

### The Colors of Courage: Gettysburg's Forgotten History: Immigrants, Women, and African Americans in the Civil War's Defining Battle

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## Review

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**Creighton, Margaret S.** *The Colors of Courage: Gettysburg's Forgotten History: Immigrants, Women, and African Americans in the Civil War's Defining Battle*. Basic Books, \$17.50 paper ISBN 139780465014576

Gettysburg

A Different Look at a Famous Battle

When *The Colors of Courage* appeared in 2005, it received solid praise from reviewers for its breadth of research and graceful writing on a neglected subject. The book recounts the experiences of the German soldiers of the Union Eleventh Corps, civilian white women, and black men and women during the Gettysburg campaign and battle. The book's author, Bates College professor Margaret S. Creighton, broadens the definition of courage by extending it beyond the battlefield to include these groups.

Creighton argues that the full story of Gettysburg must follow different paths than historians have traditionally taken. Her book focuses on these three groups because they have been either ignored or disparaged by contemporaries and history. While Gettysburg affected each group in different ways, each one contended with nativist, gender, or racial stereotypes that defined, in part, their roles in the Gettysburg saga.

Creighton uses courage as the book's central theme. For members of the Eleventh Corps, comprised of many German immigrants and first generation German Americans, their courage and manliness had been questioned for months before the battle. The Northern public and comrades in the Army of the Potomac had blamed them for the army's defeat at Chancellorsville, where they were routed on May 2, 1863.

Creighton centers her account on senior officers, such as Oliver Otis Howard, Carl Schurz, and Alexander Schimmelfennig, and on a few enlisted

men. She explores the vilification heaped upon the corps and how it affected morale. The battle's first day offered a chance for redemption, instead bad luck, a vulnerable position, and questionable leadership from non-Germans resulted in another rout. They deserved better, and recent studies of the battle have offered judicious analyses of their conduct.

Although the story of Gettysburg's civilian women has been told in various other works, Creighton presents a well-drawn retelling. She details the burdens they confronted during and after the battle, explores their dealings with Confederate soldiers, and affirms the courage of these women. Gender stereotypes of the era constitute a prominent feature of the book. In their efforts, women had to overcome prevailing nineteenth century views.

The plight of African Americans and their place in Gettysburg's story is a tragic one. During the Confederate advance into Pennsylvania, southern troops captured many blacks and sent them south into bondage. Whether the men, women, and children were runaway slaves or free persons did not matter. In turn, blacks joined in an exodus before the Confederates, losing homes and jobs. Northerners questioned their courage and framed the stories on prevalent racial stereotypes. The author recounts a sad story, enriching it with profiles of individual African Americans.

The author extends her narrative into the postwar years and beyond, exploring how history has portrayed or ignored these groups. Creighton seems to criticize military historians who have not featured women and African Americans in their works. In the end, however, Gettysburg remains an epic three-day struggle with roughly 51,000 casualties. Had it not been for the battle, Gettysburg would be a pleasant and typical south central Pennsylvania town with a rich history of its own. But war came to it in July 1863, and redefined its place in American history. Creighton's book is a worthy and welcome addition to Gettysburg's saga.

*Jeffrey D. Wert is the author of The Sword Of Lincoln.*