

Civil War Book Review

Winter 2019

Article 1

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Recommended Citation

Barber, Tom (2019) "Winter 2019," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.21.1.01

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol21/iss1/1>

Editorial

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Many of this issue's reviews concern violence, imprisonment, and the law. Two books this issue deal specifically with violence: Joanne Freeman's *The Field of Blood* and Aaron Sheehan-Dean's *The Calculus of Violence*. Reviewer Douglas Egerton recommends *Field of Blood* for demonstrating how casual violence among Congressmen became normal long before Preston Brooks' infamous caning of Charles Sumner in 1856. Looking beyond political violence, Lorien Foote considers Sheehan-Dean's book valuable for both its systematic look at what forces escalated martial conflict and its detailed analysis of the conditions that limited lethal violence.

Leaving Congress and battlefields behind is Angela Zombek's review of *Prison Pens*, a collection of letters between Confederate officer Wash Nelson and his fiancée Mollie Scollay. She values the collection for its description of how Confederates internalized military loss and began reshaping defeat into Lost Cause mythology soon after the war ended. Another important review this issue surveys Kimberly Welch's *Black Litigants in the Antebellum South*. According to reviewer Jason A. Gillmer, Welch's book adds to our understanding of antebellum courtrooms by showing how black litigants leveraged their status as property holders to access the law's protection. Gillmer concludes that while legal victories never undermined the institution of slavery at large, they are essential moments for understanding the everyday interactions between race and bondage in the antebellum United States.

Civil War Treasures and Civil War Obscura return this issue. Using pamphlets and photo albums housed in LSU Libraries Special Collections, John David Miles explores the preoccupation many Americans had with the loyalty of West Point students. The question of loyalty attracted the attention of statisticians whose calculations laid bare sectionalism's regional fault lines. He points out that for others the question of loyalty provoked a meticulous inventory of their former classmates' allegiances. In Civil War Obscura Meg Groeling revisits Frances Parkinson Keyes' *Madame Castel's Lodger* (1962), a fictional biography of Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard. Groeling explores the book as essentially a piece of fan fiction, and

recommends the novel for its fixation on the ways in which Beauregard's creole background distinguished him from his peers, and how those perceived distinctions influenced his decision making during, and after the war.

This issue I interview Aaron Sheehan-Dean about his new book *The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War*. In the interview we discuss how notions of just war theory limited violence, and why those same theories failed to afford protections to African Americans or women in times of war and occupation.

Our regular column about all things Lincoln expands its gaze and considers Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Leadership: In Turbulent Times*. Reviewer Frank Williams praises the book for remaining above today's political fray, while persuasively arguing that presidential leadership has been an act of self-creation often shaped by adversity, and self-reflection.

As always, I want to thank the reviewers, readers, and publishers that make every issue possible.