

The Broad Reach of the Civil War Era

Zach Isenhower

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Isenhower, Zach (2016) "The Broad Reach of the Civil War Era," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 3 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol18/iss3/1>

Editorial

THE BROAD REACH OF THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Isenhower, Zach

Summer 2016

Though the temperatures outside fail to reflect it, summer is winding down and another academic year is upon us. It has been a tremendously productive summer for yours truly, having had the privilege of attending multiple conferences and making strides on my own research in the archives. One of those conferences was the Society of Civil War Historians meeting in beautiful Chattanooga, Tennessee. There I enjoyed panels on themes ranging from the Civil War in the Far West to impacts from and on the environment, and also met and caught up with many friends and colleagues in the field. All of these elements sparking ideas that I hope we at the *Civil War Book Review* can transmit to our readers.

Our feature reviews this issue take us from the war's underlying cause—slavery—through the postwar legacies of a professional military and an empowered central government. Corey Brooks reviews Manisha Sinha's highly anticipated book, *The Slave's Cause*, which highlights the solidarity of abolitionists black and white, elite and middling, throughout the development of their cause. Sinha argues that they should be interpreted together as radically democratic freedom fighters.

Linking the Histories of Slavery, edited by Bonnie Martin and James F. Brooks and reviewed here by Sterling Evans, also examines slavery but from an on-the-ground perspective anchored in the peculiar institution's borderlands. This collection of essays puts U.S. slavery in the context of its Cuban and Mexican counterparts, as well as iterations among indigenous societies in the Pacific Northwest. The resulting volume demonstrates slavery's diversity as well as its development, as an integral part of the colonial process that created economic prosperity for some and incredible hardship for others.

Taking an alternative view of the causes behind the war, Chad Vanderford's new book, *The Legacy of St. George Tucker* analyzes the legal thought behind antebellum states' rights. Brent Tarter's review offers a glimpse of how these

first two generations of post-Revolution Americans grappled with the ideas of states' and the ambiguities built into the federal system. These thinkers ultimately shaped American intellectual culture in a period of mounting tension.

Unexpected legacies of the war figure heavily in Boyd Cothran's review of *Bone Rooms*, by Samuel J. Redman. Redman explores how the Army Medical Museum and others like it, originally designed to facilitate the study of battlefield injuries, became agents in the postwar formation of racial pseudoscience. Soldiers left eastern battlefields and fanned out across the Great Plains, carrying instructions to return Native American remains to these museums. For decades their "specimens" informed racial pseudoscience, and by extension, ideas about white supremacy and racial hierarchy.

This issue's author interview moves readers from the borderlands and plains of geography to the chronological borderlands of T.J. Stiles latest book. *Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America* illustrates a portrait of a Civil War figure caught between the nineteenth century culture in which he excelled, and the rapidly modernizing society he helped create. The book is a refreshing look at a famous subject. The interview is conducted by the *CWBR*'s incoming editor, Tom Barber.

I would be remiss to overlook our *CWBR* stalwarts. Frank Williams reviews *The Annotated Lincoln*, edited by Harold Holzer and Thomas A. Horrocks. Williams finds a meticulous work that provides context from one of the field's most respected Lincoln scholars, coupled with striking images of primary documents from the sixteenth president. What emerges is not only Lincoln's ideas and leadership style, but also his humor and humanity, a needed touch when examining a figure so towering and often mythologized.

Other *CWBR* stalwarts return as well. LSU Special Collections librarians, Hans Rasmussen and Michael Taylor, examine how the American Civil War unfolded across the pages of *Punch*, Britain's leading satirical magazine.

This issue also kicks off a new series on how studying the issues of the Civil War might serve to better connect the efforts of university and secondary education professionals. Zevi Gutfreund, who leads a program at Louisiana State University called *Geaux Teach*, offers one potential model for such a collaborative initiative. Future columns in this series will explore specific themes in the classroom, from slavery to postwar memory.

Finally, with a tinge of sadness I note that this will be my final issue as editor of the *Civil War Book Review*. After a two-year tenure (which I can hardly believe), I have accepted the tremendous opportunity of a Graduate School fellowship to finish out my dissertation at LSU. I have greatly enjoyed my time at the helm of *CWBR*, and am confident that the journal can look forward to smooth sailing under Tom Barber's guidance. I owe thanks to the excellent staff and administration at Hill Memorial Library and LSU Libraries. There is no better place than *CWBR* to get to know the people and scholarship in this huge, exciting field. It has been a privilege, and fun to boot.

Zach Isenhower