

The More We Know, the Less We Understand

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Recommended Citation

Buman, Nathan (2012) "The More We Know, the Less We Understand," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.14.2.01

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol14/iss2/1>

Editorial

THE MORE WE KNOW, THE LESS WE UNDERSTAND

Spring 2012

The series of public service announcements, *The More You Know*, stresses the importance of education and the benefits of involving oneself in the education of themselves, our children, and any of those around us who will possibly listen. It provides excellent advice and Civil War scholars have, for generations, ascribed to this concept, never failing to push new questions about myriad aspects of the Civil War. Sometimes, when we look out from the mountaintop of the Civil War scholarship to date, we realize the extraordinary vastness of this topic and the innumerable directions in which the investigation can continue in the future. As I have suggested previously, the more questions we ask of our historical studies, the more questions we seem to uncover; it seems as if the best studies leave us with more fresh questions than we have answers from the work itself. Fortunately, this trend means that Civil War studies are alive and well. We cannot see even a hint of slowing down on the horizon and our interest in the period and a (perhaps unachievable, yet legitimate) goal of understanding the war and those who lived through the mid-nineteenth century remains vibrant. The featured works from this, the Spring 2012 issue of *Civil War Book Review*, highlight the success of scholarship to date, and the promise of the future.

This quarter, we have chosen as our editorial image, a portrait of Private Charles H. Halstead who served in Company A, 52nd Illinois Infantry, who appears with an unidentified Union soldier.

Charity Carney's *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* focuses on the role that Methodist preachers played in the construction of southern honor, revealing that they faced difficult challenges and unique contradictions in seeking to carve out their living in the antebellum South. *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism & the American South, 1848-1865*, by Paul Quigley, explores the concept of nationalism for southerners during this period. How could Southerners carve out an independent nation under the pretext of ardent nationalism, Quigley asks, and what did this term mean to them in the first place? On the other side of that very same coin, Mark E. Neely Jr. explores

Constitutionalism and Abraham Lincoln's interpretation of this document in *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War*. In this challenging and insightful book, Neely reminds us that "the Constitution sits at the boundary between patriotism and nationalism," and he shows us the complexity of that statement, to Americans, North and South, during the Civil War years. Finally, Albert Castel and Brooks D. Simpson explore northern strategy and leaders in *Victors in Blue: How Union Generals Fought the Confederates, Battled Each Other, and Won the Civil War*. Castel and Simpson delve into the study of northern leadership to better understand the leadership that finally tipped the balance in the North's favor as the Civil War progressed, stressing the inter-personal relationships of northern commanders and their role in victory for the Union.

Nicole Etcheson, author of the Avery O. Craven Award-winning *A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community*, spoke with Civil War Book Review about her complex analysis of Putnam County, Indiana. She very successfully uses a single county in a northern state to illustrate how the Civil War provided a watershed moment for a small community as it sought to navigate through the difficult years and cope with the reality of the national struggle while seeking to make sense of the conflict that it had endured.

We truly value Frank J. Williams's contribution to this issue which focuses on two recent publications by Southern Illinois University Press, Kenneth J. Winkle's *Abraham and Mary Lincoln*, and Gregory A. Borchard's *Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greely*. In this piece, Williams uses these works to analyze the relationships between Abraham Lincoln and those around him in order to better understand Lincoln, the person.

Michael Taylor, our Special Collections columnist, has provided a very interesting piece that highlights the role of music and written word played as the Civil War generation dealt with the war. *Civil War Book Review* thanks all of those reviewers, writers, and readers who have contributed to this and all issues. The entire community continues to mean a great deal to the success of this scholarly journal as we seek a better understanding of the Civil War period.