

Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause

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Recommended Citation

Marshall, Anne (2008) "Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 10 : Iss. 3 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol10/iss3/6>

Review

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Summer 2008

Janney, Caroline E. *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*. University of North Carolina Press, \$35.00 hardcover ISBN 9780807831762

Commemoration and the Lost Cause

In *Burying the Dead but Not the Past*, Caroline Janney uncovers the history of the oft-overlooked Ladies Memorial Associations (LMAs), which formed throughout the post-Civil War South. In doing so, she seeks to bring the LMAs out of the shadows of their successor, the more famous and familiar United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC). Women who joined LMAs took on an important role in many southern communities after the war. In addition to establishing memorial days and erecting monuments, these women arranged to have the bodies of thousands of Confederate dead disinterred from battlefields and makeshift cemeteries across the country and reburied closer to home. Janney's examination of the LMAs in five Virginia cities considers the work of these overlooked organizations in the years following the Civil War. She finds them both powerful and important, and argues that it was the women of the LMAs, and not the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were responsible for remaking military defeat into a political, social, and cultural victory for the white South (3).

While historians have traditionally viewed the work of LMAs as a more personal form of grieving for and remembering the dead, compared to later memorial activities by Lost Cause organizations like the UDC, Janney argues that women infused their efforts with political meaning. Janney finds that many LMAs could not even claim male family members who fought or died for the Confederacy, an interesting finding that elucidates her claim that memorializers were politically motivated. Their mourning and memorial activities were not so much personal as they were an expression of continued support for the defeated Confederacy (56-57).

Moreover, Janney argues convincingly that this politicized memorial activity played an important role in post-war southern society. Beneath the watchful and wary eyes of their federal occupiers, southern white men found their political agency circumscribed during Reconstruction. Under the auspices of mourning and commemoration, however, southern women conducted public rituals that contained displays of Confederate patriotism and celebrated the Lost Cause. Janney explains that women ably deflected criticism by Union occupiers of what could be seen as treasonous rhetoric and behavior within memorial activity. Protected by their gender, she asserts, white women were able to escape charges of treason during Reconstruction, for which men, as political beings, would have been found guilty (65).

Janney offers another important contribution to the field of post- Civil War memory by challenging scholars' previous assumptions that southern women were readily accorded the role of civic historians in their communities. Historians often highlight the view of 19th century Americans that women's maternalist attributes made them natural public curators. But Janney shows that in several important cases (including a fascinating showdown between Jubal Early and the Ladies Lee Monument Committee over the manner in which to memorialize Robert E. Lee) women had to fight tooth and nail for the right to determine the design and placement of Confederate monuments.

Janney also invites historians to view LMA activities not only within the context of Civil War memory, but as part of the larger narrative of southern women's history. In a region where women were generally less vocal and publicly assertive regarding their rights and roles, she makes a compelling case for viewing the LMAs as part of women's late 19th century political activism and reform.

Despite the convincing nature of Janney's findings, there is one point on which readers may wish for further explanation. Historians of Civil War memory have devoted much attention to the manner in which the Lost Cause movement buttressed contemporary white supremacy. For much of the book, however, Janney is silent this important component of post-war remembrance. If the reader is to accept her assertion that we understand women's earliest mourning activities as a political response to Reconstruction, it leaves us asking about where these women's racial motivations fit into the picture, since maintaining racial order in the wake of emancipation was the overwhelming social and political priority for most white southerners.

This concern aside, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past* is absorbing and essential reading for anyone interested in Civil War memory or southern history.

Anne Marshall is assistant professor of history at Mississippi State University. She is currently revising a manuscript about post-Civil War memory in Kentucky.