

A Black Patriot and a White Priest: Andr Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans

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Review

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Ochs, Stephen J. *A Black Patriot and a White Priest: Andr  Cailloux and Claude Paschal Maistre in Civil War New Orleans*. Louisiana State University Press, \$22.95 paper ISBN 807125318

Radicals in Their Own Right

Fighting For Justice in the Deep South

Originally published in 2000 and now reprinted in paperback, Stephen J. Ochs's **A Black Patriot and a White Priest** traces the intersecting lives of Andr  Cailloux, a captain in the 1st Regiment of the Louisiana Native Guards, and Claude Paschal Maistre, a Catholic priest originally from France whose espousal of abolitionism in New Orleans enraged the church hierarchy. Since neither personal letters nor diaries remain from Cailloux or Maistre, Ochs relies on pension records, regiment papers, census data, tax ledgers, sacramental registers, and newspapers to examine their worlds during the Civil War. Ochs finds that the war provided a radical opportunity for both men. Cailloux and other free people of color in New Orleans pushed for political rights and cultural recognition, while Maistre endorsed emancipation, ministered to black soldiers, and became a symbol of white radicalism to the Afro-Creole community.

Both Cailloux and Maistre were fascinating characters. Born into slavery in 1825, Cailloux not only achieved his freedom before the Civil War but became a middling artisan and a property owner. By the time he joined the Union military and then died at the battle of Port Hudson in 1863, Cailloux ascended to symbolic status for Afro-Creoles and slaves alike in New Orleans. In death, he was transformed into an icon of black patriotism. Northern abolitionists and southern African Americans embraced him as the first black military hero of the Civil War. He was proof that black men would fight and die for a country that had abused them so routinely during the antebellum era.

Maistre never braved bullets and cannon balls, but he did have to navigate the conservative Catholic hierarchy that derided his abolitionist tendencies. Born in 1820 in France, ordained in 1844, and eventually settling in Louisiana in 1855, Maistre was anything but an organizational cleric. Often leaving parishes under innuendo of financial or sexual impropriety, Maistre found a home in Louisiana among the free people of color. During the late 1850s and the Civil War, he made it a point to care for African Americans. He provided them with sacraments and supported the Union cause. Even following the war, Maistre aligned with the freedpeople. He took a position teaching at Straight University, one of the schools founded as part of the Reconstruction-education plan. For most of his efforts, Maistre was *persona-non-grata* with the Catholic hierarchy. But by the time of his death in 1875, he had reconciled with the church.

Ochs does a nice job connecting the lives of Maistre and Cailloux to the overall experiences and environment of Civil War New Orleans. Ochs demonstrates how Cailloux helped bridge the gap between free people of color and slaves in New Orleans and how Maistre's battles with his archbishop had as much to do with abolition as they did with Maistre's personal ambitions and overall rebelliousness. All in all, Ochs's narrative offers a great deal to scholars interested in New Orleans, African Americans in military service, black Catholicism, and the Afro-Creole community.

Due to the lack of personal papers from either Maistre or Cailloux, much of Ochs's analysis fails to get into the minds and passions of the characters. Perhaps Ochs could have paid more attention to the meanings of Catholic rituals, especially the Eucharist, and what sharing together the body and blood of Christ could have meant for whites and blacks. Perhaps a thick description of these events in the fashion of Robert Orsi's *The Madonna of 115th Street* (Yale University Press, ISBN 0300042647, \$17.95 softcover) would have illuminated more about their mentalities. Sadly, the dearth of evidence makes it difficult to know precisely how Maistre and Cailloux envisioned or understood themselves and the events around them. Because of these constraints, this reviewer finished the work feeling like he knew a lot about Maistre and Cailloux, but did not know them very well at all.

If Ochs published **A Black Patriot and a White Priest** now, he would have been able to better contextualize Maistre and Cailloux in terms of religion during the Civil War, white radicalism, and interracial alliances. Since 2000, studies by Paul Harvey, Mark Noll, Steven Woodworth, W. Scott Poole, and Harry Stout

have added to our understanding of religion during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Several works have paid particular attention to the influence of religion and racial radicalism during these years. In *The Black Hearts of Men* (Harvard University Press, ISBN 0674013670, \$18.95 softcover), John Stauffer detailed how the interracial friendships and radical faiths of Gerrit Smith, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and James McCune Smith led them to align their political visions. Moreover, my own *Reforging the White Republic* (Louisiana State University Press, ISBN 0807130524, \$ 54.95 hardcover) revealed that the experiences of Maistre and Cailloux were part of a very broad radical front where the war and religious fervor worked together to create unprecedented feelings of interracial friendship, camaraderie, and hope.

Reviewers have tended to attack how Ochs's narrative, *The Black Hearts of Men*, and *Reforging the White Republic* focus on interracial alliances and friendship as an important element in radicalism. Scholars have tended to wonder how many white radicals really existed and how much of an influence they really had. Yet these reviewers have demonstrated a lack of historical imagination. The question of numbers and influence may explain very little. What Maistre and Cailloux, along with the many individuals studied by myself and Stauffer, reveal is radical potential. The limits and confines of radicalism were greatly expanded, at least for a brief time, by the eras of the Civil War and Reconstruction. What did this expansion show? For one, it meant that men like Cailloux, Maistre, Frederick Douglass and women like missionaries Laura Towne and Esther Hawks were able to envision a new kind of United States, one where the nation could be healed and redeemed from its racist, exploitative past. During the 1860s, countless radical men and women believed this to be the case. And their belief mattered, because they acted upon it sometimes as soldiers of combat and sometimes as soldiers of light and love. When three thousand northern white women trekked South to teach, nurse, and live during and after the War, it was to work alongside men like Cailloux and Maistre. The overarching goal, albeit unrealized, was to transform the country. It was in many ways the same goal that inspired the modern Civil Rights movement and that continues in the hearts and minds of those who search for an equitable and just America.

Edward J. Blum is the winner of the C. Vann Woodward Dissertation Prize given by the Southern Historical Association, author of Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, and co-editor, with W. Scott Poole, of Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and Reconstruction

(Mercer University Press, ISBN 0865549877, \$25.00 softcover). In 2007, the University of Pennsylvania Press will publish Blum's W. E. B. Du Bois, American Prophet û the first religious biography of this leading African American intellectual and activist.