

Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South

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Review

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Inscoe, John C. *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*. University Press of Kentucky, \$50.00 hardcover ISBN 9780813124995

Southern Appalachia's Civil War

The Southern Appalachian region and its role in the American Civil War have long been the breeding ground of myths and misunderstanding. Berea College President William Goodell Frost characterized the inhabitants of the region as those who owned land but did not own slaves, and argued that much of Berea's educational work was dedicated to "effacing sectional lines." Charles Fairchild, a professor at Berea, boldly stated that the nation was indebted to the service and sacrifice of mountain soldiers who had fought to preserve the Union. "You should remember," Fairchild observed to the American Missionary Association in 1883, "that this whole section (Appalachia) was loyal in the battle for a united country unstained by slavery." Writing in the pages of *The Berea Quarterly* in 1903, student Henry Brock, described as "A Mountaineer of the New Type," also appealed to the memory of the Civil War and Appalachia's role in it. "We have boys and girls who could be Abraham Lincolns, and who are as brave as any in America," Brock declared. "The North will not forget us. The mountaineers stood by the Union in '61. We may be ignorant, but we are patriotic and love the flag."

The popular image then was that mountaineers were largely loyal to the Union. These faithful citizens also represented a population that cared little about slavery and were apparently largely unaffected by the peculiar institution. Furthermore, some prominent educators and reformers believed that mountain people were somehow owed a debt by the nation for their loyalty and patriotism. Recent scholarship has done much to correct these and other myths. Professor John Inscoe, in his *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*, holds a particularly important place in this ongoing work. Since the publication of his book, *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western*

North Carolina (1989), Inscoe's scholarship has profoundly influenced a better understanding of the Civil War experience in the region. Furthermore, he carefully examines the significant, though often overlooked, connections between the mountains and the wider South. *Race, War, and Remembrance* brings together into one volume seventeen of Inscoe's thoughtful essays, all of which offer challenging and important insights into Appalachia's Civil War.

Published over the course of two decades, Inscoe's work is altogether as complex, nuanced, and diverse as the region he studies. In four essays exploring race in Appalachia, Inscoe points out that the institution of slavery and its resultant racism were not only significantly present in the mountains but sufficiently complex as to defy any kind of easy generalization. Examining the experience of slavery in Appalachia, Inscoe observes, serves "to inform our understanding not only of Appalachia as more than simply a periphery of the slaveholding South, but also of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution as it was adapted to this relatively atypical environment" (62). Five essays discussing the Civil War in the region offer opportunities for understanding the deeply divisive responses to the secession crisis, the changing roles of women on the home front, and the bitter consequences of loyalty. Finally, in eight essays on memory, Inscoe explores film, theatre, and literature and their role in both perpetuating and demolishing stereotypical views of the region and of the war. "Sometimes it takes unorthodox methods and more creative genres," Inscoe intriguingly argues, "to overcome long-standing popular misconceptions and to bring the reality of the stories back into the public consciousness" (298).

All of these essays bring to the forefront the essential fact that "Southern Appalachia has always been home to a far more complicated and diverse society and economy than once assumed" (61). The careful reader of *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* will find themselves rewarded with compelling writing by a learned and accessible scholar of the Appalachian South. This volume is highly recommended for all Civil War and regional collections.

Shannon Wilson is Head of Special Collections and Archives at Berea College. With Kenneth W. Noe, he was the coeditor of The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays (1997), and more recently, the author of Berea College: An Illustrated History (2006).