

Diversity of Civil War Era Studies

Jeffery Hardin Hobson
jhobso8@lsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Hobson, Jeffery Hardin (2022) "Diversity of Civil War Era Studies," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 4 .
DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.24.4.01
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol24/iss4/1>

Editorial

Hobson, Jeffery Hardin

Fall 2022

Reading through the contributions to the Fall 2022 issue of the *Civil War Book Review*, one notices unifying themes among the diverse books our contributors evaluate. The books explore and share subjects and themes including secession, emotions, Confederate widows and wives, extra-legal violence, and formal and informal politics. Though not all reviewed books share common themes, other subjects—maroons in the Great Dismal Swamp, a regimental history, and Civil War era libations—equally enrich our understanding of the Civil War era.

Two books examine secession—one a population study of secessionists and the other a microhistory of one secessionists' emotions. In *Rebels in the Making: The Secession Crisis and the Birth of the Confederacy*, William L. Barney reveals that southern separatists, namely young Breckinridge-aligned planters, succeeded in seceding by propagating “utopian visions” and conspiracy theories that amounted to a nineteenth-century Big Lie, writes reviewer Daniel W. Crofts. In sum, “Barney contributes to the twin causes of racial justice and historical truth,” Crofts concludes.

Anna Koivusalo examines arch-secessionist James Chesnut's emotions in *The Man Who Started the Civil War: James Chesnut, Honor, and Emotion in the American South*. Reviewer R. Boyd Murphree writes that Koivusalo expands our understanding of honor, which she demonstrates was an emotion, “not just a code of conduct.” *The Man Who Started the Civil War* “is academic in the best sense of the word: analytic, revelatory, and innovative,” Murphree writes.

Angela Esco Elder explores the emotions of Confederate widows in *Love & Duty: Confederate Widows and the Emotional Politics of Loss*. Not only does Elder reveal Confederate widows' multifarious emotions but also how the Confederate state exploited their grief to advance the Confederate cause. Esco's *Love & Duty* “adds to the growing history of emotions during the Civil War,” and will become required reading for those interested in southern women and emotionality, writes reviewer Daniel Kotzin.

The Confederate state similarly exploited Confederate soldiers' wives' special social status, Kristen Brill exposes in *The Weaker Sex in War: Gender and Nationalism in Civil War Virginia*. Further, Brill also explains that Civil War soldiers' wives leveraged their special social status to advance their own personal interests, though their own political rights were not among the interests they pursued. Reviewer J. Matthew Ward writes that Brill "artfully explains how Southern white women could transcend their traditional household roles without sacrificing those roles," which makes *The Weaker Sex* a "significant contribution to the historiography of the Civil War and ... to American women's and gender studies."

Bradley R. Clampitt explores Confederates "emotional lives" as they transitioned from soldiers to civilians in *Lost Causes: Confederate Demobilization and the Making of Veteran Identity*. Reviewer Tracy L. Barnett writes that by using a large sample of sources including letters, journals, and questionnaires collected from Tennessee soldiers who fought in all the war's theaters, Clampitt reveals "the Confederate mindset and details the on-the-ground process of southern demobilization" as the soldiers moved from the battlefield to the homefront.

Steven Cowie reveals what happened when the homefront became the battlefield in *When Hell Came to Sharpsburg: The Battle of Antietam and its Impact on the Civilians Who Called it Home*. Reviewer Annabelle Blevins Pifer writes that "from the beginning Cowie thrusts you into the lives of Sharpsburg residents" and demonstrates the town's civilians had no choice but to become part of the war. The two armies interrupted their daily lives, caused damage to their property that was rarely remunerated, initiated ecological changes, and spread disease through their community. *When Hell Came to Sharpsburg*, Pifer writes, is "a phenomenal resource for anyone who is researching the social impacts of the American Civil War."

Ernest A. Dollar Jr. examines the soldiers' and civilians' experiences during some of the last battles of Civil War in North Carolina in *Hearts Torn Asunder: Trauma in the Civil War's Final Campaign in North Carolina*. Civilians suffered from depredation from both armies, despite commanders' attempts to prevent plunder and violence. And, Dollar writes, much of that behavior resulted from soldiers' post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which compelled many to alcoholism and opiate addiction. Reviewer Jonathan M. Atkins writes that "*Hearts Torn Asunder* is a worthwhile read" that "will quickly disabuse readers tempted to view the Civil War as a romantic or heroic crusade."

Three books scrutinize extra-legal violence in nineteenth-century America. In *The Republic of Violence: The Tormented Rise of Abolition in Andrew Jackson's America*, J.D. Dickey contends the white-supremacist violence abolitionists endured and repelled was rooted in the Jackson administration, its policies, and the white workingmen's politics Jackson advanced and relied upon. Reviewer Scott Gac understands Dickey's impulse to situate Jackson at the headwaters of white supremacist violence but points out that broader anti-black agitation preceded the seventh president.

Former journalist Robert C. Conner looks at how violence was part of jayhawker James Montgomery's life before and during the Civil War in *James Montgomery: Abolitionist Warrior*. As reviewer John Daley notes, Conner's book is only the second full-length biography of Montgomery, the "least known or written about of those inconvenient heroes" of Bleeding Kansas. "Conner's stated mission in this ... work is to help the reader understand rather than forgive," Daley writes. He concludes that, "In this [Conner] succeeds."

Historians have long focused on violence's permeation of the postwar South. However, in *The War After the War: A New History of Reconstruction*, John Patrick Daly argues that the violence was so elemental to, so pervasive through and organized in the postbellum South that it constituted a new war—a Southern Civil War. Reviewer Xiaoxiao Li writes that Daly's "lively military history" reveals that White southerners waged a war of violent terror to control the former-Confederate states' governments. Further, Daly finds resonances between the war after the war in the U.S. and the aftermath of other civil wars in world history.

Andrea G. McDowell illuminates the informal politics, often backed with threats of violence, that California gold miners practiced in the heady days following 1849 in *We the Miners: Self Government in the California Gold Rush*. Without governmental institutions, the miners developed their own democratic bodies to establish rules, dispense justice, and confront monopolists who threatened their livelihoods and independence. These bodies' use of violence, especially against racial minorities, reveal the consequences of unbound democracy, however. Reviewer John Suval writes that McDowell "does admirable work unearthing overlooked dimensions of U.S. democracy and frontier law, while enriching our understanding of a storied chapter of American history."

Archivist Hans Rasmussen analyzes sources housed in LSU's special collections that shed light on the formal, if chaotic, politics of the 1872 election in Louisiana in this issue's *Civil*

War Treasures. Rasmussen uses several sources from Hill Memorial Library, including a satirical book, political cartoons, and election returns to examine the Republican Party's factionalism in the election of 1872 in Louisiana.

In *Dismal Freedom: A History of the Maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp*, J. Brent Morris uncovers the lives of people who self liberated and the communities they developed in the Great Dismal Swamp. Reviewer Ashley Towle writes that among the important revelations the book provides is that the maroons' communities were more robust and persisted longer than previously understood and their very presence undermined the institution of slavery. Morris's book "deserves high praise" as it is a "readable and engaging account of the Dismal Swamp maroons and their contributions to ending slavery."

In *The Chicago Board of Trade Battery in the Civil War*, Dennis W. Belcher not only illuminates the experiences of the battery's men, but "also sheds new light on artillery units" which reviewer Christopher M. Rein writes is "a topic of recent interest among military historians of the war." The book is an "essential building block" from which future researchers will "benefit," Rein concludes.

Reviewer Thomas F. Curran writes that *The Long Civil War: New Explorations of America's Enduring Conflict*, edited by John David Smith and Raymond Arsenault provides an "expansive spectrum of scholarship being produced" on the Civil War era "that employs a broader chronological understanding of the war." The collected essays investigate several aspects of the Civil War era—antebellum antislaveryism, Civil War commanders and their tactics, disabled veterans and veteran suicide, historical memory of Lincoln, including that of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the historiography of slavery, and the Civil War era in film culture. The book "provides a taste" of the sweeping chronological approach to Civil War studies.

And finally, in anticipation of the approaching winter holidays, stalwart contributor Meg Groeling shares a collection of historic drink recipes that will surely add spice to wintry merrymaking. Jerry Thomas's *Bartender's Guide, 1862 Reprint: Containing Receipts for Mixing All Kinds of . . . Fancy Drinks* provides recipes, histories, and measurement equivalencies that makes the book "funny, charming, and informative," Groeling writes." In short, the book "deserves some love," she believes.

Individually, the books reviewed in this issue of the *Civil War Book Review* reveal the diversity of topics historians are investigating today. Together, they reveal the themes, some new

some familiar, that historians believe will continue to help us better understand the Civil War era—emotions, gender, violence, and democracy.

Thank you,
Jeffery Hardin Hobson
Editor, *Civil War Book Review*