

The Vitality of Civil War History

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Editorial

THE VITALITY OF CIVIL WAR HISTORY

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As we enter deeper into the Civil War Sesquicentennial, we become more fully aware of how little we truly understand about the Civil War and the decades surrounding the four years of conflict. Thousands of books have attempted to explore and explain countless topics but a clearer and more nuanced understanding of previously trodden subjects remains vital. The beauty of studying the Civil War (and all of history for that matter) lays in the fact that we are constantly uncovering new questions, just as we begin to answer earlier ones. Additionally, the answers that we have discovered over the course of the last one 150 years, often leave us unsatisfied, encouraging us to look again, to ask again, and to attempt to re-explain certain aspects of Civil War and Civil War-era history. The Spring 2011 issue of *Civil War Book Review* serves as a product of the remaining vitality of Civil War history.

This quarter, our celebration of the Civil War soldier continues with an image of George Kimbrue, a Private in the 93rd Indiana Infantry, United States Army. Kimbrue's tintype provides us with a great opportunity to see the kinds of arms and armaments that Union soldiers carried throughout the Civil War.

Our first feature review, that exhibits the vitality of re-assessing what we think we know about Civil War-era history, *Slavery, Civil War, and Salvation: African American Slaves and Christianity, 1830-1870* by Daniel Fountain, challenges long-held beliefs that slaves adopted Christianity with great enthusiasm, suggesting that, only after emancipation, did African Americans flock to Christianity. In *Border War: Fighting over Slaver before the Civil War*, Stanley Harrold examines the vital role of the border states in the years leading up to the Civil War, posturing that this middle ground provided the heart of North-South tension and the primary catalyst to civil war, not the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Next, David Powell tackles the task of criticizing the Confederate cavalry commanders, Nathan Bedford Forrest and Joseph Wheeler, challenging long-held admiration for the leadership and command of these two soldiers in *Failure in the Saddle: Nathan Bedford*

Forrest, Joseph Wheeler, and the Confederate Cavalry in the Chickamauga Campaign. Seemingly untouchable for many years, Powell takes these two commanders to task by looking at their leadership during the Chickamauga Campaign and providing a valuable example of military scholarship. Finally, Randall Fuller, in *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature*, shows how the Civil War drastically altered the social outlook and personal reflective of many of America's great literary minds in his excellent study on the ways in which the war experience shaped American literature for many years.

Anne Marshall's recent study, *Creating a Confederate Kentucky: The Lost Cause and Civil War Memory in a Border State*, reminds us, yet again, that we can often understand our present by understanding our past while asking us to re-examine the unique experience of Kentucky during the war that made it a Confederate state without even seceding. She graciously granted *Civil War Book Review* with our author interview this quarter during which she discusses many of questions raised by and explained in this book.

In our Civil War Treasures column this Spring, Leah Wood Jewett provides an example of the political intuitiveness of women on the eve of the Civil War. While unable to vote, women played an active role in the political discussion, often participating enthusiastically in the conversation surrounding secession.

Frank Williams, in his Look at Lincoln series, examines the recent work by Richard Lawrence Miller in *Lincoln and His World: Volume 3, the Rise to National Prominence, 1843-1853*. Williams suggests that Miller has successfully provided a treasure trove of information, quotations, and analysis of Lincoln on a personal level that we can use to better understand his ascent to the presidency and his years in office.

Civil War Book Review would like to call our readers' attention to the Essential Civil War Curriculum, a sesquicentennial project of the Virginia Center for the Civil War Studies. The new, live website <http://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/> is a wonderful source that features many important resources for educators and anyone with a thirst for Civil War knowledge. Please take a moment to stop and take a look at their site.

No contribution remains more vital than the continued support of the LSU Libraries and Special Collections. Additionally, editorial assistant, reviewers,

publishers, technological support team, authors, and countless other individuals help to make *Civil War Book Review* the best possible product that it can be; this Spring 2011 issue is a testament to that collective effort.