

For what did they give their lives?

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What now of the essential spirit of these young volunteers? Why did they volunteer? For what did they give their lives? We can never appreciate the story of their deeds as soldiers until we answer this question correctly. Surely it was not for slavery they fought. The great majority of them had never owned a slave and had little or no interest in the institution. My own father, for example, had freed his slaves long years before; that is, all save one, who would not be "emancipated," our dear "Mammy," who clung to us when we moved to the North and never recognized any change in her condition or her relations to us.

The great conflict will never be properly comprehended by the man who looks upon it as a war for the preservation of slavery. Nor was it, so far as Virginia was concerned, a war in support of the right of secession or the Southern interpretation of the Constitution. Virginia did not favor this interpretation; at least, she did not favor the exercise of the right of secession. Up to President Lincoln's call for troops she refused to secede. She changed her position under the distinct threat of invasion--the demand that she help coerce her sister States.

This was the turning point. The Whig party, the anti-secession party of Virginia, became the war party of Virginia upon this issue. As John B. Baldwin, the great Whig and Union leader, said, speaking of the effect of Lincoln's call for troops, "We have no Union men in Virginia now." The change of front was instantaneous, it was intuitive. Jubal Early was the type of his party--up to the proclamation, the most extreme anti-secessionist and anti-war man in the Virginia Convention; after the proclamation, the most enthusiastic man in the Commonwealth in advocacy of the war and personal service in it.