

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War

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Review

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Barney, William L. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War*. Oxford University Press, \$18.95 ISBN 978-0-19-978201-7

Highlighting a New Reference Guide

An impressive effort by a single author, this compact, well-illustrated reference book offers several valuable features for general readers, college students, and scholars. The first version of this work, under the title *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Student Companion* (Oxford) was published in 2001 and is here updated, especially by adding some books to the bibliographies of individual essays. William L. Barney places the greatest weight of the work on the Civil War and its causes, while devoting a smaller portion to Reconstruction.

Reference works usually may not develop themes, but readers perusing many of Barney's essays can notice that he views the American Civil War as a "total war" (149, 310, 312). While not using that phrase in some essays, Barney also implies that theme when writing about such topics as "Anaconda Plan," "Blockade," "National Banking Acts," and especially "Wartime Economies."

Furthermore, readers can discern another potential theme Barney implies relating to an internal struggle during the war, one between Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party, on one hand, and the Democratic party and its national leaders, on the other. Barney highlights this wartime political struggle in his essays dealing with hallmark Republican platform planks of the election of 1860 and Republican goals that became signature national laws and policies during the war. These included the Morrill Land Grant College Act, the Homestead Act, the Legal Tender Act, the National Banking Act, the Pacific Railroad Acts, and especially the Emancipation Proclamation—and Barney offers an essay on each of these controversial measures. They all relate to his essay on "Radicals"—the vociferous Republicans who pushed, cajoled, and led their party in directions that many Democrats opposed and considered to be dangerous and socially

revolutionary. At various times of tension or crisis in American history, much may be made over leading politicians who call for high-minded notions of political bipartisanship, asking for rival leaders to put aside personal or party objectives and instead make sacrifices for America's common good—in short, taking steps supposed to help the nation rather than help themselves. Barney explains the minority of northern Democrats who adhered to the faction of "War Democrats." But the strong majority in the "Democratic Party" was having none of Lincoln's Republican agenda. Outspoken in their strident personal criticisms of Lincoln for being someone who was inadequately prepared for the nation's highest office and someone who repeatedly demonstrated that he was a failure as commander in chief, most Democrats clearly rejected whatever Lincoln advocated. Rather than putting aside their own party's agenda, leading Democrats worked diligently for four years to get Lincoln defeated in the presidential election of 1864. In other words, partisan politics thrived during America's most dire national crisis.

Readers will find several of Barney's essays informative or insightful. Among the best are ones on Confederate leader "Judah P. Benjamin," the controversial Confederate policy of "Impressment," Georgia's governor, "Joseph E. Brown," the prospect of "Confederate Emancipation," and the importance of "Railroads" in the war. Other notable essays include the Union's employment of "Black Soldiers" and the Confederacy's contentious policy implementing a "Direct Tax." One of Barney's most effective entries covers wartime "Government Workers."

On the other hand, some readers may be disappointed by other essays or finding out that subjects not given their own entry. The essay on "States Rights" seemed bland and lacked specifics. The entry on "Conscription" did not devote enough space to the Confederate draft and lacked references to either of the notable works by Mark A. Weitz. Barney's analysis of the "Border States" fails to point out that Kentucky and Missouri held seats in the Confederate Congress. Checking into the "War Governors," readers will come away puzzled that only three governors are named out of some forty men who held governorships, North and South. It would have been better to present two essays about governors, one for the Union and one for the Confederacy. Likewise, the essay on "Nationalism" stresses the United States and neglects Confederate nationalism; two essays were needed. Individuals not covered include CSA Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker, one of Jefferson Davis's most remarkable appointments, and newspaper publisher and presidential candidate Horace Greeley, a contentious gadfly.

Essays were needed to compare and contrast Union and Confederate Cabinets, the popularity of newspapers North and South, and a separate analysis for the Election of 1864 (covered briefly in the essay on "Union Politics").

Those quibbles aside, Barney has prepared a helpful work, especially so given its modest length. Barney updated bibliographies for several individual essays, but room remained in the "Further Reading" list for 20 or 25 more titles, especially to include ones published since 2000.

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