

The Vibrancy of Civil War Era Studies

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Editorial

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The feature essays and books reviewed in this issue cover a range of topics: engagement with unpublished historical documents; the relationship between humans and animals and contagions in the Civil War era; war finance; Native American policies; crony capitalism and “immunocapitalism”; free people of color and their antiracist activism in regional, national, and transnational contexts; nationalism(s) and religion; devotees to democracy; public mourning; and stubbornly committed educators. In short, this issue, like so many previous ones, reflects the vibrancy and dynamism of Civil War-era studies.

While serial essayist Meg Groeling usually writes about a particular published piece that she believes will broaden our understanding of the Civil War era and its people, for this issue’s *Civil War Obscura*, she has focused instead on unpublished historical texts. To demonstrate how a single document can reveal more than meets the eye, Groeling examines an ancestor’s appeal to the U.S. Army’s Claims Department for recompense for the horse he lost while serving in the Civil War. The Department’s response exposes officers’ elitism and classism while showing what can be gleaned from a single source.

Horses remain the focus in stalwart contributor Hans Rasmussen’s “The Spoils of the Turf,” in this issue’s *Civil War Treasures* feature essay. Rasmussen uses documents from three manuscript collections in L.S.U.’s Lower Mississippi Valley Collections to reveal the intersection of southern slavery and high-stakes horseracing in nineteenth-century New York. He accomplishes this by tracing the story of a Louisiana planter’s thoroughbred racehorse as it was confiscated by U.S. soldiers during their occupation of the Pelican State, auctioned off, and then raced at Saratoga Springs Race Course in 1863.

Ingram Darcy reviews the Earl J. Hess-edited *Animal Histories of the Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2022), in which, yet again, horses figure prominently, though they are hardly the only beast of burden the historians examine. Indeed, Darcy writes that by the book’s end, readers will have learned about “camels imported in the South for transportation . . .

pigs' multifaceted relationship to wartime economics and politics . . . wildlife in varied forms and contexts" as well as "animals in contexts that might be considered broadly as entertainment." Darcy believes *Animal Histories of the Civil War* demonstrates that "there is a wealth of knowledge to be gained from bringing together the fields of Civil War history and animal history."

Moving on from beast, fish, and fowl, two reviewed books examine Lincoln administration policies. In this issue's *Look at Lincoln*, longtime contributor Frank J. Williams reviews Roger Lowenstein's *Ways and Means: Lincoln and His Cabinet and the Financing of the Civil War* (Penguin, 2022). Lowenstein reveals how the Lincoln administration employed "economic innovations" that refocused wartime funding away from New York's financial institutions and onto the American middle class. Williams praises Lowenstein's ability to explain complex funding issues "in a clear and enjoyable manner avoiding what could potentially become a mind-numbing summary of financial data," which makes it "a worthy addition to any reader's bookshelf."

Michael S. Green's *Lincoln and Native Americans* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2021) is what reviewer Scott W. Berg calls a "parallel history or history by proximity." The book investigates Lincoln's relationship to Native Americans, both before and during his presidency, as well as Native American history in the era of Lincoln. Berg writes that in Green's hands, the two stories "wind along side by side, sometimes coming within sight of one another but rarely mixing waters." One of the highlights of this "valuable volume," Berg writes, is Green's "discussion of the effects of the obscene monetary spoils available for non-elected officials by way of the federal patronage system."

Michael John Witgen's *Seeing Red: Indigenous Land, American Expansion, and the Political Economy of Plunder in North America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022) similarly exposes how white Americans financially benefitted from the government's policies toward Native Americans. Reviewer Eliot Fackler writes that Witgen discovered "conquest was facilitated by a 'political economy of plunder' in which a coercive and duplicitous treaty process combined with the debt claims made by Indian agents, traders, and merchants to systematically separate Native nations from their land and annuity payments" (19). Fackler believes Witgen's "nuanced, yet forcefully argued study deserves a wide readership."

Kenneth H. Wheeler begins his story of industrial growth in Georgia with Cherokee removal, which opened North Georgia to the railroad industry. As the railroad companies laid their tracks, they simultaneously laid the groundwork for industrial capitalism in Georgia. Reviewer Michael Frawley writes that *Modern Cronies: Southern Industrialism from Gold Rush to Convict Labor, 1829 – 1894* (University of Georgia Press, 2021) “shows in microcosm the struggles that industrialists faced in the South, navigating a slave society, and bending it to modern ends and the development of the networks so important to the expansion of interconnected business enterprises in the intersection between the industrial and political worlds.”

Kathryn Olivarius discovers a different kind of capitalism in *Necropolis: Disease, Power, and Capitalism in the Cotton Kingdom* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2022). Reviewer Margaret Humphreys writes that Olivarius’s book is “rich in thick descriptions of [New Orleans’s] fevered environment,” in which elite white New Orleanians who survived their “first ‘seasoning’” of yellow fever exploited their developed immunity to expand their wealth and power until scientific advancements and more interventionist state and federal regimes stymied their influence. Humphreys writes that Olivarius’s work is an “excellent reconsideration of the impact of yellow fever on a major southern trading port in the antebellum era.”

Catherine Bateson reviews Mat Callahan’s *Songs of Slavery and Emancipation* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022). The book is part of Callahan’s larger project that includes “immersive reading and multimedia, with an accompanying CD . . . and a documentary film.” While the book is not a traditional history book, Bateson is confident that if readers come to it with that in mind, they will see “there is much to be gained.” Ultimately, Bateson writes that Callahan shows “how enslaved and abolitionist songs in America became ‘a powerful weapon against slavery and anti-Black racism,’ still holding great relevance to this day” (18).

Three books reviewed herein explore the experiences of free Black people and people of color in the Civil War era. First is Warren Milteer Jr.’s *Beyond Slavery’s Shadow: Free People of Color in the South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), reviewed by Evelyn Wilson. Milteer’s book traces the trajectory of free people of color’s experience from the colonial era when they “and people raced white lived as neighbors, worked together, prayed together, and fought together” through the nineteenth century when “‘proslavery radicals and white supremacists,’” circumscribed their rights and attempted to “exile free people of color from their

respective states” because they believed their very presence alongside the institution of slavery weakened proslavery arguments. Wilson believes Milteer’s book is an “important” work that helps “fill [a] gap in knowledge” of free people of colors' lives.

In his review of Holly A. Pinheiro Jr.’s *The Families Civil War: Black Soldiers and the Fight for Racial Justice* (University of Georgia Press, 2022), John David Smith writes that the author examines how “encounters with the pervasive White racism of their day influenced Black families across generations—affecting their often dire financial problems, their housing, and their health,” which Pinheiro terms “‘The War After the War.’” Though Pinheiro “focuses mainly . . . on the hardships experienced by the soldiers’ working-class or working-poor families,” the book pays attention to the soldiers’ wartime experience, especially “the dangers, exigencies, and indignities of military life.” Smith concludes that “*The Families’ Civil War* is a welcome addition to scholarship on the USCT, family history, and Philadelphia.”

dann J. Broyld looks farther north, to the Niagara region, to investigate “Black transnationalism” in the U.S.-Canadian borderlands in *Borderland Blacks: Two Cities in the NIAGARA REGION during the Final Decades of Slavery* (Louisiana State University Press, 2022). Reviewer Jennifer J. Thompson Burns writes that Broyld provides a “pivotal new understanding of the geopolitics and the confluences of the Underground Railroad and Black mobility, identity, and abolitionism on both sides of the American-Canadian border in Western New York.” Thompson Burns is confident *Borderland Blacks* “solidifies” Broyld as a scholar “at the forefront in the fields of Black transnational identity.”

Two books under review investigate national identity in the nineteenth-century U.S. Mark Power Smith’s *Young America: The Transformation of Nationalism before the Civil War* (University of Virginia Press, 2022) explains that Young America Democrats sought to foster “an intellectual culture” that would “‘legitimate and guide the nation’” predicated on liberal concepts like natural rights as well as “Democratic opposition to federal control,” that when coupled with their embrace of scientific racism, created an “unholy trinity of ‘states’ rights, popular sovereignty, and white supremacy” (28). However, European liberals embraced “‘more interventionist forms of liberalism,’” which made the Young Americans’ liberalism conservative by comparison. Reviewer Susan-Mary Grant admits that her review “can hardly do justice to the complexities” of Smith’s book, which she describes as a “detailed and careful study.”

Gracjan Kraszewski's *Catholic Confederates: Faith and Duty in the Civil War South* (Kent State University Press, 2020), uses the construct of "Confederatization," to understand how and why Catholic laypeople and clergy—bishops, priests, and nuns—"did accommodate well to the Confederacy." Some accommodated so well that they became "Confederate heroes." Reviewer David T. Gleeson writes that Kraszewski "is to be commended" for "initiating . . . conversations" about this population that has been understudied in Civil War-era religious studies.

Clayton J. Butler looks at white southerners who avoided accommodating to the Confederacy in *True Blue: White Unionists in the Deep South During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Louisiana State University Press, 2022). Reviewer Daniel W. Crofts writes that "Butler has breathed life into a phenomenon" by studying a "'tiny minority'" of white Unionists who fought alongside African Americans to preserve the United States, which earned them the epithets "traitors and Tories" (166). Butler shows that the white Unionists' deep-seated white supremacy, however, rent apart this wartime alignment during Reconstruction. Crofts believes Butler's text is a "capable and welcome monograph" that challenges the myth that the Civil War was a "triumph of moral principle."

Stephen John Mack reviews two books, written for two different audiences, that examine the relationship between Walt Whitman's Civil War service, his attitudes toward democracy, and his poetry. Mark Edmundson's *Song of Ourselves: Walt Whitman and the Fight for Democracy* (Harvard University Press, 2021) is intended to propel non-academic readers "into the spiritual, metaphysical, and material process of unification that Whitman weaves together to draft the poetic blueprint of the 'Democratic Everyman' that must necessarily ground and precede all democratic social and political life."

On the other hand, Kenneth M. Price's *Whitman in Washington: Becoming the National Poet in the Federal City* (Oxford University Press, 2020), offers readers more familiar with Whitman and his writing "biographical and critical treatments of [his] Washington, D.C. years," with an emphasis on his "'day job'" as a clerk in the Department of the Interior. Mack writes that Price demonstrates Whitman's work at the D.O.I. had "just as profound" an effect on Whitman's poetry as did his "work as a kind of comfort nurse" to U.S. soldiers. Ultimately, "without pointing it out explicitly, Price shows us that [while] Whitman's 1855 conception of democracy

may have been shaped by Jeffersonian individualist values, the democratic cast of his post-war work was decidedly Lincolnian in its reliance on a government of, by, and for the people.”

Sarah J. Purcell’s *Spectacles of Grief: Public Funerals and Memory in the Civil War Era* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022) looks at public funerals and public grieving around important figures in the Civil War era, including the likes of Henry Clay, Elmer Ellsworth, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Frederick Douglass, and more. What Purcell finds, writes reviewer Meg Groeling (pulling double duty this issue), is that public displays of grieving operated differently before and after the Civil War. Prominent peoples’ deaths before the Civil War forced Americans to ponder the nation’s future while public spectacles after the war gave Americans “another opportunity to regard the Civil War critically” and with a regional twist.

Finally, *Persistence Through Peril: Episodes of College Life and Academic Endurance in the Civil War South* (University Press of Mississippi, 2021), edited by Eric R. Platt and Holly A. Foster, reveals how Confederate colleges remained open during the war, and how the war allowed students and faculty to reimagine the collegiate experience. Reviewer Timothy Williams writes that it is important to acknowledge how these schools continued to operate despite confronting wartime violence and a dearth of students. Further, Williams believes that the essay collection resonates with our COVID-plagued world because educators and students then and now were forced to adapt to disruptions and adopt new ways of learning.

Educators today are forced to adapt to challenges and disruptions beyond COVID as conservative legislatures across the U.S. continue to attack intellectual freedom at every level of education. Florida’s House Bill 7, “An Act Relating to Individual Freedom”—commonly known as the “Stop Woke Act”—limits educators’ ability to teach the history of America’s racist, patriarchal, and heteronormative past (and present) candidly and honestly. Among the bill’s many elements is its revision to “required instruction on the history of African Americans” and the prohibition of “classroom instruction and curricula from being used to indoctrinate or persuade students in a manner inconsistent with certain principles or state academic standards.” The bill further states that:

It shall constitute discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sex . . . to subject any student . . . to instruction that espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels such student . . . to believe any of the following concepts: 1) Members of one race, color, national origin, or sex are morally superior to members of another race, color, national origin, or sex; 2) A person, by virtue of his or her race, color, national origin, or sex is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously; 3) A

person's moral character or status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily determined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex.¹

At first blush, these rules may seem reasonable. However, this bill is the result of revanchist white conservatives' continued attempts to cloak racist policies and ideas in colorblind language and the rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement. Further, the bill's language about lessons that make students "believe" or feel certain ways leaves tremendous room for mischief. Try as they might (and should), an instructor cannot predict what a certain lesson may make their students believe or how it may make them feel. And if a lesson makes a student believe or feel something other than what the instructor intended or hoped, that instructor may still be liable under this law. This bill's opaque language about beliefs and feelings will undoubtedly cause a paralysis in educators. 'How can I teach about white supremacy if it may make my students feel guilty about being white?' a teacher might ask herself. Perhaps she will conclude it's best to avoid the topic in the first place. This is likely the drafter's ultimate goal.²

This bill's effects can be seen in a presentation on the "Stop Woke Act" that North Florida College's attorney, Rob Sniffen, delivered on August 11, 2022. Sniffen's third slide notes that history classes are among "the most likely to be directly impacted by HB 7." In his seventh slide, Sniffen presents a hypothetical situation in which a "Mr. Allen" plans to teach his students about Jim Crow laws and civil rights activists' efforts to overturn them. While Sniffen explained that "Mr. Allen" could teach these subjects, he should "avoid making any statements that assign the blame for a act [*sic*] on any particular race."³ Of course, white southerners were solely responsible for the drafting, passage, implementation, and all-too-violent enforcement of Jim Crow laws. Lessons adhering to Sniffen's advice would teach students that Jim Crow laws merely appeared, manifested themselves, without the specific action of white people. Students cannot learn that the cause of Black oppression is white supremacy as that would lay the blame

¹ "An Act Relating to Individual Freedom," lines: 19, 25-26, 222-238.

² Karen R. Miller investigates race-neutral/colorblind language's roots in northern liberalism in *Managing Inequality: Northern Racial Liberalism in Interwar Detroit* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). Miller's notes display the robust scholarship, especially in sociology, on the usage of race-neutral/colorblind language to enact or protect racist policies. See for instance: Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); Leslie G. Carr, "*Color-Blind*" Racism (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1997); and Meghan A. burke, *Racial Ambivalence in Diverse Communities: Whiteness and the Power of Color-Blind Ideologies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

³ Mr. Sniffen's presentation was made public after Adam Steinbaugh pursued a Florida Sunshine Law request to North Florida College for the slideshow: <https://www.muckrock.com/foi/madison-10222/hb7-impact-north-florida-college-second-survey-132755/>

of Black oppression at a particular race's feet. To divorce Jim Crow laws from whiteness and white supremacy is to divorce them from the context in which they were created, to divorce them from facts, to divorce them from reality.

Educators must take an active stance and hold the line against the continued dissolution of academic freedom and concerted attacks on facts. This is especially true of administrators and tenured faculty at our universities and colleges. They have protections that allow them to speak truth to power that graduate students and contingent faculty do not have. This is an increasingly urgent matter. Florida (again) has passed Senate Bill 7044, which subjects faculty to increased post-tenure review, which threatens tenure. South Carolina's legislature is considering a bill that would eliminate professorial tenure entirely. These are unlikely to be the last attempts to stifle academic freedom. If we do not act now, we may never again have the chance to.⁴

Thank you for your continued support,
Jeffery Hardin Hobson
Editor, *Civil War Book Review*

⁴ Keith E. Whittington, "The Intellectual Freedom that Made Public Colleges Great is Under Threat," *Washington Post* December 15, 2021; Stephanie Hughes, "At Some Universities, Tenure May Become a Thing of the Past," *Marketplace*; Irene Mulvey, President of the American Association of University Presidents, "A Relentless Crusade to Destroy Higher Education in Florida," April 20, 2022; H. 4522, South Carolina General Assembly.