

Kentucky Crossroads: Essays Look At Politics And Combat In Bluegrass Country

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Review

KENTUCKY CROSSROADS

Essays look at politics and combat in bluegrass country

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Brown, Kent Masterson *The Civil War in Kentucky: Battle for the Bluegrass State*. Savas Publishing, 2000-04-01. ISBN 1882810473

More than 70 years have passed since a book has appeared that addresses Kentucky's role in the Civil War and its own internal conflict in the detail that the complexity of the twin issues requires. It cannot be for a lack of drama; nearly everyone who writes on the topic quotes Lincoln about the importance of Kentucky to the ultimate success of the Union cause. Lowell Harrison's 1976 volume on Kentucky during the Civil War was too restricted in length (by the series of which it was part) to do full justice to the topic. Kent Masterson Brown's collection of essays, **The Civil War in Kentucky**, might appear to suggest by its title that it seeks to fill this long-standing need in the literature, but it is not a comprehensive account of Kentucky during the War. Rather it is an interesting and very useful collection of essays.

Brown, an attorney, is the author of *Cushing of Gettysburg: The Story of a Union Artillery Commander* and a number of articles. For some years he served as chair of the Perryville Battlefield Commission and of the Gettysburg National Military Park Advisory Commission.

Like all anthologies, the essays are of varying strength and quality. In this case, however, there is less repetition and overlap among the essays than one might expect. **The Civil War in Kentucky** leads with its strongest and most interesting essay, John Y. Simon's "Lincoln, Grant, and Kentucky." Gracefully written, as one familiar with Simon's work would expect, deeply grounded in primary sources, and imaginative and insightful, Simon's essay is a masterpiece. Lowell Harrison also does a very fine job in his "The Government of Confederate Kentucky." These two essays are welcome additions to the literature by scholars who have a deep familiarity with the sources and the larger context

for their topics.

The largest subgroup of essays focuses on the major battles fought in Kentucky - Mill Springs, Richmond, Munfordville, and Perryville - and are well-written, narrative accounts by individuals thoroughly familiar with their topic. They will each serve well as short overviews of major actions. Essays on John Hunt Morgan and the Orphan Brigade bring those very familiar aspects of the war in Kentucky into the collection.

Unfortunately, large areas of Kentucky's experience during the Civil War and a number of important actions and sites are omitted. The topics selected reflect a very traditional approach to the study of the War and little of the concerns of newer scholarship on the home front, African Americans, or women, for example. The collection would have been stronger had an essay addressing Kentucky African Americans and their experience during the War been included. Kentucky, by the official count, which is probably substantially low, contributed the second-largest number of African-American troops to the Union army, and Camp Nelson in Jessamine County was a major recruitment and training center for U.S. Colored Troops. Also, essays dealing with relations between the Union army in Kentucky and the people of Kentucky, and one on the far western area of the Commonwealth, might have further augmented the collection.

As an introduction to its subject, **The Civil War in Kentucky** would make a worthy addition to any library. Well-illustrated, it also has maps that are useful especially in the chapters dealing with the battles. While not exactly as comprehensive as the title suggests, it is a welcome addition to the literature.

William H. Mulligan, Jr. is an associate professor of history and director of the Forrest C. Pogue Public History Institute at Murray State University. With Joseph E. Brent he edited "Sacred Ground: Preserving America's Civil War Heritage" in the George Wright Society Forum (1998).