

Civil War Book Review

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Editorial

HOW HISTORIANS REMEMBER THE CIVIL WAR

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Many people tend to view Civil War commemoration as an almost strictly public act where individuals, civic organizations, veterans groups, heritage societies, and others participate in celebrations and ceremonies to remember the over 600,000 Union and Confederate soldiers who lost their lives fighting one another on American soil. While statues, flags, and monuments stand as public markers of history and identity, historians and students of the Civil War have amassed a monumental corpus of printed material written to tell the history of the Civil War. Indeed, the writing of history serves as yet another form of commemoration. And like the more familiar public displays and ceremonies mentioned above, written histories generate controversy. The reviewers who contribute to *Civil War Book Review* participate in the process of debating just how to faithfully and correctly remember, record, preserve, and perhaps even commemorate, the story of America's Civil War.

Robert J. Cook revisits the tumultuous American Civil War centennial and recounts how competing notions of race, memory, heritage, and commemoration intersected and clashed in the early 1960s as the United States Civil War Centennial Commission sought to plan the centennial activities. Cook's book, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* serves as a timely reminder that as we approach the sesquicentennial of the Civil War in 2011-2015, the nation will no doubt wrestle with these issues once more.

Of course, the writing of Civil War history proceeds at its usual brisk pace. In this issue of *CWBR*, readers will find a full complement of the diverse studies offered by students of the war. Several recent works have focused closely on the beliefs and experiences of Civil War soldiers. In *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, editor Aaron Sheehan-Dean presents a wide complement of essays that analyze aspects of soldier life and labor from both the Union and Confederate perspective. More specifically, Chandra Manning's *What*

This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War argues forcefully that soldiers saw the war as a fight over slavery. Randall M. Miller reviews this important new work in this issue. Additionally, the *CWBR* Author Interview features Professor Manning discussing her new book.

Community studies remain an important component of Civil War studies. Over twenty years ago, Suzanne Lebsack wrote her study of the women of Petersburg, Virginia, and how they lived before and during the Civil War. A. Wilson Greene adds another layer to the Petersburg story with his *Civil War Petersburg: Confederate City in the Crucible of War* by analyzing the strategic importance of the city as well as its internal dynamics. Wayne Wei-siang Hsieh reviews this book. And as Gordon B. McKinney points out in his review of *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War*, historian Robert Tracy McKenzie has fundamentally altered the traditional interpretation of the sharply divided Knoxville, Tennessee by chronicling a civil war within the Civil War.

With the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth approaching, scholarly interest in Lincoln's life and political career—which has never suffered for attention—is gaining added momentum. David Madden rediscovers *Lincoln Under Enemy Fire*, a classic account of the commander-in-chief's April 1864 visit to Fort Stevens during Confederate General Jubal Early's attack on Washington, D.C.

Leah Wood Jewett's latest column captures the essence of planter John Elder's diary during the Battle of Baton Rouge. Faced with the chaos of warfare at home, Elder's records the everyday way of life while under fire in his usually terse entries, which leave the reader wondering how and why Mr. Elder remained so calm and matter-of-fact on paper—and if his composure held strictly on paper.

Enjoy studying and commemorating the Civil War.