

# Civil War Book Review

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Summer 2020

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## Summer 2020 Editorial

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### Recommended Citation

Hargroder, Andrew (2020) "Summer 2020 Editorial," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 3 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.22.3.01

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol22/iss3/1>

## Editorial

Andrew L. Hargroder  
Editor

Summer 2020

Once again, the Editorial Staff of the *Civil War Book Review* is honored to feature timely and important Civil War and Reconstruction-era scholarship for our Summer 2020 issue. This issue is shorter than usual, encompassing one feature work and interview, and thirteen book reviews. However, the gravity of scholarship and its relevance to our present crisis far exceed the lack of quantity. The content of this issue addresses a wide range of themes in Civil War scholarship. Several books survey the invaluable roles and experiences of Native peoples, immigrants, POWs, and women in shaping the war. Another prominent subject is the ideological and political battle over secession that drew inspiration from the revolutions in Europe and ultimately created the Confederate States of America. However, the dominant theme of scholarship reviewed in this issue is the politics of race and racism. The political struggles of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, over who should and should not have access to the full rights and privileges of American citizenship, was the great crisis of that century and it remains at the heart of our current crisis.

Our issue opens with an interview of Nicole M. Turner about her new book, *Soul Liberty: The Evolution of Black Religious Politics in Postemancipation Virginia*. Shakeel Harris provides us with the review of Turner's insightful and timely work. *Soul Liberty* explores how black religious institutions served as political centers for freed people as they fought for freedom, citizenship, and autonomy in the decades after the Civil War. Black churches formed impressive networks and coalitions during Reconstruction to advance their communities and civil rights. In addition to violent backlash by conservatives and ex-Confederates, the Readjuster Movement failed to recognize the demands of black humanity, compelling its demise and the imposition of Jim Crow. Dr. Turner argues that this unwillingness of this broad coalition to recognize black humanity should prompt us to think about our own time and the need to keep saying "'Black Lives Matter' until it rings fully true." Next is Andrew Turner's review of Paul D. Escott's *The Worst Passions of Human Nature: White Supremacy in the Civil War North*. Escott's monograph

is a detailed investigation of white supremacy in the northern press during the Civil War. The ubiquity of racism in the northern press undermined the war effort and inspired brutal race riots in New York and in the Midwest. White supremacy was a “cancerous obstacle” during and after the war that not only threatened the course of the war, but the advancement of freedom and civil rights during Reconstruction and beyond.

The subject of race and politics receives further attention in Brian P. Luskey’s *Men is Cheap*, reviewed by Holly A. Pinheiro, Jr. *Men is Cheap* approaches this topic from an inconspicuous angle: the role of U.S. Army finances, logistics, and recruitment. Though Luskey focuses principally on northern cities and U.S. Army labor brokers, his findings illustrate how, as Pinheiro Jr. states, “capitalism, class dynamics, and labor speculation” underlay the “successes and shortcomings of U.S. Army recruitment.” Despite the popular, 19<sup>th</sup> century beliefs of patriotism and masculinity, wealthy white men did not turn out to enlist in high numbers, prompting the implementation of bounties which disproportionately and negatively impacted working class men and, most notably, formerly enslaved men.

The political struggles of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras spilled over into legal battles and social contests over the war’s meaning that defined aspects of American life well into the twentieth century. Next is Daniel Crofts’s review of Steve Luxenburg’s *Separate: The Story of Plessy v. Ferguson and America's Journey From Slavery to Segregation*. As Crofts notes, Luxenburg’s book is not merely an account of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*; it is a thorough examination of “why a nation that rewrote its Constitution to embrace the principle of equality defaulted on that commitment.” That default remains a fundamental pathology in American society as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and struggle to fully commit to social and political equality. Politics and race also heavily influenced the contest over Civil War memory. Adam Domby’s *The False Cause: Fraud, Fabrication, and White Supremacy in Confederate Memory*, reviewed by Gaines Foster, brings this issue front and center. Domby confronts the myths of the Lost Cause and its role in fostering an “undemocratic one-party control of the South by providing a historical narrative that justified violence and oppression and fostered a white identity.” (Domby, 4) Gaines Foster’s generous review situates Domby’s work as a fine addition to scholarship on Civil War memory.

In addition to the powerful work on race and politics, recent scholarship continues to examine the significant wartime roles and experiences of women, Native peoples, immigrants,

and POWs. First in this group is Brianna Kirk's review of Thavolia Glymph's, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation*. Glymph not only examines how the war transformed women's lives and gender relations, but how black and white women played critical roles in shaping emancipation, Confederate nationalism, the Union war effort, and Reconstruction. Clint Crowe's *Caught in the Maelstrom: The Indian Nations in the Civil War, 1861-1865* provides an insightful account of the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi West and the war's impact on the Five Nations of Indian Territory. Reviewed by James F. Brooks, *Caught in the Maelstrom* joins the ranks of other contemporary work which seeks to illuminate the experiences and roles of Native peoples and the Civil War's course away from the hailed battlefields of the East. Of particular note is Crowe's discussion of the agency of the Five Nations and the persistent legacies of the war that still harm the Native descendants of the Civil War generation.

The subject of immigrants and POWs in the Civil War has a long place in American historiography. Two reviews in this issue, David Dixon on Zachary S. Garrison's *German Americans on the Middle Border* and Holly Pinheiro Jr. on Evan A. Kutzler's *Living by Inches*, provide us with glimpses of how this scholarship is expanding into new territory. Garrison's work examines the notable contribution of German Americans to the political struggles of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, beyond their service in the war. Kutzler's book dives into the lived experience of captivity for POWs, literally how they sensed their everyday struggle for survival. Another notable historiographical shift can be found in the ideological and political fights over secession. Two works in particular, Ann L. Tucker's *Newest Born of Nations* and Niels Eichorn's *Liberty and Slavery*, reveal the degree to which southern slaveholders and secessionists drew inspiration from abroad to justify their political revolution to form a slaveholding nation. William Nester reviewed both books and provides us with a great synopsis of how trans-Atlantic events shaped the motivation of secessionists. Last in this group is Kevin Pawlak's review of *Seceding from Secession: The Civil War, Politics, and the Creation of West Virginia*. Eric J. Wittenburg, Edmund A. Sargus, Jr., and Penny L. Barrick's book explores the rancorous political fight over secession in Virginia and the other factors that lead to the establishment of West Virginia.

Finally, to conclude the Summer issue, we have two books that feature Abraham Lincoln. The first review is by Frank J. Williams on Ted Widmer's *Lincoln on the Verge: Thirteen Days*

*to Washington*. Widmer's book offers an in-depth look at Lincoln's journey through eight states from his home in Illinois to Washington, D.C. It also provides an intimate look at Lincoln as President-Elect, before the turmoil that erupted into civil war. Second is Meg Groeling's review of *The President vs. the Press* by Harold Holzer. In a period rife with disinformation and "fake news," Holzer's work provides a fresh perspective on the media's long and fraught relationship with the president. We hope that you enjoy these reviews and stay tuned for the next issue!

In closing, I want to offer my farewell and gratitude. I have accepted a fulltime historian position and the *Civil War Book Review* will soon be under new leadership. I am confident that the incoming Editor will preserve the best of our journal and improve it tremendously. I greatly anticipate the work of the new Editor and appreciate the invaluable experiences and connections I have made as a part of this organization.