

The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War

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Review

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Gleeson, David T. and Lewis, Simon. *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War.* University of South Carolina Press, \$49.95 ISBN 9781611173253

Putting the Civil War in a Transnational Context

This diverse but useful volume had its origin in a conference held at the College of Charleston in 2011. Thanks to rather small print, the volume contains no fewer than twelve essays, plus an introduction by the editors and the text of a roundtable discussion on memory. The diversity of the essays is striking and can stand, in itself, as a testament to the Atlantic setting in which the American Civil War developed and the far-flung impact of that war on other places and cultures. Essays cover topics ranging from slavery, emancipation, and economics in the western hemisphere, to international diplomacy affecting the war, to immigrants who fought in the war, to the concept of retaliation in the law of war, to Florence Nightingale's influence on American women, and to the influence of events on our shores in places as different as Santo Domingo and South Africa. All the essays are professionally done and carefully documented.

Among those that might attract the broadest interest are contributions by Edward Rugemer, Matthew Karp, James McPherson, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean. Edward Rugemer continues his significant contributions by comparing "the political contests over the future of slavery in the United States, Cuba, and Brazil" (p. 15) and showing how emancipation in the Caribbean and the United States affected the remaining slaveholding nations. Matthew Karp's essay builds an impressive case for the proposition that U.S. slaveholders, far from being on the defensive, believed instead that their slave-based economy and polity was essential to prosperity and represented the wave of the future. James McPherson examines Confederates' belief in an ethnic basis for their nationalism, a belief inspired in part by the ethnic struggles for national identity that were occurring in Europe. Aaron Sheehan-Dean traces the issue of retaliation, as it arose in the

North and the South and as it was affected by theories of international law.

The eight other essays have a tighter focus and may be of keen interest to fewer readers, but they also are well-done and intriguing. For example, many scholars may not remember that a group of African Americans from Philadelphia had emigrated in the 1820s to the Samaná peninsula of what is now the Dominican Republic. In 1871 two hundred of them listened to a speech by Frederick Douglass and, inspired by the racial progress brought by the Civil War, voiced their support for annexation to the United States. Lesley Marx from the University of Cape Town uses the trans-Atlantic popularity of the movie *Gone with the Wind* to analyze the psychological dynamics of racism in the United States and South Africa. The strange and imperfectly understood arrival of Russian warships in Northern ports during the Civil War receives a fresh and interesting interpretation by Alexander Noonan. Hugh Dubrulle adds to our understanding of British racism during the 1860s and how events in this country affected it. David Gleeson explores how English immigrants “needed the sectional conflict to confirm their bona fides as Americans.” (p. 100). Essays by Niels Eichhorn on the impact of the German States on transatlantic diplomacy, by Aaron Marrs on the creation of the *Foreign Relations of the United States*, and by Jane Schultz on Florence Nightingale’s impact on American women round out this volume.

Paul D. Escott is Reynolds Professor of History at Wake Forest University. His most recent book is Lincoln’s Dilemma: Blair, Sumner, and the Republican Struggle over Racism and Equality in the Civil War Era.