

### Reconstruction and the Sesquicentennial

Zach Isenhower

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## Editorial

### RECONSTRUCTION AND THE SESQUICENTENNIAL

Isenhower, Zach

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Sesquicentennial commemoration all over the country, and indeed the world, draws to a close this summer. Yet the reverberations of America's Civil War have rarely seemed so present. As Gregory Downs and Kate Masur demonstrate in this issue's Sesquicentennial column, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary only moves into increasingly complex terrain, even as the last guns of 1865 fell silent. Readers will find excellent guides to that terrain in this issue.

James McPherson's latest book, *The War that Forged a Nation*, tackles this complex legacy, as Matthew Stanley shows in his review, right from the subtitle, "Why the Civil War Still Matters." McPherson reminds readers how the war not only ended slavery, but reshaped citizens' expectations of their government, the definitions of citizenship, and ultimately, he argues, that Reconstruction recast the Civil War as the longest in American history.

In his review of Alex Gourevitch's *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, Christopher Tomlins explores American conceptions of liberty and freedom. In Gourevitch's work, Tomlins reveals a deft assessment not just of a historical American definition of republicanism, but a timely reflection on current American notions of liberty, as well as its limits.

Shifting from the macro scale to the micro, Ashley Baggett offers a look at Lisa Tendrich Frank's analysis of women in the path of Sherman's march in *The Civilian War*. Carefully researched and tightly focused, Frank's book demonstrates the impact Southern women had not just on the Confederate war effort, but on the efforts of the Union's most fearsome invasion force. As the epitome of Southern femininity and an integral piece to defining Southern masculinity, these women represented a significant challenge for Sherman's mission to break the rebellious South.

Catherine Jones takes readers through the Reconstruction that followed Southern capitulation through the experiences and issues surrounding Southern

children—black and white. Anya Jabour's review of *Intimate Reconstructions* provides a look at this fascinating approach, showing how debates over children and the family frequently followed, and even stood in, for postwar struggles over the meanings of freedom, resistance, union, Northern victory, and Southern defeat.

As with the legacy of Reconstruction, the memory of Lincoln's death is not yet at rest. In Frank Williams' "Look at Lincoln," column, our resident Lincoln expert examines Richard Wightman Fox's *Lincoln's Body* and Martha Hodes' *Mourning Lincoln*. Together, these works illustrate how the national outpourings of emotion that followed Lincoln's death continued to wind through history and memory long after his funeral train finished clattering its way through the American countryside.

As politicians, jurists, and historians wrestled with the meanings of the Civil War even as Reconstruction was underway, veterans grappled with the physical and emotional consequences of the war. This issue's author interview features Brian Craig Miller discussing his most recent work, *Empty Sleeves*, also reviewed in this issue by Steven Noll. Miller follows the experiences of Southern amputees, denied the support of Federal programs, as they fought for recognition and support. Their struggles, Miller shows, forced a reckoning of Southern conceptions of honor, masculinity, and the Lost Cause with the difficult realities of disability and dependence.

As always, the overview of this issue's featured content only scratches the surface of what readers will find. Also included are Matthew Carr's provocative take on William T. Sherman and American military culture, William E. and Erica L. Gienapp's tremendously useful and careful work on the diary of Gideon Welles, and the latest of Earl Hess' work revising the tactics and technology mismatch narrative of Civil War battles.

Perhaps the most important contribution of so much excellent scholarship on Reconstruction is the clarity of hindsight it provides to the events we have commemorated for the past four years. Reconstruction, with all the drama of idealistic efforts to raise up former slaves, reunion, Southern resistance, ultimately tepid Northern commitment to equal rights for black citizens, reshaping of the Southern economy, and more, demonstrates the causes over which the war was fought. It exposes the difference between the side issues and the matters at root of the conflict. Reconstruction reflects, in many ways, the

war's beginning. After four intensive years studying battles, leaders, ordinary soldiers and civilians, and all aspects of American society amid civil war, studying Reconstruction demonstrates the issues that even 700,000 dead could not resolve. It serves as reminder that postwar Southern redeemer governments fought to institute black codes and suppress black citizenship, not to renegotiate tariffs or debate states' rights. It reminds us that the Confederate battle flag vanished from American (not just Southern) political life until the Civil Rights movement, one hundred years after Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Over fifty years later still, the flag that those surrendering Confederates furled, that protesters of integration unfurled, is just now coming down from its final places of current (not historical) display. Undoubtedly, such symbols have a range of meanings for different individuals. No individual interpretation, however, can supplant the historical record of causes and legacies of the Civil War. *CWBR* hopes to help ensure that such accurate historical context is never lost from the ongoing discussion of "why the Civil War still matters."

*Cover Image: Thomas Nast, "This is A White Man's Government," in Harper's Weekly September 5, 1868.*