

### Race and Radicalism in the Union Army

Fay A. Yarbrough

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Yarbrough, Fay A. (2010) "Race and Radicalism in the Union Army," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 . Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol12/iss2/11>

## Review

Yarbrough, Fay A.

Spring 2010

**Lause, Mark A.** *Race and Radicalism in the Union Army*. University of Illinois Press, \$45.00 ISBN 978-0-252-03446-6

### A Look at Race and the Union Army in the American West

Nearly 150 years later, the Civil War continues to generate scholarly and public fascination and the production of a plethora of printed material. There are books that focus on specific battles; historical figures; the causes of the war; why the South lost or the North won; the lives of common soldiers, black and white; and women in battle and on the home front. There has been little work, however, on the West and the contributions of indigenous groups to both the Union and Confederate causes. Mark A. Lause's monograph begins to fill this gap.

Lause, an Associate Professor of history at the University of Cincinnati whose publications include *The Civil War's Last Campaign: James B. Weaver (2001)*, *the National Greenback-Labor Party & the Politics of Race and Section (2000)*, examines the Civil War as a "Second American Revolution" that had the potential to radically alter racial dynamics in the United States (2). Colored troops made their first appearance in battle in the West and formed a tri-racial army alongside indigenous and white soldiers. This army visually, if not implicitly, argued for racial equality, an equality that could extend into the larger society. The West, in some ways then, served as a model for what was possible racially in the United States.

In chapter 1, Lause demonstrates the importance of figures such as John Brown and other radicals to the war effort and the lessons gained by their activity in the west. For Brown, the constitutional crisis of "Bleeding Kansas" highlighted the effectiveness of individual citizens resisting laws they considered unjust. Brown and other radicals attempted to apply this lesson nationally (24). In fact, many radicals imagined that the far West or Southwest was the ideal place to attack slavery. Lause reveals the linkages between John Brown's raid on

Harper's Ferry and a western strategy to overturn slavery in chapter 2. The next chapter considers the Civil War in the West, carefully outlining military policy and troop movements. The Confederacy refused to recognize native neutrality in the war, which pushed several groups such as the Cherokees to side with the South, but also unwittingly pressed Union supporters within indigenous groups into action as well. Thus, many Indian nations were just as divided in their support of secession as their Southern brethren. Moreover, native groups who officially sided with the Confederacy did so only through coercion, in Lause's view.

The presence of a multi-racial military force in the West "challenged the rigidity of antebellum race relations and raised questions about the extent to which the authorities would be willing to transform the Union in order to preserve it" (68). Could the Union accept using a multi-racial fighting force to win the war but then deny native or African-descended populations citizenship, the franchise, or the right to live separately as sovereign nations? The large population of indigenous people in the West also introduced a different vector in race relations, that between indigenous and African-descended populations. Lause argues that western troops challenged notions of whiteness but failed to successfully convert these challenges into new realities in racial thinking in chapters 4 and 5.

The final chapter illustrates that despite the possible gains made by native populations because of their support of the federal war effort, many federal officials continued to work to extinguish native land titles and capitalize on provisioning native groups. Siding with the Confederacy nullified treaty agreements with the federal government for various Indian nations which led to the confiscation of native lands. Official policy also encouraged native dependency on the federal government for food and clothing while simultaneously insisting that former slaves did not need assistance from the government.

By focusing on the West, Lause illuminates the importance of that region in the Civil War and the crucial role native groups played, as well what the war could have achieved in terms of race relations. Lause also disparages more recent attempts to create a multi-racial Confederacy that includes natives and "black Confederates" and the usefulness of whiteness studies when exploring interactions between native and African-descended populations (7, 131). Though scholars of American Indians might hope for more discussion of the

“characteristic pragmatism” of native groups as they made decisions to form nations, write constitutions, and join the Confederacy, they will, along with scholars of the Civil War, appreciate Lause’s valuable work (27).

*Fay A. Yarbrough is an Associate Professor of history at the University of Oklahoma and the author of Race and the Cherokee Nation.*