

The Reality of the Civil War

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Editorial

THE REALITY OF THE CIVIL WAR

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The Civil War Sesquicentennial provides us with the opportunity for reassessment; the next four years should encourage and inspire us to look, once again, at the Civil War and the soldiers and civilians who endured those four long years. 146 years beyond Appomattox, it can be difficult, at times, for modern Civil War historians to approach and truly understand the war and the wartime generation. It's often easier to examine the heroic aspects that have embellished our memory of the war but we must always remain cognizant that these four years changed the course of United States history, and every single person living in this country during that period found themselves affected by the conflict. We must remember that the soldiers were not simply pawns on a map moving from place to place under the influence of some higher unseen power, devoid of any human emotion. The Sesquicentennial years provide a chance for us to truly look at the people who took part in the war or, perhaps telling us just as much, those who preferred to stand on the sidelines. But, at the end of the day, human actors played a part in the drama of the Civil War, influencing its outcome while being altered tremendously by their experience.

This summer we have a photograph of a young Confederate, Private John White, of a Virginia regiment, who, again, reminds us of the ever-present human side of those who endured the Civil War.

This issue of *Civil War Book Review* highlights several works of new scholarship that help us to look at the war and wartime generation, providing a new way of understanding the human reality of the war. Robert Cook's *Civil War Senator: William Pitt Fessenden and the Fight to Save the American Republic* reminds us of the antebellum years, leading up to the secession crisis, when the war seemed a looming, but not necessarily present, cloud on the horizon. Cook reminds us of the role that individual politicians played in navigating the tenuous years leading up to the war. Adam Goodheart explores, in *1861: The Civil War*

Awakening, the ways in which society stood up and recognized the reality of war during the first year by highlighting specific historical figures. These characters confronted the war, forced to feel their way through the uncertainty, in an effort to find their role during the course of the war. In *A World On Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War*, Amanda Foreman explores the drama that played out in the game of international politics wherein countless people interpreted the war and its course, influencing whether or not Great Britain would recognize the Confederacy or maintain friendly relations with the United States and Abraham Lincoln. Finally, several essays, collected and edited by Susannah J. Ural explores how important groups within society experienced a war that significantly altered the notion of citizenship for ethnic and racial groups both North and South. *Civil War Citizens: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in America's Bloodiest Conflict* reminds us how deeply the Civil War affected all of American society as individuals sought to understand their role within this momentous event.

Professor Gary Gallagher graciously accepted an invitation to speak with *Civil War Book Review* about his new book, *The Union War*. Gallagher goes to great lengths to detail the concept of the word "Union" and what the war meant to the wartime generation. Furthering our understand of the actual people on the ground who deemed it necessary to don a uniform and risk death to fight during the war, Gallagher makes great strides to explain why Union soldiers chose to fight and how they described and remembered their experience.

We are thrilled to add a new element to *Civil War Book Review* in honor of the Civil War Sesquicentennial this quarter. Our new column, which will feature a different topic in each issue over the next four years, will seek to provide a pulse on the current historiography of that topic while providing some new avenues where we might need to push the scholarship or explore further. We hope that our readers will find this column useful with their own studies and understanding of some complicated topics. Our first installment features historian Russell McClintock who has written a fine piece on secession; we hope that the readers of *Civil War Book Review* enjoy this column and those to come in the future.

We also have a new columnist moving forward. Michael Taylor will be following in the footsteps of Leah Wood Jewett who has decided to hand over the reins to Mr. Taylor. We thank Leah, very much, for her insightful columns over the past years while we look forward to what Michael Taylor has in store

for us. This quarter, he has chosen to introduce a new set of letters in the LSU Special Collections that highlight blockades and blockade runners in the area around Lake Ponchartrain in Louisiana, opening up new opportunities to explore a topic that has often been forgotten.

As always, we would like to acknowledge that the very difficult task of putting a scholarly journal online every three months would not be possible if it were not for the constant support of the staffs of both LSU Libraries and Special Collections. We thank them, very much, for their continued support as well as the support of our publishers, reviewers, and you-the readers.