

We Must Always Remember the Cost of War

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Editorial

WE MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THE COST OF WAR

Buman, Nathan

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With Veterans Day, November provides a special moment for us to remember that real people have passed before us to participate in and influence the events of the past. So often when we study history, especially the Civil War, we lose that human element by elevating generals to heroic status and remembering the major battles out of the context of the war in its entirety. The decades of the middle-nineteenth century, and the four long years of conflict between the North and South saw millions of Americans who felt strongly about their place within American society test their limits. The study of the Civil War period provides historians with a look into the society of the past and the roles that Americans played, while Remembrance Day gently reminds us not to take that past and the efforts of our soldiers (past and present) for granted.

This Fall we feature the portrait of Private Charles Mitchel of Company D, 107th New York Volunteers. This portrait provides a window into the world of the past. That is what makes the continued study of the American Civil war so fascinating, the notion that we can look, time and time again, into the past through the words, lives, and actions of historical figures (famous and obscure) to discover new angles and new avenues to better understand these vital years that helped to shape the American society of today.

In this quarter, we have chosen to highlight four works that help to illustrate the ways in which war changed society and the degree to which historical actors played a role in shaping the events of that period and the outcome of the war. Margaret Abruzzo, in *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism*, investigates how nineteenth-century Americans debated slavery by looking at the (in)humanity of the institution with increasing ferocity up to the eve of the Civil War. *A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War*, by Sean A. Scott, exams the Civil War the way that northerners looked at it: through a religious lens. Northern civilians constantly used the church and the clergy to interpret and deal with the course of the war; Scott does an excellent job of narrating this process, looking at how this effort changed the

church as well. *Moments of Despair: Suicide, Divorce, & Debt in Civil War Era North Carolina*, by David Silkenat explores the social challenges that many Civil War veterans encountered when they returned home from fighting, an eloquent reminder to consider how we treat veterans when they return to civilian life after their service to the country. Finally, Gregory P. Downs provides an excellent narrative of the fallout of the Civil War in *Declarations of Dependence: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861-1908*. Southerners, white and black, necessarily compromised and jostled for position as result of emancipation and the abolition of slavery leading into the twentieth century as white and black sought to create a new society.

Civil War Book Review was very fortunate to speak with Eric Foner about his Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, a book that shows us how President Lincoln evolved over time as a result of his increasing experience and the events of the Civil War. Professor Foner urges us to remember that we are all changing over time as part of our personal growth; we can find inspiration in Lincoln.

Daniel W. Crofts has provided us with an excellent Civil War Sesquicentennial column that explores Unionism in the South during the Civil War. As Foner illustrates in his aforementioned book, Lincoln often overestimated the strength of Unionism throughout the South and Crofts brings us up to speed on this topic, providing avenues for future exploration.

This quarter, Frank Williams uses *Lincoln Apostate: The Matson Slave Case* by Charles Robert McKirdy and *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement* by Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page to further illustrate the personal growth of Abraham Lincoln during his life and the evolution of the way that he looked at African Americans and slavery.

Our final feature, this quarter, written by Michael Taylor, highlights a particular manuscript collection at LSU that shows the difficulties faced by those at home as they navigated the events of the war. Four difficult years, full of unknown consequences, led soldiers and civilians alike to endure the best they could to affect the outcome and their words, as Taylor shows, give historians a better understanding of the way that people endured during the Civil War.

As always, *Civil War Book Review* would like to thank the wonderful support staff and crew that makes every issue relatively easy, at least on my part.

I would like to welcome a new assistant, Alice Wolfe who will be our publicity contact. If you have any books that you would like to call to our attention, please contact her at our mailing address or her email: cwbr@tigers.lsu.edu. To our readers: thank you again for your continued support and have a wonderful end of the semester, end of the year, and a fantastic Holiday season!