

Adding Up Postbellum Economics

Morgan Knull

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

Recommended Citation

Knull, Morgan (1999) "Adding Up Postbellum Economics," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 .
Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol1/iss2/30>

Editorial

ADDING UP POSTBELLUM ECONOMICS

Knull, Morgan

Fall 1999

This issue represents a milestone in several respects. I am pleased to announce that David Madden, novelist and founding director of the United States Civil War Center, has agreed to contribute a regular column to our pages, to be devoted to classics. We are embarking on a quarterly publishing schedule, so readers may look forward to four issues during 2000. In addition to subscription by mail, *Civil War Book Review* now is available for purchase at Books-A-Million stores nationwide. And our free electronic edition, located at www.cwbr.com, features the entire contents of the print edition plus scores of book annotations unique to the Web site. Check it out!

Book reviewing is fraught with the usual human vagaries, which may explain how the same work can be given conflicting treatment in different reviews.

In our Summer issue, Kent Gramm reviewed enthusiastically *Runaway Slaves* by John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger (Oxford University Press, \$35.00, ISBN 0195084497). As fall approached, I saw a review published elsewhere that received the book less warmly, suggesting that it fails to acknowledge the long-term social consequences of slavery. Deceit and defiance may be natural responses to bondage, but what happens when they persist beyond their necessity? This question lately has assumed particular salience in regard to Russia's bumpy transition to liberal democracy. Like the newly freed slaves, Soviets were reared in circumstances that encouraged-and sometimes necessitated-lawbreaking. It is no easy task to foster the rule of law or to restore familial harmony and work ethic where they have long been absent or suppressed. Such is the inheritance of collective history, which, though not chosen by them, still profoundly affects individuals.

To recognize the courage required to both acknowledge and move beyond the past must not discourage its undertaking. Were not slaves -- just as the post-serf and post-Soviet Russians -- better off as freedmen? At last summer's

annual Deep Delta Civil War Symposium, James G. Hollandsworth, author of *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Louisiana State University Press, \$34.95, ISBN0807122939), told of New Hampshire captain Jonathan Johnson, who was stationed in South Louisiana during the War. Writing home, Johnson described the freed women who visited the Union encampment to do washing. When another soldier asked one of the women if she preferred working on her own to slavery, she replied unhesitatingly: "I had a great deal rather work hard and be my own mistress, for what I learn now is my own and I can do with it as I like."

Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers (University Press of Florida, \$24.95, ISBN 0813016460), an account of Reconstruction in Florida by John T. Foster, Jr., and Sarah Whitmer Foster, captures a different aspect of post-slavery economics. "Planters also turned to contracting with former slaves to resume work on their farms," the authors note. "Those planters known for being 'cruel' often found themselves without laborers." Not only working conditions improved with the demise of the slave economy; so also did the cause of human dignity. As the Louisiana washerwoman put it: "I have worked for a mistress as long as I want to. I want to live by myself." Even when reviewers cannot agree on a book's purpose, merit, or style, the testimony of those who directly experience history speaks for itself.