

Civil War Book Review

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Historiography And Civil War

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Editorial

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CIVIL WAR

Freeman, Christopher S.

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The father of history, Herodotus, in *The Histories*, wrote so that human achievement may not become forgotten in time. While his intellectual successor, Thucydides, in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, wrote for those who want to look into the truth of what was done in the past. The historians craft is to shape meaning out of the tangled web of the past. The interpreter of the past seeks out various threads that color the tapestry of a historical narrative. The collection and weaving of these threads of history are guided by competing paradigms for evaluating historical evidence. What constitutes human achievement and how should historians come to know the truth of what was done in the past? In the writing of contemporary history two competing methodologies hold precedence, the new social history of the common man and the traditional military/political history of the great man. This issue of the *Civil War Book Review* is replete with examples of both.

Edward Ayers approaches the Civil War not from the vantage point of Washington or Richmond but from the perspective of the lives of the people living adjacent to the warring cities in Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Historian Paul Christopher Anderson reviews *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America* (W.W. Norton & Company, ISBN 039305786, \$27.95, hardcover), Ayers's most recent narrative of the struggles of the common man and woman brought on by civil war.

The manipulations of the legal and political systems by the politically marginalized are the subjects of two new additional works of social history in the antebellum period. Kym Rice, Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of the Museum Studies Program at The George Washington University, looks at Judith Kelleher Schafer's *Becoming Free, Remaining Free* (Louisiana State University Press, ISBN 0807128627, \$69.95 hardcover), a study of how slaves used the judicial system to gain their freedom in Louisiana. Susan Zske's *Signatures of Citizenship* (University of North Carolina Press, ISBN 0807854263, \$19.95 softcover), reviewed by Beverly Wilson Palmer, analyzes the effect petitioning

had upon the development of women's political identity.

Rounding out these works of social history is a study of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Jennifer Ritterhouse, a historian at Utah State University, explores the importance of the U.D.C. and women's roles in the development of the story of the Lost Cause in her review of Karen L. Cox's *Dixie's Daughters* (University Press of Florida, ISBN 081302653, \$55.00 hardcover).

Juxtaposed with these works are several new titles of legal, political, and military history. James Hardy, assistant dean of the Honors College at Louisiana State University, in this issue's *Perspectives column*, shares his insights on the legal history of the Civil War era while examining two new works in the area. The first, *Justice of Shattered Dreams* (Louisiana State University Press, ISBN 0-8071-2868-6, \$69.95 cloth) by Michael A. Ross details the contributions of Justice Samuel Freeman Miller to the Court during the war and Reconstruction. The second, Robert Bruce Murray's *Legal Cases of the Civil War* (Stackpole Books, ISBN 0-8117-0059-3, \$29.95 hardcover) presents the arguments and decisions of the Court's Civil War cases. Michael Berheide, chair of the Political Science department at Berea College, explores the Fundamental Problem of Politics and Lincoln's answer to it in his assessment of another work of legal history, Daniel Farber's *Lincoln's Constitution* (University of Chicago Press, ISBN 0226237931, 27.50 hardcover).

Major Charles R. Bowery tackles the massive work of military history, *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War* (Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0786711477, \$35.00 hardcover) by European military historian Brent Nosworthy. This study attempts to place the military operations in the American Civil War in a worldwide context. Robert E. May's *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (University of North Carolina Press, ISBN 0807827037, \$45.00 hardcover), examined by historian Paul David Nelson of Berea College, interprets a segment of political history that affected the politics leading up to the Civil War.

Also, in this issue, David Blight, a history professor at Yale University, reviews German historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch's study on the manipulation of memory by vanquished nations in *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (Metropolitan Books, ISBN 0805044213, \$27.50). David Madden, in his column *Rediscovering Civil War Classics*, urges us to

remember America's great cartoonist, artist, and journalist, Thomas Nast, and for a new edition of his illustrated biography *Thomas Nast, His Period and His Pictures* by Albert Bigelow Paine.

Closing out this issue are interviews with Robin D. G. Kelly, professor of African American Studies and Anthropology at Columbia University and Maya Angelou, Reynolds Professor at Wake Forrest University and recipient of the Presidential Medal of Honor about their involvement in the posthumous publication of the only children's book ever written and illustrated by the great American artist Romare Bearden, *Li'l Dan: The Drummer Boy* (Simon & Schuster Books, ISBN 0689862377, \$18.95 hardcover).

In order to attain the goals of Herodotus and Thucydides, both social and traditional approaches to the study of history need to be viewed as complimentary rather than diametrically opposed. Neither methodology alone provides a satisfactory palette for scholars to paint a meaningful portrait of the human achievement and the truth of the Civil War.

I would like to thank my predecessor, Colleen Fava, and Leah Jewett, the director of the Civil War Center, for all their work in the creation of this issue and making my inaugural weeks as editor go so smoothly. Also, I would like to wish Colleen continuing success in all her endeavors. To the *Review's* readers and reviewers, my humblest thanks for your kind welcome and I hope that we have created an issue that you will enjoy.