

Limits Of Loyalty: A Rediscovered Diary Reveals Atlanta's Underground Unionists

Mark E. Neely

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

Recommended Citation

Neely, Mark E. (2000) "Limits Of Loyalty: A Rediscovered Diary Reveals Atlanta's Underground Unionists," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.2.1.18

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol2/iss1/18>

Review

LIMITS OF LOYALTY

A rediscovered diary reveals Atlanta's underground unionists

Neely, Jr., Mark E.

Winter 2000

Dyer, Thomas G. *Secret Yankees: The Union Circle in Confederate Atlanta.*
Johns Hopkins University Press, ISBN 801861160

Ever since the historical discovery of internal opposition to the Confederacy as described in Frank L. Owsley's 1925 book, *State Rights in the Confederacy*, the subject has fascinated scholars of Southern history even while proving curiously unmanageable. For all his genius in puncturing the Lost Cause myth of white solidarity in the Confederacy, Owsley sent historians down the wrong path and marginalized unionism. Opposition to the Confederacy from state rights motives seems anti-Union and ultra-secessionist; more importantly, serious opposition to the Confederacy by no means followed state lines. East Tennessee and West Virginia wanted to join the Union rather than assert the state rights of Tennessee and Virginia.

Much of the literature written since Owsley's day on internal opposition to the Confederacy has emphasized class warfare among whites. Yet such emphasis on social class hardly squares with the regional nature of the most serious opposition -- again, East Tennessee and West Virginia offer obvious examples. A focus on class likewise ignores political ideology, patriotism, and another obvious basis of opposition for some confederate citizens, Northern birth.

In **Secret Yankees**, Thomas G. Dyer has uncovered another group of people in opposition to the confederacy, and his book provides the best picture yet offered of urban dissenters in the Confederacy. The "secret Yankees" he discovered in Atlanta -- white, black, rich, poor, men, and women -- follow no particular pattern, though Northern birth may be the most salient factor for the white dissenters, and all were apparently unionists. The South had been kind to many of them and they appeared assimilated. Several were well-to-do financially and some were slaveholders. Nevertheless, "the Union circle" around Cyrena

Stone, whose diary formed the crucial piece of evidence for this book, aided Federal prisoners of war in Atlanta, sympathized with Confederate deserters, hid spies, and offered information to Federal authorities.

The submerged world of Cyrena Stone, a Vermont-born Yankee in Jefferson Davis's Atlanta, provides the focus of this work, which is chronologically organized. The very best part of this good book lies in an appendix, "In Search of Miss Abby" (Stone's *nom de plume*), which I suggest reading first. It describes the author's research and problems regarding sources, from the first appearance of the anonymous diary in the hands of a manuscript dealer in 1976 to the full-fledged historical narrative appearing in this book over 20 years later. I cannot imagine a more interesting description of the process of writing an archivally driven piece of history than this appendix.

If anything, perhaps, the archival research tyrannizes a bit over the book, and there is an abundance of detail -- furniture inventories, exact escape routes north, and local addresses in Atlanta -- presented at the expense of analysis. The absence of persons prominent in the customary grand narrative of Confederate history adds to the confusion, as there are many characters and all the biographical details are new.

But why should anyone complain of new-ness in a Civil War book? Thomas G. Dyer offers an important and original portrait of one form of opposition to the Confederacy, and his book deserves the notice of all who are interested in the history of the Confederacy as something more than the gallant struggles of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Mark E. Neely, Jr., McCabe-Greer Professor of Civil War History at Pennsylvania State University, won a Pulitzer Prize in history for his book, The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties.