when the *Virginia* arrived at the Roads. Observers on the banks and the ships of the Union fleet remembered later that the *Virginia* looked like no vessel they'd ever seen before — more like a house floating on top of the water than a man-of-war. The *Cumberland* engaged her first, but while she had substantially more firepower than the *Virginia* did, her shot bounced off the thickly iron- and steel-plated sides of the Confederate vessel. This was the shining moment for the *Virginia*’s deadliest weapon — her ram, a thick wooden pole attached to her prow. The *Virginia* rammed the *Cumberland*, pulled back, and rammed her again, breaking a huge hole in her side. The ship began to sink immediately. There was a harrowing moment for the crew of the *Virginia* when the ram became wedged in the gap it had created in the *Cumberland*’s hull, but it snapped off and the *Virginia* managed to escape without the ram. The *Cumberland* was left to
sink with the majority of her crew, including her captain, aboard. The water of the Roads was shallow enough at the place where the *Cumberland* sank that her mast and her still-flying flags were visible when her keel hit the bottom, creating one of the most iconic images of the entire war. As the *Virginia* was wreaked havoc on the Union fleet at Hampton Roads, the *Monitor* came to the end of a harrowing and arduous journey from her origin in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. She sailed into Hampton Roads illuminated by the light from the still-burning *Congress*. The *Monitor*, which looked more like a piece of machinery than a ship, looked almost as strange to onlookers as the *Virginia* had the day before; some of the crew did not even recognize her as a warship, and the executive officer of the *Patrick Henry*, Lieutenant James Rochelle, supplied the vivid description of “an immense shingle floating in the water with a gigantic cheese box rising from its center” that had appeared next to the grounded *Minnesota* in the night. Leaving the *Minnesota*, she sailed out to meet her much larger foe. The much-vaunted “first battle of the ironclads” was, tactically speaking, more or less a stalemate – the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* positioned themselves near each other – the *Monitor* was by virtue of her small size more maneuverable than the *Virginia*, but neither was particularly quick – and fired their guns for four hours. A series of highly confused events led to the end of the conflict – with Captain John Worden of the *Monitor* injured, command passed (inefficiently) to Lieutenant Samuel Dana Greene, who had to pause to get his bearings. Aboard the *Virginia*, Lieutenant Catesby Jones (who, like Greene, took command in relief of an injured captain) believed that the pause in the *Monitor*’s action meant she was done; by the time the *Monitor* was underway again, the *Virginia* was headed back to her dock. “Both commanders,” according to Davis, “believed the other had given up. Thus an epic battle in American and, indeed, naval history, ended in a case of

simultaneous, mutual misapprehension, with each side believing the other had thrown in the towel." In the end, the demise of the *Virginia* and the *Monitor* was nearly as inglorious as the end of the Battle of Hampton Roads – the *Virginia* was intentionally destroyed by the Confederate navy a few months after the battle to keep her from falling into Union hands, and the *Monitor* sank accidentally off the coast of South Carolina in late 1862. The impact of their battle, however, had been made. The ultimate price in lives and ships paid at Hampton Roads was relatively small in the context of the massive carnage and bloodshed of the Civil War.

However, simply considering the ships in their military contexts robs them of their industrial background. In order to understand the grip the two ironclads had on the American imagination, it is necessary to make note of how closely the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* were linked to industrial building processes during the nineteenth century. They were representative of two different styles or philosophies of industrial construction: the *Virginia* was a new design placed on top of an old one, literally clad with iron over a traditional wooden frigate frame. In this way, it was similar to other ironclads that had been constructed in Europe prior to the Civil War – particularly the French *Gloire* and the English *Warrior*. By contrast, the *Monitor* used an entirely new design, different from anything that had previously been attempted. As a result, their construction processes were vastly different, and they held contrasting meanings upon their completion.

The differences in the construction of the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* were also rooted in the realities of nineteenth century American industrialization. The North was heavily industrialized by the time war broke out in 1861, and had been for decades; David R. Meyer

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5 Davis. "Hampton Roads." pp. 16.
notes that the "metropolitan complexes of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and, secondarily, Baltimore were the nation's industrial powerhouses by 1840." By the eve of the Civil War in 1860, Northeastern factories "produced 74 percent of value added in manufacturing." Northern factories, particularly in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, were leading producers of paper, lumber, coal, printed materials, and -- most importantly -- metal, machinery, and transportation. The South was not without its factories, but its economic emphasis had been agricultural for generations; Meyer notes that the South’s capital was "invested in slaves rather than in land, infrastructure or machinery; this institutional structure generated little demand for manufactures." Without demand, few factories were built, leaving the South dependent on Northern and European imports of manufactured goods -- a precarious position with war on the horizon.

Neither the Union nor the Confederacy had a strong navy when war broke out in 1861, but the North at least had a few older vessels with which to fight. The Confederacy had nothing. Stephen Mallory, the Confederate Secretary of the Navy, was tasked with building a naval force from nothing; according to Raimondo Luraghi, his strategy involved "putting all his cards on the war of iron against wood, hoping to take off balance an enemy that would never expect to be challenged by such a daring adversary." At first Mallory attempted to buy one of the European ironclads, but when that failed, he turned his attention to the construction of one of his own. Without significant industrial infrastructure, however, Mallory had limited means and ability to do so. The Virginia began life as a Union steam frigate called the Merrimac or Merrimack, and was destroyed by the Union navy when it abandoned Gosport Navy Yard at Norfolk when war


broke out on April 20th, 1861. In Parker's reckoning of the damage left at Norfolk by the Union navy, he notes that "the steam frigate *Merrimac* was scuttled and sunk, and burned to her copper-line and down through to her berth-deck, which, with her spar and gun-decks, was also burned."\(^{11}\) Two men, identified by Parker as Commander John M. Brooke and Naval Constructor John L. Porter, claimed responsibility for the idea of transforming the hulk of the *Merrimac* into an ironclad; he also reports, however, that "on the 21st of June, 1861, the Hon. S.R. Mallory, Confederate Secretary of the Navy, ordered that the *Merrimac* should be converted into an ironclad on the plan proposed by Lieutenant John M. Brooke, C. S. Navy."\(^{12}\) The process of building the ship was a long one – chief among the problems facing the construction project, led by Porter in conjunction with Brooke, was the sheer lack of usable iron in the South with which to sheathe the vessel. Of the very limited foundries in the Confederacy, only the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond (the only factory in the South with national reach, selling guns and wrought iron to manufacturers in the North\(^ {13}\)) was able to roll iron plate thick enough to provide ample shielding for the new ironclad ship, and in all of Virginia, there was not nearly enough iron to be processed. Craig L. Symonds writes that, after attempting to melt down cannon, shot and tools and still falling short, "the Confederacy began ripping up hundreds of miles of its own railroads."\(^ {14}\) The potent symbolism of the new American ironclad being at least partially constructed from rails is crucial – up until this point, the railroads were closely linked with American industrialism, the symbol for the expanding limits of technology and the borders of the nation. The use of railroads out of sheer desperation in the construction of the *Virginia* further highlights the dire straits of Confederate manufacturing industry – such as it was. It also


highlights the industrial nature of the war, even on the Confederate side: all industrial infrastructures, even the railroads that were emblematic of such progress and hope, fell to the service of the war effort. Construction was a slow process, however, and the Virginia was not commissioned until February 27th, 1862 – nearly eight months after construction began.15

Although dogged by technical difficulties and delays, the Confederacy had begun building their ironclad first. Although the Union navy was also interested in obtaining an ironclad, there was no initial report from Federal Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles’ Ironclad Board until August of 1861 – two months after the Virginia project began in Norfolk. The Board recommended two options, both of conventional type: a steam frigate like the Gloire, or a gunboat with traditional masts and sails and armor plate fitted to her sides, called the Galena.16 The designer of the Galena, Cornelius S. Bushnell was referred to John Ericsson, a Swedish engineer who proposed an ironclad one of his own: “an ironclad that was built quickly, capable of sailing shallow Southern waters, protected throughout by impenetrable iron plate” that “could face the extreme danger that threatened.”17 The most revolutionary part of Ericsson’s already novel design was a revolving turret with guns inside, enabling the ship to fire constantly on the enemy. He also designed a ventilation system to keep the air inside the ship breathable. The contract was signed on October 4th, 1861, with construction having started previously. The construction of Ericsson’s ship, so derided that in some corners it was called “Ericsson’s folly,” represented the power and extent of Northern industrialization: instead of the limited resources that by this time of the year had hamstrung the South, “a series of shops was mobilized: one would build the turret and its fittings, another the engines, while a shipyard would begin

constructing the hull, and the larger Union rolling mills sprang into action to provide the armor plate."\(^{18}\) The system used to construct the ship was almost a proto-assembly line, decades before the generally accepted date of invention. It could only have been possible in the heavily industrialized – and economically diversified – North. The construction of the *Monitor* was the product of nineteenth century processes of industrialization; while neither ship could have been built prior to this period, one ship’s design and assembly were clearly more advanced than the other. Further highlighting the discrepancy between Union and Confederate industrial capabilities was the very day of the *Monitor*’s sea trials – February 27\(^{th}\), 1862, the same day as the commissioning of the *Virginia*, whose construction had begun months before the *Monitor*’s.\(^{19}\)

Finally, the *Monitor* was self-consciously revolutionary, designed to be paradigm-altering – even her name was chosen to indicate her new and powerful status on the world stage. On January 20\(^{th}\), 1862, Ericsson wrote to Gustavus Vasa Fox, Deputy Secretary of the Navy, noting that “the impregnable and aggressive character of this structure will admonish the leaders of the Southern rebellion that the batteries on the banks of their rivers will no longer present barriers to the entrance of the Union forces. The ironclad intruder will thus prove a severe monitor to those leaders,”\(^{20}\) as well as to foreign powers. In other words, the new Union ironclad was such a triumph of technology and industrialization that the fact of its existence had serious foreign and domestic policy implications. Beyond the policy considerations inherent in calling the new American ironclad a “monitor,” however, lay certain metaphorical considerations. Inherent in the word “monitor” is a sense of warning or foreboding; as if the technology debuted at Hampton Roads, specifically the *Monitor*, was something that required a close watch and was

\(^{19}\) Symonds. “Ironclads.” pp. 33.
a potential harbinger of dangerous things to come. Ericsson intended at least some of this dual meaning to be understood, given his desire that the Monitor serve as a warning to Europe about the rapidly advancing industrial capabilities of the United States. However, it also was understood as a warning about the potential industrial future of the United States – the replacement of skilled workers and artisans by machines, and the increasing efficiency of death and violence.

When the two ships met in battle on March 9th, 1862, their industrial backgrounds were forgotten in the frenzy over the eagerly awaited “clash of the ironclads.” However, neither the Monitor nor the Virginia could be separated from the idea of industrialization by observers of the battle across the country; they would serve as the new symbols of technology and industry, both good and bad, for years after the smoke cleared from Hampton Roads.
The American Print Media Responds to the Battle of Hampton Roads

The Battle of Hampton Roads triggered a barrage of written responses both North and South. Beneath the fiery, bellicose language and imagery employed by Northerners and Southerners, civilians and military personnel, lay similar – arguably identical – fears and hopes about the battle, the course of the war, and the direction of the nation’s destiny. Nineteenth century Americans were saying the same things, albeit with different language, about their worries about the effect increasing industrialization was going to have on the rhythms of their lives, their livelihoods, their safety, their families, and the future prosperity and strength of their beleaguered nation. Their nostalgia for a disappearing, simpler past often manifested in symbols of a declining naval tradition, the emblems of a world that could never be regained.

Nineteenth Century Newspaper Technology and Wartime Reporting

The massive advances in the technology of newspaper production that took place in the 1840s and 1850s led to a corresponding increase in newspaper circulation, which was also linked closely to the exponential spread of railroad tracks across the entire American continent during this period. The extreme impact the dawning of the age of the railroads had on the American consciousness is evident in the sheer number of references to railroads and railroad materials that can be found in reports from Hampton Roads in March of 1862. The expansion of railroads and newspapers had significant ramifications for the rapid dissemination of information as well: rising newspaper circulation, as well as the increasing importance of the telegraph, made it
possible for people at opposite ends of the country to hear about the same events at the same time.

The telegraph was a crucial piece of the puzzle of nineteenth century American industrialization; the use of wire services in transmission of news stories, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, enabled reporters in the field to quickly send facts and stories to their newspapers back home, an ability which became invaluable once war broke out in 1861. Telegraphs first became available for public use in 1844, and while it was not instantly linked to news reporting, by 1861 wire had replaced mail as the primary method by which stories were moved. Because it changed the speed at which news travelled, it enabled the creation of national news: “The advent of the telegraph also promised to expand the scope of the news,” Menahem Blondheim writes. “Now it would be news all over the country, not merely local events, that could capture the attention of the public and create expectations as to future developments and the resolution of events.” This national connectedness was crucial during the Civil War, especially after the secession of the Southern States. In order to hear and transmit the news of Hampton Roads and to participate in a moment of rapid industrial transformation and expansion, the American press – and the general population – used a modern industrial technology, just as mechanized and industrialized as the Monitor herself. That moment – and the creators of that moment, the Monitor and the Virginia, was essentially industrial. Telegraph technology, relatively new at less than two decades old, linked the country together. Its usage was so widespread it brought a significant portion of the American population – at least those who were free, with access to newspapers or a public telegraph – into participation in the industrial system.

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It became another peacetime industry turned to the practice and the pursuit of war. At Hampton Roads, the New York Times wrote, “the telegraph...put New-York [sic] almost in the position of a spectator.” More so than any other item of industrialized technology, the telegraph made its way into the lives of Americans, changing the ways in which they interacted with their era, their nation, and each other. In other words, it had precisely the effect on the United States that many feared the Monitor and the Virginia would have – a complete revolution in technology and industry, supplanting traditional methods with a wide-ranging and ruthless efficiency.

Newspaper Coverage of Hampton Roads and Embedded Industrial Imagery

Without question, in the minds of many there were heavy implications for the immediate and eventual future of the war riding on the often-patchy news reports that trickled out of Hampton Roads in the days and weeks following the battle. The defeat of the Union fleet, embodied in the burnt-out hulks of the Cumberland and Congress, was a major blow to Northern morale, but the arrival of the Monitor on the night of March 8th and her improbable stalemate with the Virginia the next afternoon served, at the very least, to soothe some of the North’s bruised pride. Equally important were the strategic implications of the battle – Northern fears that the Virginia might leave the Roads for Washington, D.C. and lay the Union capital to waste were assuaged by what was widely perceived to be the Confederate humiliation sustained when the tiny Monitor held off the hulking Virginia. For a few weeks after the battle, the existence of the Monitor was enough to frighten the Confederate navy into keeping the Virginia a safe distance away. The situation for the Confederacy was almost entirely inverted from that for the

Union: the giddiness, triumph, and hope of the first day at the Roads evaporated with the arrival of the Monitor. It is no coincidence that the second day of Hampton Roads, in Confederate sources, appears to be by far the less important day of the battle; it was reported in less detail in Southern newspapers, possibly as a result of the major blow to Confederate hopes sustained when the Virginia failed to destroy the upstart Monitor. Despite her perceived failure, however, the Virginia was a psychological weapon just as powerful as the Monitor: for the duration of her existence, she kept the Monitor safely north and away from Confederate ports.

Issues of strategy and tactics weighed heavily on the minds of sailors, soldiers, and civilians alike; however, for the Americans who waited for baited breath for the outcome of the battle to be clear, the implications of the two-day clash were far deeper. Whether they were present at Hampton Roads itself or were reliant on the reports of newspapers, letters, and official announcements for their news of the war, the majority of commentators on the war betrayed their concerns for the future of American society, including the possibility of national reunification and what a reformed America would look like, national security, their own personal safety, the presence of industrial technology in their own lives, and the increasingly tight relationship between the powers of war and peace, and the powers of industry. These concerns were manifest in the obsolescence of the naval symbols of masts and sails that were deeply symbolic to nineteenth century Americans. "Henceforth the mighty frigates and gigantic steamers, the "wooden walls" which have formed the marine defence [sic] of nations, are nothing," one author wrote in the New York Times a few days after the battle. "They have passed away...they are already things of the past."24 The idea of the "ship of state," the nation manifest as a wooden vessel and crewed by its citizens, is evoked in this article as something under threat; the defenses

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24 "Romance of War."
of the nation, represented by the wooden hulls of the navy that patrolled the coastal borders, were obsolete and outdated, leaving America vulnerable to attack.

This author does not explicitly address the darker implications of this change for society, but there are implications that the increasing industrialization of ships of war would ultimately lead to an escalation of mechanized warfare — the industrialization of death — itself: "either artillery more tremendous than any known to war, must be used for the defense of harbors, or iron floating batteries and iron-cased frigates."25 Though the impact of this escalation on civilian populations, or during peace-time, is not discussed, the societal repercussions of the development of what were for all intents and purposes super-weapons were terrifying to nineteenth century Americans. A more mechanized system of waging war would require other industries to be turned to the purpose of violence; peacetime factories would be transformed into the manufacturing centers of war. A recurring source of dread hinted at in nineteenth century media was that of all aspects of industry were slowly being turned towards the practice of war, a particularly troublesome idea given the increasing numbers of Americans involved in industrial trades. No image spoke to this worry as powerfully as that of the Virginia's railroad iron construction; since there was no iron to be had in the Confederate South, Confederate engineers tore up railroad tracks and rolled the iron into armor for their new warship. The potency of the image was not lost on contemporary commentators. "Even the enormous and expensive plated ships, like the Warrior and La Gloire, must be replaced," one author wrote. "They would neither of them be a match for the Merrimac, with her railroad-iron plating; and as for the Monitor, our engineers believe she would shoot them through and through with her wrought-iron eleven-inch

25 "Romance of War."
balls, fired near the waterline.”26 The “railroad-iron plating” of the Virginia, symbolic of the ways in which modern industry was now a part of war, became a prevalent image. “Her decks are protected by a covering of railroad iron, in the form of an arch,”27 wrote another author in the New York Times; a brief reference, but one that indicates the potency of the industrial metaphor. Some sources move beyond railroad imagery, creating in the body of Virginia an entire factory. One source describes the demonstration of “this new and terrible enginery of war;”28 another depicts the Confederate fleet as “belching fire and destruction,”29 imagery more suited to an ironworks than a naval battle. More than the Monitor, the Virginia combined factory and warship, a harbinger of the explicit link between industrial production and violent death.

As one of the survivors of the Cumberland wrote to the New Haven Palladium on March 22nd, 1862, “it is an impossibility to describe the action, as it should be, at present.”30 What happened at Hampton Roads, beyond the military realms of tactics and strategy, was unlike anything that had ever been seen before. Faust notes that “faced with the Civil War’s unprecedented slaughter, soldiers tried to make sense of what they had wrought,”31 but could not communicate it, a difficulty rooted in the traumas of the war and common to veterans of both bloody land battles like Gettysburg and Shiloh, and the sailors who served at Hampton Roads. The violence and unfamiliarity of the scene only increased the difficulty faced by those attempting to translate it into words they could understand. Americans accustomed to the rhythms of a society divorced from the reality of the factory, and to the familiar sights of naval battles fought by wooden ships, were not prepared to describe the battle in terms that made sense

26 “Romance of War.”
to them. In some sources, what happened at Hampton Roads was presented as more of a scientific experiment than anything else, enabling writers to work through the newness and unfamiliarity of what had happened in a safe and objective manner, focusing on technological excitement and novelty rather than on sociocultural ramifications. One article, a piece in the New York Times aptly titled “The Exploit of the Monitor – a Scientific Comment,” transformed Hampton Roads into a scientific proving ground, where “a problem on which the nations of Europe have for ten years lavished all the resources of their wealth and skill, to arrive at no satisfactory result, is suddenly taken up in the shock of war, put to the crucial test, and pushed for on toward a definitive solution.”32 To grapple with the events, the author took a military contest – or, as some other writers would have it, a world-changing clash of giants – and turned it into a purely scientific event, with experimental data standing in for tactical results. Another noted that the Monitor’s heroic voyage down the Atlantic Coast was “merely... an experimental trip,” but “it would appear that the experiment proved quite successful.”33 The cataclysmic destruction of the Union navy and the frightening display of strength by the Virginia barely even enter into the equation. In this version of the story, they are not the important events – the retelling of the Monitor’s success was paramount.

In some variations, however, the excitement of new science and technology is absent, and the sense and fear of industrial or military development are on full display. Some sources demonstrate attempts to tame the bizarre and frightening events from Hampton Roads, and to situate them in a more familiar, older cultural context. In 1862, the words and concepts to explain what had taken place simply did not exist – or at least, the American public was not prepared to use them. What was clear was that old, familiar ways of making war – the age of the

32 “The Exploit of the Monitor.”
33 “Record To-Day of a Slight Reverse.” The Agitator. March 12, 1862.
wooden warship, the eternally romanticized Age of Sail – was gone and replaced by something at once frightening and exciting. Some newspapers demonstrate an excitement about what had happened, both the beginning and the end of the battle. The *Norfolk Day Book* of the 10th, described the *Virginia’s* arrival at Hampton Roads and how her crew “went thus boldly with smiles and huzzas to solve a new problem in maritime warfare – to make the “trial trip” of the *Virginia, the trial of battle!” Others responded with fear; the Washington correspondent for the *Times* registered his belief on April 6th, 1862, that “nothing but what infidels would call “good luck” and what Christians would call God’s favor, will save the Union from the annihilating blows of the Merrimac.” All felt that nothing would ever be the same. Central to the cultural sea change was the displacement of tradition, and all the cultural markers it represented, by technology. The automatic response was an attempt by both Northerners and Southerners to put Hampton Roads into a historical or cultural setting one that would be familiar to white Americans with at least some education and Christian background. Others attempted to use their past to understand their future.

Some discussions of the Battle of Hampton Roads, while removing the events of March 8th and 9th from their actual time and place, were not attempts to use previous historical events to make sense of the battle. Certain contemporary writers attempted to use familiar historical images or tropes as shorthand to describe the events of the battle in case the “clash of the ironclads” proved too massive for Americans to comprehend. Rather than attempt to divorce the Monitor and *Virginia* from their actions at Hampton Roads, the anonymous author of “The Battle

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of Hampton Roads” transforms the Virginia into a rampaging dragon, a “destructive monster”\(^{36}\). “Imagine the thrill of terror,” he exhorts his Northern audience, “that ran through their wooden walls as the terrible mailed monster made his appearance.”\(^{37}\) The rhetoric employed by this author instead invokes a fairy tale story with comfortable dimensions of good and evil and familiar technologies and actions. The arrival of the Monitor is hailed as that of “a knight in mail fit to cope with Sir Merrimac.”\(^{38}\) The image of the knight and the dragon must have been a successful one, for it was revived in another article, published in the Times six days later. The author describes how “the iron mailed knight, whom romancers so delight to summon, comes forth from the darkness to do battle with this mailed dragon. He seems but a dwarf beside his mighty antagonist, yet he bears on his slender lance the honor if not the destiny of his country. ...we should say our valiant little knight was wearied with travel, but half prepared for the deadly struggle, and now for the first time testing his maiden sword.”\(^{39}\) There are no grey areas in terms of which side is right and which wrong; the stock fairy-tale figures of the knight and the dragon are about as black-and-white as it is possible to be. The knight wields familiar, low-tech weapons: a sword, a lance. The world created by this anonymous New York Times writer is far away from the technological advances of a rapidly industrializing nineteenth century, and while this world has its horrors – specifically, the rampaging dragon Merrimac – they can be defeated by one small knight with a sword and a lance. In these articles, the reader is transported away from the unfamiliar territory and grey areas of civil war and the new, horrifying, electrifying technologies that, in the eyes of many, changed the face of warfare altogether. This was made abundantly clear in an article that transplanted the battle deep into American history with the

\(^{36}\) “The Battle of Hampton Roads.”
\(^{37}\) “The Battle of Hampton Roads.”
\(^{38}\) “The Battle of Hampton Roads.”
\(^{39}\) “The Romance of War.”
image of the Virginia, "her appearance as strange and formidable to the wooden ships as were the artillery of the Jamestown settlers to the bows and arrows of the Indians." Knowing how the story ends, the reader is meant to take away a contrast between the new, exciting technology of the Jamestown settlers, and by extension the Virginia, and the old-fashioned – the implication is primitive – technology of the Native Americans encountered by the English upon their arrival in Virginia, and by extension, the wooden ships destroyed by the Confederate ironclad at Hampton Roads. In this source, the replacement of old technology by new is sudden, violent, and invasive, and it is no coincidence that only the Virginia receives this treatment in the source – here, as in others, a debate is waged between two forms of industrialism, good and bad, Northern and Southern. Confederate industrialism, readers were implicitly told, was a negative force, one that would be invasive and dangerous. Northern industrialism, manifest in the Monitor, "who bears on his shield the Stars and Stripes, and the honor and welfare of a nation," stood in stark contrast, a force for salvation and for good. These questions of one industrialization versus another were important considerations in the aftermath of Hampton Roads, which was a reckoning for the eventual course not only for American industrialization, but American reunification following the war.

Also inherent to analyses of the battle were certain assumptions about size – the size of the nation, the fleet, or the ships themselves. These Northern and Southern sources make the same assumptions about size. Key to the worlds created in the newspaper articles is the need for one side of the battle to be portrayed as smaller or weaker than the other. None of the written sources portray a battle of evenly-matched foes; not even the "clash of the ironclads" on March 9th, which current history argues ended in a stalemate, was a conflict between equal powers.

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40 "The Romance of War"
41 "The Romance of War"
Readers could see these varying concepts of size in the “little knight” fighting the “monster” of the *Times* articles. With the exception of the *Norfolk Day Book*, Confederate sources uniformly contrast the power of the *Virginia* – only one ship – against the combined might of the Union navy. Some articles expressed this discrepancy in terms of numbers; the *Daily True Delta* of New Orleans reported on March 12th, 1862 that “our combined squadron had only 21 guns. The federal frigate Cumberland had 24 guns, the Congress 50, the Saint Lawrence 50, and the Minnesota and Roanoke each 40, besides the Newport News batteries and several small steamers armed with heavy rifled guns.” Someone reading this article in conjunction with the *New York Times* articles about the arrival of the (relatively) tiny *Monitor* at Hampton Roads might very well have wondered whether the two authors had watched the same battle. “Suddenly, on ‘a mild hazy morning,’” reported the *New York Times* on March 16th, “a mysterious, monstrous object, a dark, floating house, terrible and impregnable, makes her appearance. . . . Nothing withholds her; the iron rain of batteries and broadsides falls harmless from her mailed sides.” It was crucial that reporters North and South used their platforms – news that was increasingly moving from local to national – to begin the process of normalizing the system of industrialism their side had produced. More significant than the military strength of one ship or another was the extent to which they embodied the industrial system that produced them: the *Monitor* for Northern industry, frequently depicted in Northern sources as good, clean, and safe and in Southern sources as yet another example of Northern automation; and the *Virginia* for Southern, industry, just as often depicted as dirty, frightening, and evil in Northern sources as it was used to illustrate Southern ingenuity. These concerns were equally present in descriptions of the military

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43 “The Romance of War”
might of the two ships and in attempts to situate Hampton Roads in earlier or mythical cultural contexts.

Crucial to these conflicting depictions of industrial systems were the ways in which each side understood the size, power, and efficiency of its own vessel, and how those understandings were transmitted through the media. Northern stores of artillery and ordnance were insurmountable from one perspective, and were useless from another. The Virginia, so outmatched from the Confederate perspective, was monstrous from the perspective of the Union. Depictions of the Monitor went to great lengths to create a picture of a tiny warrior, overshadowed but undaunted. Nowhere is this better stated than in “The Romance of War,” whose author refers to the Monitor in turn as “the dwarf,” the “diminutive knight,” and “the valiant little warrior.” The preponderance of sources that describe one side or another as smaller, weaker, more outmatched than the other, indicates that there was something powerful, perhaps a morale booster, in believing that one was fighting for a noble, outmanned cause against a far stronger, overbearing, even evil juggernaut. There is a decided consistency of language with regards to the Virginia. The single most frequent descriptor used for the Confederate ironclad is “monster,” found in articles from across the United States, and even internationally. The Caledonian Mercury, published in Scotland, reported on March 28th, 1862, that a shot fired by the Monitor hit “the sides of the iron-hided monster.” On March 12th, 1862, the Agitator, a Wellsboro, PA local newspaper, wrote that “the frigates being sailing vessels were completely at the mercy of the monster Merrimac.” Finally, the universality of the word “monster,” and the concept of monstrous size, to describe the Virginia is nowhere better

44 “The Romance of War”
46 “Record To-Day of a Slight Reverse.”
demonstrated than in the *Norfolk Day Book*, which notes that “it was a gallant sight to see the iron-clad leviathan gliding noiselessly through the water.”\(^{47}\) What was a slur in other articles is a word of praise in the South.

There was, however, another trend at work, one clearly reflected in a broad swath of writings from both the North and the South: a growing discomfort and anxiety over the increasing industrialization of war, in conjunction with the rapid destruction of dearly-held naval traditions. No matter the language they used, no matter the side they supported, nineteenth century Americans writing about their experiences during the Civil War, particularly in the aftermath of the Battle of Hampton Roads, betrayed their worries about where the technologies of war, and by extension society, were heading. This was most often done through the lens of the destruction of the Union fleet on March 8\(^{th}\), particularly the sinking of the *Cumberland*. The *Cumberland* had been one of the most important wooden frigates in the Union fleet, and the *Virginia* tore her to pieces with what seemed to observers to be a minimum of effort. As a wooden ship, the *Cumberland* was in possession of those elements of a ship that were most important to American culture: masts, sails, wooden walls, and sailors. Sailors were used to further highlight the discrepancy between the *Cumberland* and her ilk, and the two ironclads: “Not a man was to be seen on either ship,” one source reported, “all being housed.”\(^{48}\) While not the most striking visual difference between the traditional ships and the ironclads, the lack of discernible human involvement was particularly troubling. More than any other ship present at Hampton Roads, as a traditional frigate the *Cumberland* physically embodied the world that technology now threatened.

\(^{47}\) “Norfolk Day Book.”
Commentators North and South differed on their treatments of the sinking of the 
*Cumberland*. Perhaps the most interesting trend in nineteenth century discussions of the sinking 
of the *Cumberland* is the recurring image of her flags and masts, invoked by commentators from 
newspapers across the country. Flags and masts were fundamental parts of the construction and 
operation of wooden warships, and were therefore closely linked to traditional naval culture, and 
to American culture more broadly. The fact that these are the most commonly appearing images 
of the *Cumberland* – indeed, of Hampton Roads altogether – indicates that the concerns that 
weighed heavily on the minds of Americans went far beyond the military outcome of the war; 
rather, they were concerned with the destruction of symbols for a way of being and an era they 
knew and understood. Americans who used wooden ships confronted a new and terrifying age in 
which nothing was left of old, familiar concepts but masts poking out of the water. The 
*Cumberland*, fighting even as she sunk, represented old traditions of naval glory. An anonymous 
sailor on board the *Cumberland* on March 8th, wrote in the *New York Times* on March 14th that 
"as I always predicted, the *Cumberland* died game [sic], with the Star-Spangled Banner flying at 
her mizzen." The Cumberland's sinking with her flags still flying is the most potent symbol 
possible for the declining glories of the Age of Sail; the power of this image is evident in the 
sheer number of sources that repeat it. Confederate flag officer Franklin Buchanan wrote in his 
oficial report dated March 27th, 1862, that the *Cumberland* "commenced sinking, gallantly 
fighting her guns as long as they were above water. She went down with her colors flying." Most romantically of all, the *New York Times* wrote on March 16th, 1862 that "[the *Virginia*] 
attacks the great ships which the day before were the pride of our navy, and in a short time one 
of them goes down, unconquered, with the old flag flying, though her decks are covered with 

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dead and the water is surging into the broken sides.” The flag is a direct reference back to the idea of the ship of state, the essential iconographic form of which was so threatened by the results of Hampton Roads. By continually reinforcing the image of American flags still flying proudly over the sinking wreck of the *Cumberland*, reporters linked the proud wooden warship with American national hopes, creating an effective piece of wartime propaganda in the process: not only was the *Virginia* destroying a proud old warship, it was attacking the Union itself. More importantly, however, the link between the flags of the *Cumberland* and the ironclads at Hampton Roads created an indelible image of the ship of state under attack. In other words, ironclad technology, embodied by the *Virginia*, and industrialization in general, represented in some sense an attack on the fabric of democracy. The implications for the reunion of the United States after the war were dire; these articles strongly imply that a Southern victory, a victory of “bad” industrialism over “good,” would lead to the collapse – the sinking – of American democracy itself.

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51 “The Romance of War.”
The Monitor and the Virginia in Lithographs

Nineteenth century anxieties about the meaning of rapid industrialization were embedded in Civil War sources beyond the printed word. The visual arts – particularly lithography and paintings – also carried these fears. The Battle of Hampton Roads, especially the “first battle of the ironclads” between the Monitor and Virginia on March 9th, was a popular topic for printmakers and artists, and a number of works were commissioned or released in 1862 and in the years following the war that illustrated the events of the battle to the American public. The prints and paintings combine to create a fairly bleak picture of American feelings (at least in the North) with regards to the development of the industrial landscape of the nation. In most cases, this was likely not the intent of the artist; some prints, especially those printed by New York-based Currier & Ives, were almost certainly created with patriotic goals in mind. However, a look at the composition of the prints and paintings reveals what is hidden below the surface. Like the eyewitness accounts previously discussed, which despite their disparate origins used overwhelmingly similar language, imagery, and metaphor, these visual sources all employ the same iconography, elements, and even color scheme, creating an overall effect of the general social feelings and fears, all voicing the same concern: what the rapid industrialization of the United States, particularly the North, and the corresponding debut of new and horrible machinery of war, meant for American society. There were ramifications in every aspect of life: work culture, family culture, and governmental culture. To nineteenth century Americans, it represented the end of a culture rooted in the potent symbols of wooden ships, including masts, colorful pennants, wooden hulls, and gallant men waging war above the surface of the water;
these symbols, though embedded in naval culture, played a crucial role in the ways Americans understood their government, their religion, and their national character.

The Changing Role of Industry in the Production of Civil War Lithographs

Before considering the body of visual representations of the Battle of Hampton Roads, one must consider why it is useful to separate artistic sources—specifically, lithographs—from renditions of the events of the battle in other media. The fears and anxieties about what it meant for America to be industrializing as quickly as she was were implicit in woodcuts and lithographs depicting the *Monitor* and the *Virginia*, the *Cumberland* and the *Congress*, and were rapidly and relatively efficiently transmitted to the American public thanks in large part to new technologies of printing and production.

The massive improvements in telegraph and railroad services that dramatically increased newspaper circulation in the nineteenth century had a similar effect on the lithograph industry by dramatically increasing the speed by which images and information could be transmitted from one part of the country to another. Just as it was rapidly becoming possible for Americans on opposite ends of the country to consume the same news story at the same time, circulation was spreading so widely that it was increasingly likely that those same Americans could see the same image at the same time, regardless of their distance from one another. "Depending on how long a sketch took to reach an editor’s desk," Anthony M. Lee writes, "the papers promised that a drawing made in the field one day could end up as an engraved and published illustration within
two or three weeks, easily considered newsworthy for an American audience."\textsuperscript{52} There had always been opportunities in the visual arts for the furthering of political or national ideologies but with the new techniques for mass production of art including lithographs, woodcuts, and prints, the ability of artists and printmaking companies to directly address their audience was greatly magnified.

It should briefly be noted, however, that there is a problem inherent in the act of reading through artistic representations Hampton Roads: the scarcity of Confederate sources compared to Union sources. The distribution is not necessarily equal, but there are existing literary and news sources about the Battle of Hampton Roads from both the North and the South, although the already-weak Southern publishing industry was hit hard during the war, and newspaper circulation suffered accordingly. On the other hand, the relative parity between Union and Confederate sources is not present among visual sources, especially lithographs and woodcuts. The number of Confederate prints produced during the war is much lower than the number of Union prints produced during the war, and Harold Holzer goes so far as to say of the Battle of Hampton Roads that "there was no artistic response from the South."\textsuperscript{53} This is not to say that there was no desire or impetus to respond artistically to events that had just as much impact in the South as they did in the North; literary sources including newspaper articles and memoirs clearly demonstrate the depth of Confederate feelings about the battle. The explanation lies in logistics and resources, indicative of the deep divide between Northern and Southern levels of industrial infrastructure before and especially during the wars. "By 1862, Confederate

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printmaking was already teetering on extinction,” Holzer writes. “Chronic shortages of paper, ink, and artists in the region had crippled picture production, dooming its publishing industry… Thus the production of popular prints that could be displayed in loyal Southern homes soon vanished altogether.”54 The visual expression of complicated feelings about new technology was inextricably linked to that new technology – lithographic processes were industrialized by 1862, rooting them in the same cultural moment that made the design and construction of the Monitor and the Virginia possible. The ability to create media – and ironclads – was a privileged one.

Hampton Roads in Civil War-era Lithography

Given the realities of lithograph production during the Civil War versus the realities of painting production, it is no surprise that the very first images produced of the Battle of Hampton Roads were lithographic prints produced by publishing companies and disseminated through the sale of prints for display in the home as well as illustrated magazines such as Harper’s Weekly and Frank Leslie’s, the first newspapers to illustrate news stories with printed woodcut lithographs.55 Of these, it is not easy to discern which print might have been the first to reach a wide audience, but it is likely that the March 22nd Harper’s carried the first, albeit anonymous, view of the battle.56 The first attributable print of the battle between the Monitor and the Virginia – and therefore, the one whose iconography is easiest to trace through other, later prints – is most likely one captioned “The Great Fight Between the ‘Merrimac’ & ‘Monitor,’ March 9th 1862 / The First Battle Between Ironclad Ships of War.” (fig. 1) It was distributed by the New York-based Currier & Ives, one of the most famous printing companies of the nineteenth century, who

54 Holzer. “Victory Without Glory?” pp. 116-117
55 Lee. “Gardiner.” pp. 17
56 Harper’s Weekly March 22nd 1862.
somehow “reached the masses before the competition”\(^{57}\) with each of their prints. They based their depiction on “a sketch allegedly made on the scene by a Norfolk eyewitness named F. Newman,” an anonymous man, lending a certain air of authenticity to the lithograph. The “great fight,” as presented by Currier & Ives, has a cramped and bleak feel to it, and stylistic influences that can be traced through other 1862 lithographs – even those not produced by the Currier & Ives company. The *Virginia* floats on the left side, the *Monitor* on the right; the two ships, which during the actual battle had stayed a reasonable distance from each other, are brought together to such an extent that they are practically on top of one another like component parts of a machine, each incomplete without the other. The *Monitor* lies behind the *Virginia*, half of her obscured by white smoke. This is the only major sign of disparity between this print and the others that will be surveyed; with the exception of the location of the two ships, the basic iconography, with its heavy connotations of industrialization – the smoke, both white and black; the grit; the clearly-rendered machinery; and the total lack of visible human forms on the deck of either ship – and the end of the glorious age of sail, stays the same. The horror of the scene, if anything, is amplified by the presence of the *Virginia* front and center in the frame of the lithograph. The artist’s priority seems to be the Confederate vessel rather than the Union one. The print becomes one whose goal seems to be to highlight a looming industrial nightmare by downplaying the ingenuity and technical skill required to create ironclads and highlighting the large, “hulking” size, slanted sides, and savage, sharply-delineated lines of the *Virginia* rather than illustrate the glorious triumph of the Union navy or the historic nature of the conflict. The *Virginia* is huge and dark compared to the slight, lightly shaded *Monitor*, and she is depicted as spewing thick black smoke into the air from a black smokestack placed nearly central in the picture. The

\(^{57}\) Holzer. “Victory Without Glory?” pp. 116
implication is clear. Holzer refers to the “increasingly smokestack-studded reality”\textsuperscript{58} of the American landscape during the mid-nineteenth century, an image strongly evoked and capitalized upon by Currier & Ives. In this print, the Virginia is inextricably linked with spreading industrialization and machinery, and the portrait that is created is not necessarily a flattering one. Adding to the sense of unease implicit in this lithograph and its placement of the Virginia and Monitor are the wooden warships dotting the background of the frame. These traditional symbols of maritime life and naval combat serve as a visual reminder of what was lost and what was fading into the past during and after the Battle of Hampton Roads, and what the consequences of industrialism might be; in essence, the wooden warships could be said to represent a traditional, more natural way of life, one incompatible with new ironclad technology.

Later prints, including others by Currier & Ives, switched the positioning of the Monitor and the Virginia almost exactly. The earliest example of this was the next Currier print, drawn by Fanny Palmer – a woman in her fifties considered to be one of the best working marine artists of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{59} Captioned as “The First Fight between Iron Clad Ships of War / Terrific Combat between the ‘Monitor’ 2 guns and ‘Merrimac’ 10 guns / In Hampton Roads, March 9\textsuperscript{th} 1862 / In which the little ‘Monitor’ whipped the ‘Merrimac’ and the whole ‘School’ of Rebel Steamers” (fig. 2), the print, which was also made in New York in 1862, is practically identical to the F. Newman print in all ways save one: the Monitor is placed farthest forward in the frame, and the Virginia has been pulled back to occupy the space formerly occupied by her Union foe. The result of the change – which may have been implemented as an attempt to counteract the image of industrial horror presented by the presence of the massive, black Virginia as the

\textsuperscript{59} Holzer. Union Image pp. 111.
privileged object in the frame – was, if possible, to highlight even further an underlying sense of anxiety about the deeper ramifications of the naval conflict at Hampton Roads. The wooden warships are still present, but they are now farther back in the frame and practically obscured by the two-toned smoke – white and black – billowing from the battling ironclads. The “little Monitor” may now be the central object in the frame, but moving the *Virginia* farther back has had an odd – perhaps unintended – effect. The Confederate ironclad is hidden by the smoke from her own and the *Monitor*’s guns, to such an extent that her form remains mysterious. The *Monitor*, images of which had been published for weeks in the illustrated newspapers, would have looked familiar enough, but the *Virginia* has transitioned from something horrifying but visible into something frightening in its enigma – lurking in the smoke and waiting for the right moment to strike. The most important visible element is the smokestack, peeking out from behind a cloud of steam and spewing the black smoke which was a staple of contemporary depictions of the battle, and of the *Virginia* specifically. What piece of industrial machinery exactly might be lurking behind the smoke was not necessarily clear; what was clear, however, was that it was something frightening, something dangerous – the dawning of a new era was represented by a monster lurking, biding its time and polluting the air.

The Fanny Palmer and F. Newman lithographs are representative of a number of important trends in art and printmaking that were indicative of American feelings of worry or concern about the growing industrialization of their nation. These trends can be traced through lithographs as well as paintings. The first is the disparate characterization of the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* in art. Of the two ships, the construction of *Monitor* required the bigger technological leap forward; though neither ship looked anything like a ship that had been seen before, the *Monitor*, with her rotating turret, was entirely unfamiliar. And yet, when artists needed a
shorthand image for industrial hell, they weighted the Virginia with layers of meaning beyond simple military or naval tactics. This was almost definitely politically linked; the Monitor and her crew were, however briefly, the heroes of the entire Union, and a print casting doubt on the wondrous "Ericsson battery," the little technological wonder, would not have sold well. In addition, the sheer size discrepancy between the two ships made it easy for one to be cast as more monstrous than another—the Virginia dwarfed the Monitor. In keeping with the common tendency among nineteenth century observers of the war to attempt to make sense of the terrifying events happening around them by removing those events from their context and placing them in the distant, easily processed past, the size discrepancy enabled artists and writers to place the battle firmly in a familiar context, in this case a biblical one: the clash between David and Goliath. Biblical and classical themes were frequently employed by the newspapers and memoirs of the time, and artists were not immune to this tactic. Whether the reference was made explicit or not, the implication was clear. The caption to Palmer’s print in particular—"the little ‘Monitor’ whipped the ‘Merrimac’"—placed it squarely into a tradition of size-related rhetoric employed to play up the technological horror that was the Virginia while downplaying the equally industrial qualities of the Monitor. In the aftermath of Hampton Roads, the Virginia, an ironclad built on the hull of a traditional wooden vessel and assembled in the relatively unindustrialized South, came to symbolize the dangers and excesses of modern industrialization. Part of this apparent discrepancy lies in the scarcity of Southern sources— if all historians have are Northern depictions of the battle, it follows that negative perspectives on the Monitor will be few and far between—but that cannot account for everything. Another likely explanation is the mid-war need for Union propaganda, for which the Battle of Hampton Roads served nicely. Other possible causes lie in the history and actions of the Virginia herself: her construction

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60 Holzer. Union Image pp. 118
physically displaced not only a Union ship, the USS *Merrimack*, but supplanted a traditional sailing vessel, steam-driven but with tall masts and sails. The fact that the Confederate ironclad, whose debut on the world stage was so dramatic and violent, was the physical embodiment of the replacement of the Age of Sail with the Age of Iron must not have gone unnoticed, although it has never been explicitly stated. A final explanation lies in the ruthlessness with which the *Virginia* took apart the Union fleet at Hampton Roads: where the *Monitor* was first seen by the world in a defensive role, blocking the hapless and grounded *Minnesota* from the *Virginia*’s guns, the *Virginia* first appeared as a rampaging ship of war, destroying with ease wooden ships which had previously been the finest and most powerful of their class. All these combined to create a flattering idea of the *Monitor*, and a bleak idea of the *Virginia*. The need to normalize one system of industrialization over another was also at work in lithograph; regional differences in economy, industrial capability, and ideology played themselves out in the visual media just as much, if not more so, as they did in printed news media. The clean, smooth *Monitor* was a commentary on the positive qualities of the Northern model of industrialization, just as the ominous, rampaging *Virginia* was a commentary on the negativity of the Southern model.

Another important inclusion in a number of prints was the traditional wooden warships that floated in the background of the frame, watching their world fall apart. This is the first important indicator of a tension between the old and new worlds of naval technology, and the industrialization of America in general. In two of the prints, neither published by Currier & Ives but clearly taking their visual cues from the Palmer lithograph, the wooden ships are not only floating passively and watching the forces of industry wreak havoc – they are sinking. Henry Bill’s “The First Battle Between ‘Iron’ Ships of War / The ‘Monitor’ 2 guns / The ‘Merrimac’ 10 guns / The Merrimac was crippled and the rebel fleet driven off” (fig. 3) and the George W.
Hatch, Jr. & Co print “The Splendid Victory of the Ericsson Battery Monitor / Disabling the Rebel Battery Merrimac, 10 guns and Steamers Jamestown and Yorktown, In Hampton Roads, March 9th, 1862” (fig. 4) are practically identical to the Palmer print except for one important difference. The scope of the battle in these prints has been made wider – that is, while the Monitor and Virginia are still clearly the important parts of the image, the frame in both prints has been widened, and much more of the conflict (as imagined by the artists) can be seen. More specifically, many more wooden warships can be seen than are present in either of the previously discussed prints, making them much more a part of the action than before. The viewer seems to have come into the print in medias res, because there has clearly been significant action taking place – the wooden ships are not participating actively in the fighting; rather, they are sinking (some in flames). Other visual elements are the same – for example, the Virginia is shrouded in smoke, only her smokestack visible, and the Virginia and Monitor are placed exactly where they are in the other prints, but the addition of the sinking, burning wooden warships adds an extra dimension of fear to the lithograph. A viewer looking at this print is presented with a vision of industrialized technology violently ending one world, the age of sail and all the romance it entailed, and bringing in a new one. In both the Bill and the Hatch print, the rigging and the flags of the wooden ships are clearly defined; even as they sink, their flags are still flying – an image that pervades written sources about the battle as well. Regardless of the patriotic implications inherent in these prints and their captions, the feeling invoked by the events depicted in the lithographs is not one of excitement for a new future carried in on the backs of machines; on the contrary, thanks to images of a dying culture and the violent innovations of the Monitor and the Virginia, the viewer leaves the print with regret for a disappearing world and fear for the world to come.
In no print, however, is the transition between old and new world – and the important role played by technology in that transition – more explicit than in the Calvert Litho. Co.’s “The First Encounter of Iron-Clads / Terrific Engagement Between the “Monitor” and “Merrimac” / Hampton Roads, Virginia, U.S.A. March 9th 1862 / This fight settled the fate of the “Wooden Walls” of the world and taught all nations that the War-Ship of the future must be – like the McCormick Harvester – a Machine of Steel.” (fig. 5) The McCormick Harvester was a mechanical farming device invented in 1831 by Cyrus Hall McCormick, the son of a poor farmer. Where previously grain had to be harvested by hand, a long and arduous process, the McCormick Harvester, or Reaper, mechanized the entire process, only needing to be pulled by a horse over the grain. Where the Monitor and the Virginia supplanted traditional naval technology, the McCormick Harvester revolutionized the traditional methods of harvesting, making a link between the two clear to nineteenth century artist. While the other prints clearly link the Battle of Hampton Roads to technology and technological advancement, this is the first to make an explicitly commercial link. The print was made in Detroit or Chicago, both industrial centers, in 1881, almost two decades after the event it depicts and the fifty year anniversary of the invention of the Harvester, and was a reproduction of “a Battle of Hampton Roads cyclorama then on view in Toledo.” The violence of the imagery makes it a curious choice to help sell a product – the implications of industrial hell that can be teased out of the earlier prints are on full display here, with smoke and flames filling the air, and gallant wooden ships sinking in the background. As with earlier prints, the Monitor is front and center in the lithograph, but both she and the Virginia are distorted, portrayed so darkly that it is difficult to make them out. The fact that an image as brutal as this one could be used with some degree of success to sell machinery is

62 Holzer. “Victory Without Glory?” pp. 121
testament to the power machines and industry had over the American mind during the nineteenth century. The lithograph evokes the horror of war as a means of promoting Northern-style industrialism, despite the negative portrayal of the *Monitor* in the print itself. The McCormick Harvester, American consumers were told, would, like the *Monitor* and the *Virginia*, replace everything that had come before it, but it was necessary that it do so. Unlike older methods of harvesting – unlike wooden warships – the McCormick Harvester and the ironclad ships, manifestations of modern industrial technology, were well-constructed, efficient; they replaced the grace, symbolism, and even honor of agrarian or artisanal methods of harvest, or warfare, with technology deeply rooted in the factory.
Hampton Roads and Industrial Fears in Traditional Painting

The Context for the Battle of Hampton Roads in Traditional Painting

Painting and lithographs were two ways in which visual information was transmitted to the American public during the nineteenth century. However, although the events the two media depicted were often similar, if not the exact same, the means by which they did so were entirely different, as were the goals of their respective artists and the social purposes of the artwork. Lithography – especially chromolithography, a new printing technique – was represented rapid technological advancement in terms of industrial printing and newspaper circulation. Lithographic images could be printed *en masse* and shipped all over the country; they were created quickly, printed quickly, and viewed quickly. Within a few weeks of the Battle of Hampton Roads, artists from printing companies all over the Northern states had released their impressions of the clash between the *Monitor* and the *Virginia*, and the work of shaping public perceptions of the event had begun. Painting represents a different historical issue altogether. Where lithographs were modern, paintings were old-fashioned, a traditional and storied method of creating art. It is true that lithographs had to be created by artists, but once a woodblock or other engraving was complete, the image could be printed dozens at a time over a few hours. Painting, on the other hand, was a long and arduous process – it could only be done by hand and required months of delicate work. It was also expensive – most paintings were commissioned from painters by wealthy buyers, usually the very rich, and sometimes on behalf of clubs or organizations. Where lithographs were accessible, paintings were exclusive, and unless chosen for public view, the ability to see them and interpret them was highly privileged.
The purpose of traditional oil-on-canvas paintings was different than the purpose of lithographs, which was generally to aid in advertising and the transmission of news stories. Paintings, however, have historically been made with more of an eye to historical context; that is, both the historic moment they depict, and the historic moment which they produced them. Depictions in oil of historic events and figures have been used for centuries as ways of visualizing important moments in the course of the history of mankind, as well as creating for the observer a sense of what those events or people may have meant, in a moral sense as well as a historic one. "Traditional" war paintings are part of a historical style of paintings referred to as the "grand manner" of painting – "a visual solution to the problem of translating "knowing into telling,"" according to Steven Conn.63 There were rules and guidelines to the grand manner tradition that "governed both how painters should paint and how viewers should view."64 Grand manner painting used historical events to teach moral lessons by trying "to weave together the heroism of individuals with universal moral messages embodied by those individuals at particular moments – specific scenes illustrating eternal truths."65 These paintings often made use of classical or biblical imagery, a common nineteenth century trope. Grand manner history painters transformed flesh and blood historical figures into classical and biblical analogies for heroism and moral goodness in order to make sense of historic or current events, make an argument about moral living, or express their own thoughts and feelings about a historic concept.

The Civil War, and more importantly for this argument, the Battle of Hampton Roads, brought industrialization further into the national consciousness than it had ever been before; as the sun set on March 9th, 1862, it was clear that the old relationships between warfare and
culture, which until the mid-nineteenth century were not explicitly linked through industrialization, were rendered obsolete by new machines that made the connection between technology and violence explicitly clear. Within a decade or so, the depictions of violence in art changed as well. As to why the Civil War changed the field of American paintings, two explanations are clear above the rest. The first is that the meaning of the events that needed to be recorded—so central to the traditional grand manner history paintings—were beyond the realm of events that artists could record; they were too big, too traumatic. Civil War painters, according to Conn, “were unable, apparently, to use history painting to convey the large meanings and ultimate truths of the conflict, whatever those might have been.”66 This was not an uncommon feeling among Americans during this time period—the events of the Civil War that were taking place were so traumatic and world-altering (including the sectional conflict, the new and terrible forms of violence that developed, and the widespread soul-searching that occurs as part of a civil war) that the community could not entirely make sense of what had happened. The Civil War, Bruce Catton writes, “had been the biggest thing that ever happened on this side of the globe. No one was quite certain just what it meant—or, perhaps more accurately, a good many men thought they were certain but they could not agree with each other—but it was clear to everyone that it meant something prodigious.”67 The creation of visual representations of war had in the past required clarity—a clear understanding of what had happened, how it had happened, and why it had happened. Feelings of national unease and uncertainty were strong during the years directly after the war, when the American people began the long and arduous process of putting themselves back together. The scars of the war, however, ran deep. “Such was the trauma of the war,” Conn writes, “that American history painters, both during and after, found themselves

unable to give purpose and legitimation to it in the ways they had relied on for roughly one hundred years." In other words, the war and its myriad possible ramifications were so large and so horrific that traditional modes of representation were not sufficient to record them and make their meanings plain to viewers. What was present in American styles of painting, however, and did survive the traumas enacted by the Civil War on artistic communities, was a common desire to look back to the past. Barbara Novak argues that the "American search for a tradition was ultimately converted into a concern for anything old and past; much American realism, both still life and genre, was thus transformed into a form of nostalgic romanticism."

There is a direct link between "nostalgic romanticism" and another difficulty faced by American painters attempting to record the Battle of Hampton Roads. This reason is partially a reaction to the new technologies employed by the navies of both the Union and the Confederacy: painters were not equipped to evoke the naval combats of the Civil War, specifically Hampton Roads, because nothing in them looked anything like the wooden warships with their graceful sails and gallant crew that they had been trained to paint. Traditional wooden sailing vessels had strong connotations in the nineteenth century American mind, rooted in centuries of naval culture and history. Here again are attempts to link contemporary events with the classical or biblical imagery also used by the grand manner painters and nineteenth century writers. According to Arne Neset, wooden vessels evoked the classical political ideal of the nation as a vessel, the ship of state, an image so potent it is still in common usage today. In addition, Neset writes that the shape of the wooden ship itself was crucial for Americans reared in a Christian background:

"The ship is also an important Christian symbol of the community of man sailing its course.

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68 Conn. "Narrative Trauma." pp. 22.
toward the eternal harbor. In a church the nave (represented by the ship) is the place where the congregation faces the priest at the altar, the pilot who steers the ship according to the sacred logbook. The pulpit could be imagined as the ship’s prow, and to take the metaphor further, the mast stood in for the cross. The centrality of the masts in popular images of traditional wooden men-of-war is analogous to the centrality of religious imagery in American popular culture during and after the war — a traditional way of life that some Americans felt was being displaced or eclipsed by the horrors of modern warfare, exemplified by Hampton Roads. The shape and placement of the wooden vessels included in depictions of the Battle of Hampton Roads in contemporary paintings seems to support this idea. This also highlights the extent to which traditional concepts of naval culture and its relationship to society were violated and overthrown by the dawn of the ironclad era: if, as is implied by Neset in his analysis of the meaning of ships, the cultural center of society was represented by ships, what did it mean when the shape of the ship shifted and changed? If the wooden ship represented the church, the ironclad ship represented the factory — following this analysis, the new center of nineteenth century American culture. The potential consequences of the centrality of the factory in American culture were subconsciously placed at the heart of artistic representations of the Battle of Hampton Roads: the contrast between the cross-like masts of the |Cumberland| and other ships of her ilk and the sharp industrial lines of the |Virginia| represented the displacement of traditional, church-based morality and stability by modern capitalism and industrial greed. Having the factory as the reference point for American culture indicated a shift in cultural priorities towards industrial and military success, the making of money no matter the cost, and the dehumanization of violence. New technology supplanted old morality

71 Neset. |Arcadian Waters|. pp. 163.
Despite the tightly-held beliefs and customs of American naval society, ironclads and steam-driven vessels played a large role in the naval theatre of the Civil War; however, John Wilmerding notes that while “critical to the future conduct of battle, these vessels somehow never stimulated artists in the way that they had done in the age of sail. Few marines of great prominence emerge from these years; it was not a war for marine painters to record.”

Earlier marine painting had been marked by romantic depictions of sailors and their beautiful ships. Neset notes that “throughout the nineteenth century popular marine painting developed into stereotypical portraits of ships that showed the boat broadside under full sail or steam, sometimes with other craft in the distance and maybe a glimpse of the breakers on a distant shore in the horizon. The painters wanted to show their expertise in seamanship and took great pains to delineate the exact rigging and system of ropes and pulleys so that people with similar nautical expertise could nod in approval.” On the other hand, Monitor and Virginia were neither beautiful nor graceful, and their clash was the furthest possible thing from romantic. In the process, the popular stereotype image of the wooden warship was obliterated. Holzer agrees, writing that “the most celebrated Union naval achievement of the war, the construction of the Monitor and its successful battle against the Virginia, did not lend itself easily to a lingering romantic aesthetic: the Monitor was an ugly machine and a relentless reminder of industrialism.” Regardless of their own personal or artistic feelings, however, there were a limited number of marine paintings produced concerning the events at Hampton Roads within the decade or so after the war ended.

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Paintings of Hampton Roads

Given the layers upon layers of social and cultural meaning embedded in the bodies and shapes of wooden ships, it is no surprise that images of the rise of the ironclad and decline of the wooden warship were fraught with anxiety and fear. The majority of the paintings of Hampton Roads were painted within two decades of the war. Perhaps the most famous one is reprinted – taking a previously exclusive image of industrialization and exposing it to public view – by Louis Prang, the owner of L. Prang & Company, “the nation’s most famous and successful publisher of decorative color prints for the family home,”75 in his 1886 book of Civil War prints: “Battle Between the “Monitor” and “Merrimac,” March 8 1862,” or “‘The Monitor and Merrimac.’ The First Fight Between Ironclads” (fig. 6), painted by the marine painter Julian O. Davidson, who had gone to sea prior to beginning his study of art and therefore had significant naval experience.76 The print began life as a watercolor painting, but was transmitted to a broader audience by the technological processes of lithography. The traditional art of painting was permanently linked to technological processes of creating artwork in this period, often by people like Prang and Davidson. Even if only by association, even if the methods by which painters took paint to canvas had not become technologically advanced, industrial development was everywhere – including in the fine arts. The supplanting of the traditional, artisanal construction of wooden warships by the industrial, mechanized processes of building required for the ironclads was mirrored in the wide-spread replacement of traditional paintings in the public eye by rapidly-produced lithographs. Davidson, according to the official text in Prang’s book, “based his work on interviews with the Monitor’s surviving crewmembers, as well as

76 Prang. Civil War Pictures pp. 33.
recollections by its inventor, John Ericsson and one of the *Merrimac*'s builders John L. Porter. Davidson also acknowledged a debt to marine artist Francis A. Silva, who had observed and sketched the actual battle from the shoreline at nearby Newport News." Davidson was a fairly well-known naval painter by this point, so his work was already credible, but the addition of such eyewitness testimony added an extra layer of veracity to his work, crucial for audiences unfamiliar with industrial imagery and hungry for visual depictions of the reality of the war. The image he paints is certainly vivid and dramatic: the composition is divided almost perfectly diagonally, with the *Virginia* on the left side cloaked in black smoke and the *Monitor* on the right, practically haloed in white. The water of the Roads is dark and choppy throughout, but there is one patch of light directly beneath the bow end of the *Monitor*. The *Virginia*’s familiar black smokestack is present and billowing the thick black smoke that had by this point become a standard mode of depicting the ship (not only has its use been documented in lithography, it appears traditional paintings as well) and in the background can be seen the well-worn images of wooden warships, watching the new form of industrial combat unfold before them. Perhaps in an effort to keep the composition balanced along the diagonal line, there are two visible wooden ships – one, which may invoke the idea of the “ship of state” and represent the Union, defended by the dauntless *Monitor*, is to the right of the frame, protected from harm by the *Monitor* herself. The other is not so fortunate – she is tucked away on the left side of the frame, almost hidden from view behind the *Virginia* and her coal-tainted smoke. If the wooden ship on the right represents the protection of the American nation, the ship on the left represents the old structures of society and culture, represented in the bodies of ships, which were symbolically and systematically deconstructed as part of the cultural understanding of the Battle of Hampton Roads. As in 1862, the *Virginia* is presented as an industrial nightmare, the worst of what the

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country might be heading towards: the physical embodiment of a potential future in which people were replaced by machines, the sky was blotted out by coal smoke, and gallantry and honor were replaced by capitalism and greed. The Virginia is constructed almost entirely of straight lines and sharp edges, except for the rounded cone just to the left of the flag perched atop the vessel, which comes into what looks to be a savagely sharp point. Near the point, are the outlines of what look like formless industrial materials, all the more unnerving for how they cannot be positively identified as things nineteenth century Americans would have been familiar with, further linking the Virginia to the horrors of the factory. By contrast, the Monitor is constructed from smooth, round lines, and while it looks sturdy, industrial and unnatural, especially when compared to the graceful wooden warship tucked away behind it, it does not look evil or deadly to the same degree that the Virginia does.

This image leaves the Monitor in a very different place, and therefore transmits an entirely different message about industrialization. The Davidson print was originally a watercolor, a traditional medium, but Prang had made his fortune on chromolithography, a new and industrial form of image production, and was therefore one of the beneficiaries of technological advancement. Given Prang's personal investment in industrialization, and the ambiguously positive portrayal of the Monitor in the print itself (compared to the explicitly negative portrayal of the Virginia), what may be present is a guardedly optimistic argument for a possible industrialized future for America, with the Monitor representing the idealized vision of what a mechanized America could be under Northern leadership, and the nightmarish Virginia representing not only the worst-case scenario given a Southern victory but the present state of technological development and industrial affairs. More so than other paintings, the Prang/Davidson chromolithograph pushes a political statement beyond simple North-versus-
South propaganda, enhanced by the distance of more than two decades after the battle itself. At stake at Hampton Roads was far more than the military fortunes of the Union or the Confederacy: the two sides were battling for control of the industrial future of the nation. The Southern vision of industry, embodied by the Virginia on the dark, smoke-obscured left side of the frame, brings to mind the hellish conditions of factory labor – and by extension, the slave labor that built both the South and the Virginia herself. There is a violent quality present in the Southern model of industrialization that is not present in Davidson’s metaphorical version of the Northern model as embodied in the Monitor, all smooth lines and clean white smoke. Inherent in this artistic presentation of the battle was a sense that the “righteous” industrialization had won; that in defeating the Virginia, the Monitor had also defeated the forces of Southern industrialization, leaving Northern entrepreneurs free to guide the United States.

A significantly less optimistic vision of the future is found represented by the minor nineteenth century marine painter Thomas C. Skinner, in his 1875 “Battle Between Virginia and Monitor” (fig 2). At least some of the difference between the two paintings can be attributed to the dates at which they were painted. 1875 was a year of economic turmoil in the United States, a period of industrial depression on the heels of a crisis two years before, when “in September of 1873, the financiers of Wall Street were paralyzed by a series of colossal failures.” Industry represented something frightening and risky, a process which had carried the country down a bad road. It is no wonder that Skinner’s vision of industrialization is closer to a nightmare than a dream, or at least an ambivalent, guardedly optimistic evocation of certain (that is to say, Northern) kinds of industrialization, as is Davidson and Prang’s. 1886, the date of the Prang print’s production, was more than a decade after the financial crises, enough time for the country

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to find itself on more solid economic ground. As a result, the vision of industrialization, at least as embodied by the Monitor, is less outright frightening. This optimism is undercut by the horrific depiction of the Virginia, indicating that there was still a significant amount of worry and fear at work.

Skinner’s painting puts the fear and worry on the surface. Gone are the clean lines and the easy division of light from dark, good from evil, which distinguished Davidson’s painting for Prang, replaced by ambiguity and uncertainty. On its surface, the elements that make up the painting are relatively standard fare for marine paintings depicting the Battle of Hampton Roads: the Virginia’s black smokestack is on full display, as are the outlines of industrial materials that can be seen on the surface of the ironclad ship. The smoke billowing from the smokestack, another reminder of the coal dust reeking from America’s factories by this point of the nineteenth centuries, has filled the air to such an extent that it has practically obscured the sky, or rather, there is so much smoke that it has become the sky; in other words, the addition of industrial materials and refuse into the environment has overtaken natural things so much that it has simply replaced them. Even the smoke emanating from the Monitor, normally pure white compared to the Virginia’s black, is tinted grey. The water directly beneath the Monitor and Virginia is dark and choppy as well, almost metallic, and presenting a sharp contrast to the depiction of the graceful wooden warship, presumably the Minnesota, observing the combat. The position occupied by this ship seems to be a privileged or at least a positive one – the sky above and behind her masts and sails is clear and bright, and the water beneath her is calm and smooth. She is the only ship shown in this way the frame of the painting. The positive – one might even say hopeful – depiction of the wooden ship is undercut by the placement of a sinking wooden ship directly to the left of the Minnesota. Only her sails are visible above the waterline, and an
object sitting on the stern of the *Virginia* simultaneously points to and partially blocks the sight from view.

The story told by this painting, however, is not a happy one even by the standards of visual depictions of the Battle of Hampton Roads. Artists depicting the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* often at least attempted to portray the two ships in an approximation of how they would have looked during battle: as separate and distinct from each other. They were clearly linked through smoke and fire, but they were also individual entities in their own right. The visual division of the two ships, which is perhaps most explicit in Davidson’s diagonally divided painting of the battle, makes it easy for the viewer to organize the connotations and meanings implicit in the placements of the two ships as far from one another, and enables the artist to make a clear statement about the relative values and morals of one side or another, one ship or another, or, most importantly, a statement about what each ship meant in terms of the future of the American people. Skinner’s warships, by contrast, offer up no such easy visual distinction. The *Monitor* and the *Virginia* are placed parallel to each other in the center of the frame, their hulls so close together that the lines mapping out where each ship begins and ends blend into one another. The massive mechanical ship created when the two ships are combined begins at the left side of the frame, with the tip – bedecked with an American flag on an impossibly flimsy pole – of the *Monitor*, and extends almost to the edge of the right side of the frame, where the pointed tip of the *Virginia* comes to rest just in front of the prow of the *Minnesota*. Even the smoke billowing from the *Monitor* and the *Virginia*, usually used as easy shorthand to distinguish the “good” ship from the “bad ship” is in on the job, with grey smoke obscuring the places where the sides of the ship would be distinct from one another and creating the illusion that the two ships have merged. The *Monitor*, the heroic little ship of Union legend and Northern lithograph, is dragged into the
technological nightmare created by the *Virginia*, becoming just as culpable for the destruction of cherished naval traditions. This painting may be the strongest indictment of the invention and use of the ironclads, and the heavy consequences it was believed to have for American society.

Where Davidson’s depiction of the *Monitor* indicated what might be called a guarded optimism about industrialization, with the Union ship representing an idealized view of a future led by Northern industrialists as opposed to the potential of a future mechanical hell represented by his *Virginia*, Skinner’s ships betray no such hope. The *Monitor* and the *Virginia* are one looming industrial creation, an image of an America reunited post-Civil War towards sinister, mechanized aims. The link between the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* in this painting represents the worst-case scenario for industrialization and serve both as a commentary on the present and a warning for the future. In addition, his use of a battle more than a decade old (thirteen years had passed since the “first battle of the ironclads” when Skinner began his painting) testifies to the power the images of the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* still had in the American mind as representations of the good and the evil of their industrialized future.
Herman Melville and the Poetic Image of the *Monitor*

**Industrial Publishing in the Nineteenth Century United States**

As shipbuilding and war-making industrialized, the means by which the news of military and naval encounters was transmitted across the country industrialized as well: the popular and literary print media. The printing press was by no means a new invention in the 1800s, but it had changed dramatically from the hand-operated Gutenberg printing press of the fifteenth century. Publishing was an industrial process by the early 1840s; the developments in printing technology that altered the landscape of newspaper circulation and distribution also reached the book publishing world, enabling larger numbers of books to be printed and circulated faster. During the mid-nineteenth century, printing and related industries grew exponentially along with industrial development. The industrial processes that created the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* were powered by steam- and waterpower, the exact energy sources that fueled the rise of rapid industrial publishing. The linotype machine, which mechanized the practice of typesetting and made the production of books and other printed materials even faster, was not invented until the 1880s, but printing shops employed massive numbers of workers to forge, set, and print the type.79 Much more was needed to mass-produce books than paper and ink; Scott E. Casper notes that the other industries involved included “engraving and lithography, the production of ink, type, and printing equipment, and the stationary trades,” giving the publishing industry a large share of the American industrial landscape within twenty years of the end of the war – “more than 4 percent of America’s manufacturing laborers and more than 3.5 percent of its total

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manufactured products." More and more people were beginning to work in factories and industrial processes that would have been limited a few decades earlier, like large-scale printing and lithography, were becoming increasingly part of the lives of Americans. Even those who did not work in factories were living in a world increasingly touched by industrial mechanization; the McCormick Harvester had adherents in even the most rural areas of the country.

As with other aspects of industrialization, however, there was disparity between the Northern and Southern printing worlds – the publishing capabilities of the South were far less than those of the North even before the war started. Alice Fahs uses the 1860 census to illustrate the divide: there were “986 printing offices in New England and the middle states, with only 151 printing establishments in the South. Of these, the 21 presses in Tennessee produced the most work – yet Tennessee, with the only stereotype foundry in the South, fell under Union control early in the war.” The loss of the Tennessee foundry, which produced the metal type used in publishing, would have completely paralyzed the already-limited Southern publishing industry. The outbreak of war necessitated a switch from traditional cotton- to wood-pulp-based paper, the creation of which required a more industrialized process that needed more complicated machinery. This was not a problem in the more industrialized north, but “there were no facilities in the South for making wood-pulp paper,” and by early 1862 the few extant Southern newspapers were running advertisements asking their readers to send in their cloth rags to keep the presses running. “Bring the shirt upon your back,” suggested the Georgia-based Burke, Boykin, and Company, “bring us pieces white or black.” The incorporation of rags of clothing into the Confederate war effort has a similar iconographic effect as the railroad tracks torn up by

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83 Fahs. Imagined Civil War. pp. 22.
the Confederate navy to help build the Virginia: modern mechanized warfare was so all-consuming that all branches of industry, from railroads to clothing manufacture to the press, were necessarily conscripted into the war effort. In other words, no aspect of American life was separate from the war or from industry. Adding fuel to the fire consuming the Southern literary world was the Northern navy's successful blockade of Southern parts (of which the fleet stationed at Hampton Roads was an integral part) and the Confederacy's separation from the Federal mail service. As a result, the publishing of literature during the war was an overwhelmingly Northern field, and while there were a fair number of popular works—particularly poems and romances—published in the Confederacy during the war, the major works of fiction that have survived have been Northern-written and Northern-published. Although the blockade had been lifted and the mail routes were open again, the printing infrastructure of the South was in dire straits, and in fact stayed there: "southern printing establishments in 1880 numbered 7 percent of the nation's total, less than before the war, and the value of their output was 4 percent of the nation's printing and publishing."\textsuperscript{84} The same industrial disparity that limited production of lithographs to the North, ensuring that a particular view or vision of the industrial future was spread throughout the country was at work in print media.

\textbf{The Battle-Pieces}

Because the publishing infrastructure of the North stayed running at a more or less standard rate throughout the war, as opposed to in the South where publishing activities took place but were heavily curtailed (a few literary magazines were founded, but few survived the

\textsuperscript{84} Casper. \textit{Industrial Book}. pp. 38.
war\textsuperscript{85}, there were plenty of opportunities for writers both amateur and professional to record their hopes and fears about the course of the war and the direction of the country. In particular, the poetic and literary response to the Battle of Hampton Roads was as instant and wide-ranging as the artistic response. March 8\textsuperscript{th} and 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1862, “probably inspired more poems than any other single event of the war,” writes Stanton Garner, “but it was the sinking of the \textit{Cumberland}, rather than the ironclad battle, that inspired most of them.”\textsuperscript{86} Like traditional oil-on-canvas painting, American poetry tended towards romantic imagery to discuss events and their meanings. It had a tendency towards pastoral imagery, and often “aestheticize[d] the effects of violence and... evade[d] questions about the historical contingency about politics.”\textsuperscript{87} It was unsuited (or poets were unwilling) to deal with American anxieties about industry and the increasing mechanization of society in the same ways painters and their creators were; their traditional modes of representation did not grapple with the new images and fears that the war triggered. In addition, it was sentimentalist – concerned primarily with evoking emotions, rather than describing events as they were. “Given the popularity of sentimental literature in the mid-nineteenth century,” writes Faith Barrett. “It is...no surprise that an abundance of poems rely on the conventions of sentimentality or the imagery of Victorian domesticity in responding to war’s violence.”\textsuperscript{88} The \textit{Cumberland} is the perfect event for sentimentalist war poets to record in verse, loaded with powerful, emotional images: the deaths of hundreds of sailors, the evocative image of a wooden warship with its flag (the flag of Union, of course) undaunted and flying high even in defeat. The iconographic trends that are present in artistic representations of the sinking of the

Cumberland, including the drowning crew and the soaring masts, are easily identifiable in contemporary verse depictions of the same event. Anxieties about the future could be easily expressed through nostalgic sorrow for the past. However, grappling with the future as it appeared in the bodies of the Monitor and the Virginia required different techniques altogether. As in art, where the ugly and frightening Monitor and Virginia represent a new age which traditional forms and techniques were not equipped to convey, poetry on the whole demonstrated the same inability – or unwillingness – to take on the Monitor and Virginia and the ramifications of their battle for naval warfare and the future of America, particularly with regards to the increasing development and industrialization of the country (the print media, of course, being a prime beneficiary of that rapid-fire industrialization).

Herman Melville, on the other hand, was deeply preoccupied with the question of industrialization and what it meant for the country. More than any other writer, he saw in the Battle of Hampton Roads a historical moment in which his – or the country’s – fears and hopes, and the hidden meanings of the decline of the wooden man-of-war and the rise of the ironclad, came clearly and visibly to the surface, prime for educating and convincing the American people. His poems demonstrate both a strong nostalgia and sense of loss for the past and a fear and ominous feeling for the industrialized future. There is also present a feeling unique in depictions of the Battle of Hampton Roads: a very faint, albeit slightly queasy, optimism for a future ruled by mechanical warfare based in Melville’s doubt and hatred of war in general, and his extreme distaste for any glorification of war. This exalting of war was undertaken, he believed, by so many other writers and artists that it had become the cultural mode of understanding conflict. In Melville’s mind, “the feats of the Nelsons and the Decaturs, had lent romance to bloodshed and carnage, seducing men into loving war too much. The stink and clank, the hiss and grumble of
the *Monitor* presented war as it really is, the assemblyline of Satan.”89 There was nothing
glorious, holy, or even useful about warfare in Melville’s mind. Perhaps some great men, such as
Nelson, had participated in the waging or wars, and indirectly led to the glorification of violence,
but it was impossible for Melville to see war as anything other than industrialized death, and
modern ironclad warfare in particular as anything other than a link between industry and
suffering. Like other poets and artists, he saw the death of glory in the sinking of the
*Cumberland* and the various triumphs of the *Monitor* and the *Virginia*, but while he was
nostalgic for it, he was also, according to Hershel Parker, “determined to repudiate gaudy
idealizing of military glory, especially since (a confirmed Unitarian might say) this war exalted
impersonal mechanical power over personal heroism.”90

Melville’s *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* was published in New York in 1866. It
was a volume of poetry containing the four Hampton Roads poems as well as his political and
social responses to other battles and events of the Civil War, like Antietam, Sherman’s March to
the South, and the surrender at Appomattox, as well as the immediate aftermath of the end of the
war. *Harper’s*, the weekly magazine owned by the publishing company that had agreed to print
the *Battle-Pieces*, began to print previews of the poems in January of that year, the first that
anyone beyond those close to the poet had heard of his Civil War work.91 On August 12, 1866,
months after the first preview poems had been published in *Harper’s*, the writer of a feature on
upcoming books printed in the *New York Herald* announced the publication of “‘Battle Pieces
and Aspects of the War,’ by Herman Melville;” the advertisement was coupled with a damning

statement: "for ten years the public has wondered what had become of Melville."92 What had happened to Melville, who had published *Moby-Dick* more than a decade earlier to great acclaim, was largely the circumstances of life, illness and financial ruin; in the 1850s, he "conducted a lecture tour without much profit, searched in vain for a publisher for a book of poetry, and attempted to procure a foreign diplomatic appointment."93 The *Battle-Pieces* were to be Melville's return to the writing scene, but the American public would not have it.

The window into American popular opinion one is given through the *New York Herald* about Melville was not a positive sign for his prospects or for his ability to use *Battle-Pieces* to express his views to the American public, but it was certainly an indicator of things to come: *Battle-Pieces* met with a chilly reception at best, far from the success and popular support Melville expected and hoped for. It sold badly — Garner notes that "in its first year and a half, fewer than 500 copies were sold, some to his own friends and relatives."94 Reviewers, mostly from New York and New England (there are no extant examples from the Southern states), attacked the subject matter, the language, the style, and especially Melville himself. "No one but Mr. Melville could have written it," one reviewer wrote in the New York magazine *Albion*, "and few besides himself would have cared to write it."95 Beyond Melville's dark, gloomy subject matter — a distinctly more pessimistic and doubtful take on industry and a war that audiences, particularly in the North, were inclined to see as successful — his poetry was in a new, unattractive style that was not welcomed. Instead of the regular poetic meter and rhyme that were familiar to educated American audiences, Melville used uneven cadences and rhyme structures to indicate the changes to the United States, exemplified by the *Monitor* and *Virginia*. Neither his

subject matter nor his new poetic styles were to the liking of the postwar literary world, rejected out of distaste for his bleak wartime depictions or his own character, or both. On September 6, 1866, a reviewer in *The Nation*, then only in its first year of circulation, placed Melville’s work in the literary field of the day, widely considered to be lackluster at best: “accustomed as we have been of late, in certain works professing to be poetry, to astonishing crudity and formlessness, we yet cannot refrain from expressing surprise that a man of Mr. Melville’s literary experience and cultivation should have mistaken some of these compositions for poetry, or even for verse.”96 As there was modernity at work in the Battle of Hampton Roads, with the *Monitor* triggering anxieties and fears for the industrial age to come, there was a modern sensibility emerging in Melville’s war poetry. In rejecting the *Battle-Pieces*, Melville’s attempt at modernism and an approximation of the new rhythms and styles of the industrial American life, American audiences in some sense rejected the implications of Hampton Roads, beyond the military and naval excitement that was less terrifying to consider: the increasing importance of the factory, the connection of industrial products that seemed as innocent as paper, cloth, and railroad tracks to the national war effort, and therefore, to violence, and the disappearance of the trappings of wooden ships like masts and sails that had so much cultural importance ascribed to them by nineteenth century Americans.

Many war poems, written by anonymous men and women for newspapers and magazines as well as famous members of the American literary scene, had already been published by 1866, including Walt Whitman’s influential 1865 collection *Drum Taps*. To nineteenth century observers, Melville was both behind the times and unqualified to write poetry about the war; his subjects had been written, discussed, and debated for years before he began to write. It is a

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misfortune that the special events which have moved Mr. Melville to write are the same, in several instances, which have already been put into verse by other writers,” wrote a reviewer in *The Nation* on September 6th, “and that these earlier poems, already more or less familiar to the public, are necessarily brought into comparison with his.” However, Melville had a distinct argument to make about industrialization and its relationship to the future of the United States, and if his subject matter was not unique, his approach certainly was.

There was one section of the *Battle-Pieces* in particular that was less familiar to the public, and therefore less apt for comparison: Melville’s discussion of the Battle of Hampton Roads. His rendition, like others, began with the gallant and tragic sinking of the *Cumberland*. Uniquely, Melville creates his own version of the battle by expanding far beyond the traditional narrative and turning his focus instead on the unsightly and highly ambiguous *Monitor* and *Virginia*. His treatment of the battle in *Battle-Pieces* comprised four poems, “The Cumberland,” “In the Turret,” “The Temeraire,” and “A Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Fight.” David Mindell writes of Melville that “even without the advantage of hindsight he saw in the *Monitor* metaphors and conflicts hidden behind the public rhetoric of victorious new weapons,” and he used the four poems – especially the last two – to highlight these metaphors and conflicts. “The Cumberland” is fairly standard as depictions of the doomed frigate went at the time, but addressing it is crucial to an analysis of the more modernist Hampton Roads poems. The dissonance between the standard “Cumberland” and the rest of the poems highlights the stylistic and subject leap undertaken by Melville in the *Battle-Pieces*. It was one of the poems chosen by *Harper’s* for preview prior to the publication of the *Battle-Pieces*, since there was already a place for it in the cultural context of the time: it evokes strong emotions, uses a familiar poetic form,

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97 *The Nation*.
and creates nostalgic imagery. As in other poems, the key image is the Union flag, staying aloft even after the *Cumberland* sinks to the bottom. Melville writes that “her flag above her fate is flying,” and later nods to the prominence of the image of the flag flying over the wreck of the *Cumberland* in the American memory: “Her fame shall live – outlive the victor’s name; / For this is due / Your flag and flag-staff shall in story stand – / Cumberland!”

Thematically and structurally, “The Cumberland” is most similar to Melville’s other requiem for the rapidly disappearing wooden man-of-war in the four-poem cycle of *Battle-Pieces*: “The Termeraire, a commentary on the replacement of traditional technology by industry, disguised as a description of a hallowed historical warship. Taken together, the two poems illuminate the naval world that Melville believed was being supplanted by industrialism. “The Termeraire” is particularly concerned with the physical form of ancient ships: “O Ship, how brave and fair,” Melville writes, “That fought so oft and well, / On open decks you manned the gun/Armorial.” The idea of “open decks” and open air is particularly important when compared to the descriptions of life aboard the *Monitor* that come from “In the Turret” and “A Utilitarian View,” and appear to be crucial to Melville’s feelings about wooden men-of-war. The idea of “open decks” also appears in paintings, using the ship as a physical embodiment of principles of democracy. The idea of the “ship of state,” the nation as a vessel crewed by its citizens, was deeply embedded in the physical body of the wooden vessel. Melville’s “Termeraire” asks what it means when those decks are supplanted by technology; the image is

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quite literal, with “a pigmy steam-tug,” a modern vessel, towing the noble wooden man-of-war to its final resting place.102

"The Cumberland" and “The Temeraire” are Melville’s look backwards at the world of wooden warships — “The Temeraire” more explicitly than “The Cumberland,” which makes no mention of ironclad ships or even the ship that sank the Cumberland, the Virginia. “The Temeraire,” however, is directly linked to the new developments in industrial warfare exemplified by the Monitor and the Virginia — Melville writes that “the rivets clinch the ironclads,/Men learn a deadlier lore,” directly contrasting the modern construction of the Monitor and the Virginia with the “fighting Termeraire,” constructed “of a thousand trees” in the traditional way.103 Heightening the contrast is the addition of ideas about nature: the Monitor and the Virginia were built by men of metal and iron; the Termeraire, and by extension the Cumberland, were built of wood, crafted rather than wrought, and inherently closer to nature, and therefore, to goodness. Melville concludes on a lament for the fading past: “O, the navies old and oaken, /O, the Temeraire no more!”104

His lament for the glorious naval past of Nelson and Trafalgar, exemplified by the scrapping of the Temeraire, stands in stark contrast to his depictions of mechanical warfare as found in “In the Turret” and “A Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Fight.” “In the Turret” takes the smaller view of the Monitor, written directly to Captain John Worden, who fought in the Monitor’s famous turret during the Battle of Hampton Roads (and was her most drastic casualty; he was partially blinded when shrapnel sprayed through a slit in the turret, an industrial material entering an industrial space). The contrast between the open decks of the Cumberland and Temeraire and the enclosed space of the Monitor is strongly felt here; Melville hails Worden for

103 Melville. Battle Pieces, pp. 68.
how he “bore the first iron battle’s burden/Sealed as in a diving-bell.” Worden trapped himself in what amounted to an iron tomb to stand to his post in battle; taken in conjunction with “A Utilitarian View,” this idea of entrapment illustrates the extent to which Melville viewed modern, industrialized warfare as something that would put men at the mercy of machines, something that might eventually eliminate the need for men in war except as mechanical operators – engineers, not soldiers or sailors. Industrialization represented the replacement of highly skilled, artisanal trades, with work so deskillled it was believed to be practically automated. This concern was especially potent given the growing numbers of Americans who were either involved in industrial work or were using industrial products in their lives.

Nowhere, however, is Melville’s mixed discomfort and optimism for industrialized warfare, and for industrialization itself, on greater display than in “A Utilitarian View of the Monitor’s Fight,” the fourth and last of his Hampton Roads poems in Battle-Pieces. What is most clear on the surface is that Melville believes that something significant has changed, and it has been argued that his attempts to use the poem to express the changes in society on the most basic poetic level, altering his rhythm and language to create a certain feeling among readers of the poem: Levy writes that “Melville does more than modify the form of verse in order to suggest the harsh reality of the vessel; he indicates a basic alteration in the rhythm of contemporary life. The ironclad becomes a metaphor of the qualities of nineteenth-century society.” Gone are the standard rhythms of the wooden-ship poems, “Cumberland” and “Termeraire,” which privileged and educated Americans would have recognized. They are replaced by a jarring, lurching rhythm, one that sounds more like clanking machinery than anything else. If standard verse and meter represented pastoral life, Melville’s modernist verse

represented the worst of life in the factories: graceless, grinding, and dirty. Melville uses the poem to focus specifically on the changes in warfare as it moved from wooden ships to mechanical ones. Regardless of his nostalgia for the old ways of making war at sea — glorious wooden vessels, proud sailors, all the romantic images evoked by paintings of ships like the *Temeraire* — Melville was still uncomfortable with the prominent social practice of glorifying warfare and conflict that went hand in hand with nostalgia for the “oaken navies” of the past. The end of the romantic age of sail would necessarily mean the beginning of an age of mechanization and mechanized warfare, dirty and ugly, exposing the truths and realities of war to all observers. “Hail to victory without the gaud/Of glory,” wrote Melville, “zeal that needs no fans/Of banners, plain mechanic power/Plied cogently in War now placed – /Where war belongs – /Among the trades and artisans.” The language Melville uses to describe the new warfare — “the clangor of that blacksmith’s fray, /The anvil-din” — is explicitly industrial, entirely devoid of the romance found in his poems about the *Cumberland* and *Temeraire*; instead, it evokes the red flames and black smoke found in so many contemporary artistic depictions of the battle. Ultimately, Melville believed most strongly in the horrors of war; his optimism was not for industrialization and a new, mechanized America, but for the day when the American public would finally see the terrible realities of conflict, both military and social, exposed by the grit, noise, smoke, and ugliness of ironclad ships — and of industry itself.

Conclusion

Even years after the ironclad technology modeled after the Monitor and the Virginia became obsolete, the two ships refused to fade from memory. The sense of fear and excitement about the two ships, and the heavy ramifications of ironclad and industrial technology in both warfare and everyday life embodied in the Battle of Hampton Roads have helped to keep it in the American consciousness for nearly 150 years. Tactically speaking it was not an insignificant battle, but there were naval actions of much greater consequence that took place after the battle, including Admiral Farragut’s taking of New Orleans. In technological terms, while the Monitor and the Virginia were hailed as the “world’s first ironclads,” they were more accurately the newest and most radical ironclad designs up until that point; the European powers, specifically England and France, had had ironclads in development for centuries. England in particular was in the process of building, or at least attempting to build, four more ironclads when the Civil War broke out.\(^{109}\) The actual battle of March 9\(^{th}\) ended in confusion and stalemate; if anything, it was the Virginia’s cataclysmic defeat of the Union fleet, particularly the Congress and the Cumberland on March 8\(^{th}\) that “revolutionized” the navies of the world. After the ships steamed away from one another, they never met in combat again – the idea of the Monitor was enough to keep the Virginia in port, as was the idea of the Virginia for the Monitor. The respective ends for each ship – the Virginia scuttled on May 10\(^{th}\), 1862 of Sewell’s Point, Virginia, by her own crew to prevent her from falling into Northern hands\(^{110}\); the Monitor finally proving herself

\(^{109}\) Ericsson. “Letter.”

unseaworthy and foundering off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, on New Year’s Eve, 1862\textsuperscript{111} — were inglorious, far from the promise and potential demonstrated at Hampton Roads.

And yet, in American popular culture, the \textit{Monitor} and the \textit{Virginia} are frequently weighted with heavy symbolic meaning and historical import. What has come to be important about the \textit{Monitor} and the \textit{Virginia}, and Hampton Roads more generally, are not the actual facts or truths about the battle, or even what the two ironclads themselves did over the course of the conflict. Instead, what is important is what the \textit{Monitor} and the \textit{Virginia} represented to the American people during and after the Civil War — namely, the physical, moral, and spiritual consequences of industrialization. The survey of various forms of popular culture, including art and literature, undertaken in this thesis indicates that there were several constant themes that crossed the boundaries of genre, time, and media, reflecting the hold they had on the American imagination. Popular culture was crucial to an understanding of Hampton Roads; to understand its implications beyond the military and tactical, into the realms of industrialization and the increasing mechanization of American society. Chief among these themes is a widespread fear or anxiety about the spread of industry, its relation to warfare, and its implications for American society. These potential consequences included the dehumanization of combat, the possibility that machines would supplant people, an increasing emphasis on the factory at the expense of religious and governmental structures, the birth of total, mechanized war, and the turning of all the industrial practices of the peacetime United States towards the practice of violence.

The myriad fears triggered, and defined, by the Battle of Hampton Roads are reflected across genres and can be seen in newspaper articles, lithographs, paintings, and the poetry of Herman Melville. By highlighting the nightmarish qualities of the \textit{Virginia}’s black coal smoke,

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{111} Hoehling, \textit{Thunder}, pp. 191.
\end{footnote}
the heat and misery of life inside the Monitor, and the strange visages presented by both ships, so unlike anything that had ever been seen before, nineteenth century writers and artists, anonymous and well-known alike, made public their uncertainty about the future that had been briefly revealed when the two ships met at Hampton Roads on March 9th. The horrifying images of smoke and fire billowing from the version of Hampton Roads depicted in industrial lithographs and oil-on-canvas paintings — two visual media that, in their production and their goals, could not have been more different — were a nightmarish worst-case-scenario for the results of industrialization, the possibility of which was echoed by writers across the country. Also embedded in cultural representations of the battle were deep concerns about the prospect of American reunification, what the United States would look like in a post-war world, and the contrast between Northern and Southern models of industrialization. The issue of which system would dominate the reunited nation was illustrated in the stark difference between the sharp-edged, dirty Virginia and the smooth, clean, Monitor; industry on the whole triggered anxiety about health, safety, and the future, but nineteenth century artists argued, at least implicitly, for a "good" industrialization, one bringing hope rather than fear.

Coupled with this fear for the future was a deep nostalgia for the past, for old ways of making war, ships, and other manufactured products, and for the romantic and picturesque wooden ships-of-war that were violently and visibly supplanted by the Virginia and the Monitor. The skilled laborers of the past, the artisans that built wooden ships and waged war from their decks, were replaced by industrial workers, men who labored in mechanized spaces and whose job was perceived to require only the skill necessary to pull a lever or shovel coal. The labor required in building and operating the Monitor and the Virginia was valued far less than the traditional forms of labor that had built ships like the Cumberland or Melville's Termeraire. In
poems, paintings, articles, and lithographs that looked backwards to a distant (often mythical) past, the creators of nineteenth century American popular culture expressed their concerns via representations of proud, glorious wooden ships that physically embodied the values of traditional naval culture. By extension, these ships gave physical form to traditional Western perceptions of cultural values and institutions that were widely believed to be eliminated at Hampton Roads by the encroaching forces of industry.

In other words, the famous “first clash of the ironclads” is indeed notable for what it contributed to the development of naval technology; but its far greater value was in the useful, timely, and powerful metaphor it provided for the people of the United States – at least those whose voices were heard through popular media like newspapers, art, and poetry – to express their fears and concerns about rapidly expanding industrialization. The Monitor and the Virginia stood in for mechanized industry and technological advancement, representing the forces of industrial progress and their inherent violence, just beneath the surface.
The Great Fight Between the 'Merrimac' & 'Monitor,' March 9th 1862 / The First Battle Between Ironclad Ships of War. Currier & Ives. 1862. Relief block lithography.

The First Fight between Iron Clad Ships of War / Terrific Combat between the 'Monitor' 2 guns and 'Merrimac' 10 guns / In Hampton Roads, March 9th 1862 / In which the little 'Monitor' whipped the 'Merrimac,' and the whole 'school' of Rebel Steamers. Fanny Palmer, Currier & Ives Co. 1862. Relief block lithography.

The First Battle Between 'Iron' Ships of War / The 'Monitor' 2 guns / The 'Merrimac' 10 guns / The Merrimac was crippled and the rebel fleet driven off. Henry Bill. 1862. Relief block lithography.


The First Encounter of Iron-Clads / Terrific Engagement Between the "Monitor" and "Merrimac" / Hampton Roads, Virginia, U.S.A. March 9th 1862 / This fight settled the fate of the "Wooden Walls" over the world and taught all nations that the War-Ship of the future must be - like the McCormick Harvester - a Machine of Steel. Calvert Lithography Co., 1881. Relief block lithography.


Figure 7

*Battle Between Virginia and Monitor.* Thomas C. Skinner, 1875. Oil on canvas.

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