

Defining the Civil War Era

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Editorial

DEFINING THE CIVIL WAR ERA

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The latest issue of *Civil War Book Review* once again features a wide spectrum of books focusing on the Civil War era. Yet defining what constitutes the Civil War era sometimes proves challenging. When and how did the conflict start? At what point did armed conflict become inevitable? What events in the antebellum period directly altered the course of history and pushed the nation toward civil war? When was the United States of America fully reconstructed in the postbellum period? All of these questions bear directly on what students of the Civil War include within that broad period we call the Civil War era. In all likelihood, we will never find final answers to these questions, but they will certainly impact how scholars treat the history of this seminal American conflict.

This issue of *CWBR* reflects the breadth of Civil War era studies. The abolition debates in New York and Virginia, which Matthew Mason revisits in his review of David Gellman's *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* and Eva Sheppard Wolf's *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* show that Americans debated slavery and sectionalism years before the Civil War. In the postbellum period, the debate on how to return the South to the Union persisted to the end of the nineteenth century, as Charles W. Calhoun notes in *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900*. Allan Peskin reviews this new political history.

Of course, the war itself continues to receive ample treatment by a host of scholars. Colin Woodward reviews George S. Burkhardt's *Confederate Rage, Yankee Wrath: No Quarter in the Civil War*, a book that revisits the theme of atrocities during the Civil War. The war's impact on civilians continues to inspire scholars. Richard R. Duncan's *Beleaguered Winchester: A Virginia Community at War, 1861-1865*, reviewed by Judkin Browning, analyzes this Shenandoah Valley city's wartime experience. Professor Duncan discusses his new book in

the *CWBR* Author Interview.

This issue marks the debut of a new *CWBR* column series commemorating the upcoming bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth. A New Birth of Freedom: Studying the Life of Lincoln, written by noted Lincoln scholar Frank Williams, will focus on new books that seek to explain Lincoln's life, career, and beliefs through new perspectives. In this issue, Williams analyzes Allen Jayne's *Lincoln and the American Manifesto* by discussing the concept of Lincoln as the final founder of the American nation. By transforming the Civil War into a war not only to prevent the sundering of the Union, but to end slavery, Lincoln oversaw a sweeping reinterpretation of the Declaration of Independence and furthered the process of equality embodied in that document.

James K. Hogue offers an examination of Henry Clay Warmoth's *War, Politics, and Reconstruction: Stormy Days in Louisiana* in our latest installment of the *Perspectives from Afar* series. Written in 1930, some sixty years after the events chronicled within its pages, Warmoth's memoir, as Hogue points out, is a significant but troubled and somewhat inaccurate account of the contentious Reconstruction period in Louisiana.

Because of the Union naval blockade, the Confederacy relied on illicit trade from both Europe and the American Northeast to keep supplied and to sell Confederate cotton abroad. However, Union sympathizers also fled the Confederate States of America through this conduit. In *Civil War Treasures*, Leah Wood Jewett uses a shipping contract to transfer refugees from Matamoros, Mexico, to Union-held New Orleans to illustrate the larger implications of this curious chapter of the Civil War in the Gulf South.

Civil War Book Review is published in the first week of the months of February, May, August, and November. If you would like to receive e-mail reminders of upcoming issues and special features on the website, click on Sign me up for *CWBR* Updates! link at the bottom of any page in the journal. From there, you can provide us with your contact information so that you will receive these e-mail reminders. Of course, we will NEVER share your personal information with any third party.

As always, enjoy studying the rich history of the Civil War era!

