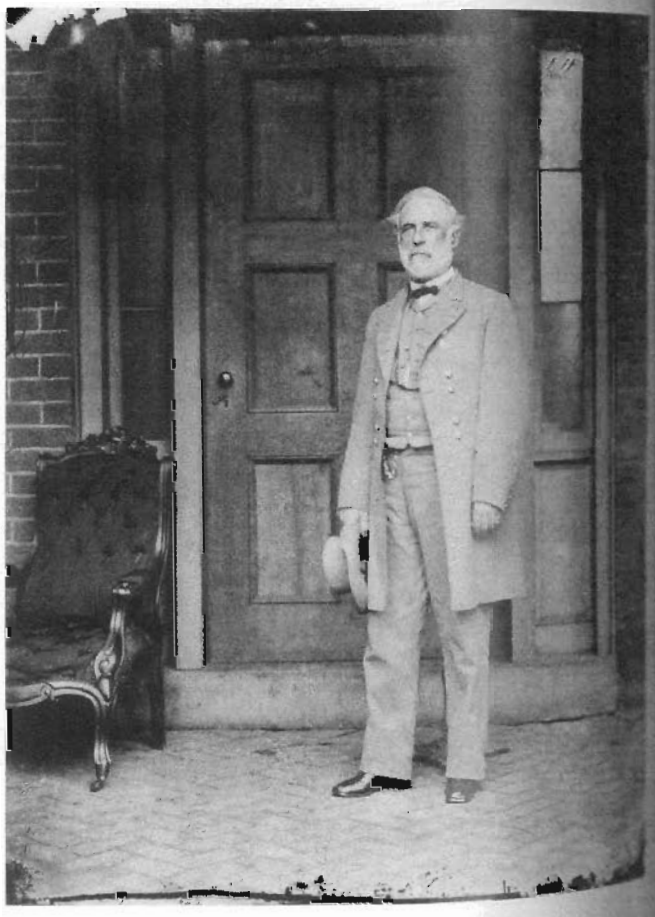
8.38 WINSLOW HOMER, *The Army of the Potomac—A Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*, 1862. Wood engraving, 9 × 13¾ in (22.8 × 34.5 cm). Private Collection.

tree (**fig. 8.38**). The diagonals of the tree's limbs, the soldier's feet and the rifle lend the image an off-balanced perspective. The soldier counters the tilt of the tree with his left hand and foot, each braced against the tree as he steadies the rifle. The canteen hanging from the limb on the right hints at the long duration of his "picket duty." He has probably sat in one position for hours. The soldier's mastery of his situation—his ability to balance himself against the odds—contrasts sharply with the sprawled and defeated form of Gardner's sharpshooter.

War and Peace

For all the efforts of artists to transmit images from the front as rapidly as possible, no photographer was present at Appomattox Court House at the conclusion of the Civil War. Instead, Mathew Brady took a portrait of General Lee shortly after his surrender (**fig. 8.39**). The image shows Lee standing in front of his Richmond home wearing his gray Confederate uniform one last time. Lee had to be persuaded by his wife to venture outside the house and pose for Brady, whom he had met before the war. Brady portrays Lee as a figure of dignity and honor. The large upholstered chair to the left, coupled with the visually prominent door and doorknob, transform Lee into a latter-day Cincinnatus, the Roman general who preferred privacy and retirement to war. By capturing Lee in a domestic context, Brady anticipates the homecoming awaiting soldiers of both sides at the end of the war.



8.39 MATHEW BRADY, *General Robert E. Lee at his Home*, April 1865. Photograph. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

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His photograph gestures in the direction of national reconciliation and a return to normalcy.

***PRISONERS FROM THE FRONT* BY WINSLOW HOMER.** Brady's emphasis on reconciliation has echoes in the post-war painting of Winslow Homer. For Homer, the end of the war meant the beginning of a new era. In *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866, Homer pits a Union officer against three disarmed Confederate prisoners, their standard-issue rifles tossed upon the ground before them (**fig. 8.40**). Four years of fratricidal strife are reduced in Homer's painting to the spatial and psychological gulf that separates the victor from the vanquished.

The power of Homer's painting lies in the dignity displayed by each of its main characters. Homer's Union officer refuses to lord it over his prisoners; instead, he regards them respectfully. Their heads, like his, just puncture the horizon line. In this way, they share with him a capacity to rise above nature and transcend their recent histories. Though the painting's four protagonists still need to resolve their fraught relations, they give promise, by their postures and calm demeanors, of a future defined by respect and reconciliation. For a painting completed only one year after the war's end, *Prisoners from the Front* demonstrates a sense of compassion very different from the post-war bitterness expressed by many of Homer's peers.

The painting also reveals the influence of photography on Homer's work. Early cameras tended to wash out the sky and background of outdoor scenes. Homer clusters the soldiers in the foreground, close to the picture plane, and empties the background of detail, repeating in his painting ways of seeing made popular by the camera. In the process he foregoes the middle-ground landscape of the Hudson River School, with its language of progress and optimism. Instead, Homer converts the two-dimensional and voided spaces of landscape photography into a new style of painting: psychologically acute, empirically driven, and reticent about any promise of transcendence.

TWO VERSIONS OF THE HOME FRONT. While Homer converted the image of captured soldiers into a meditation on the possibility of national reconciliation, other artists focused on the role of domestic life in the healing of the

8.40 WINSLOW HOMER, *Prisoners from the Front*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 24 × 38 in (60.9 × 96.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Frank B. Porter, 1922.

8.41 LILLY MARTIN SPENCER, *War Spirit at Home (Celebrating the Victory at Vicksburg)*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 30 × 32½ in (76.2 × 83.1 cm). Ohio Newark Museum.

nation. Lilly Martin Spencer (1822–1902), whom we have already encountered as an antebellum sentimental artist (see fig. 6.1), engaged post-war history in her own way. In *War Spirit at Home* (**fig. 8.41**), Martin shows a Northern mother reading a freshly unfolded *New York Times* with news of the 1863 Union victory at Vicksburg. Three of her four children parade around the family table, merrily imitating the victorious troops. It is a humorous, anecdotal scene, and yet, for all that, the painting also argues for the role of women in shaping domestic life, transmitting, through their children, the values for which the war was fought. By allying the woman with the *New York Times*, Spencer links her heroine to the larger public sphere. She also suggests that women bear responsibility—like the popular media of the day—for maintaining and preserving knowledge of the past. Painted in 1866, one year after the conclusion of the war, *War Spirit at Home* fires its own preliminary shot in the post-war battle over the war's memory.