

# Wars Within a War: Controversy and Conflict Over the American Civil War

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## Review

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**Waugh, Joan (ed.) and Gallagher, Gary W. (ed.).** *Wars within a War: Controversy and Conflict over the American Civil War.* The University of North Carolina Press, \$30.00 ISBN 9780807832752

### War and Memory During the Civil War

*Wars within a War*, a collection edited by Joan Waugh of UCLA and Gary W. Gallagher of the University of Virginia, offers a number of interesting and insightful essays into various aspects of the Civil War from some of the top historians in the field. The essays are organized – loosely – around an exploration of “the internal stresses that posed serious challenges” to the viability of both the Union and the Confederacy, as well as “the ways in which wartime disputes and fissures carried over into the postwar years and well beyond” (x). The range of topics is quite broad, including – for example – treason and confiscation law, political activism on the part of southern women, motivations among black soldiers, the burial programs of the Federal government, political caricature, military leadership, veterans’ pensions and support, Hollywood’s representation of the Lost Cause, and the memory of both U.S. Grant and William T. Sherman.

Many of the essays are taken directly from larger monographs recently or soon to be published. This can steal some of the thunder the collection might otherwise have had if all of the essays were original to this work, as some are, but it does produce a collection that is something of a survey of current thinking in these areas, at least among the selected group of highly influential authors included. The works by Drew Gilpin Faust, Gary W. Gallagher, Joseph T. Glatthaar, and James McPherson are good snapshots of their larger, recent work, while the essays by William Blair, James Marten, Stephanie McCurry, and Joan Waugh are teasers, whetting the appetite for their longer works soon to be released.

There are standouts, even in this illustrious group: Stephanie McCurry's essay on poor southern women and a "politics of subsistence" offers genuinely new thinking about the non-elite as it also indicates the great promise of her coming monograph. William Blair's essay on the travails of treason prosecutions opens up new lines of inquiry into the Union's perception of the conflict. And Carol Reardon extends her work on Civil War memory with a subtle demonstration of the evolving nature of Sherman's memory in the south. On the other end of the scale, Stephen Cushman's essay on Whitman seems out of place in this collection, an essay that elevates Whitman to an exemplar of later historiographic practice even as it seems to denigrate his ability to record the "real" war. J. Matthew Gallman's analysis of enlistment motivations among Philadelphia's 8th U.S. Colored Troops, contrasted with the men who had previously joined the 54th Massachusetts and the 1st North Carolina, does not quite convince, but is thought-provoking and innovative.

In one regard, the collection as a whole does not seem to live up to the promise of its title. There is nothing very much controversial presented in the book, historiographically or otherwise. Few of us would find much to disagree with in the arguments or positions presented by these prominent scholars. Additionally, few of these discuss any matter that can be considered a "serious challenge" to either nation. Conflict is certainly present, in frictions between citizens and their government, between military leaders, and between cultural representations of the war. But while conflict exists within some of the essays, it is of no unusual sort. This does nothing to undermine the validity or usefulness of the essays themselves, and as a survey of recent and forthcoming work the book is intriguing and worthwhile. Prospective readers, however, should respond to the impressive list of talent among the contributors more than to the subtitle. It is, in part, because of the stature of the contributors that these ideas have become essential to our current understanding of the war.

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