

Document 7.4 Walt Whitman, "Cattle Drove About Washington" (1864)

Both armies used hundreds of thousands of horses and mules for transportation and other forms of labor between 1861 and 1865. Their enlistment in the war effort impacted the northern and southern farms, plantations, and city streets from which they came. Their absence was felt especially in agricultural fields across the nation, which often lay fallow without the horses and mules to pull plows and haul crops and other materials. Just as horses and mules disappeared from the landscape, so did other domesticated and wild animals. Soldiers purchased or stole cattle, pigs, turkeys, and chickens to supplement their meager rations. Cattle drives, like the massive wagon trains that accompanied Union and Confederate armies, trampled vegetation along roadsides. In the winter of 1864 the poet Walt Whitman was amazed to see droves of cattle passing through the streets of Washington, D.C.

— Among other sights are immense droves of cattle, with their drivers, passing through the streets of the city. Some of the men have a way of leading the cattle on by a peculiar call, a wild, pensive hoot, quite musical, prolong'd, indescribable, sounding something between the coo of a pigeon and the hoot of an owl. I like to stand and look at the sight of one of these immense droves — a little way off — (as the dust is great.) There are always men on horseback, cracking their whips and shouting — the cattle low — some obstinate ox or steer attempts to escape — then a lively scene — the mounted men, always excellent riders and on good horses, dash after the recusant, and wheel and turn — A dozen mounted drovers, their great, slouch'd, broad-brim'd hats, very picturesque — another dozen on foot — everybody cover'd with dust — long goads in their hands — An immense drove of perhaps 2000 cattle — the shouting, hooting, movement, &c.

Source: Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days & Collect* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1883), 48.