

Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation

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Review

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Janney, Caroline *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. University of North Carolina Press, \$35.00 ISBN 978-1-4696-0706-1

Remembering the war while restoring the Union

At 3:00 PM on July 3, 2013 several hundred Union re-enactors and thousands of spectators stood along the stone wall at Gettysburg and watched an even larger number of Confederate re-enactors and modern civilians recreate General George Pickett's great charge on its 150th anniversary. As the cameras clicked and rebel yells filled the air, the world watched as the National Park Service commemorated one of the most spectacular military failures in American history. Yet, the day clearly belonged to the losers, whose energetic final sprints to the wall contrasted with the sullen passivity with which they were received by those representing the victors. Lest one be tempted to see this as further evidence of the Lost Cause's triumph in our collective memory of the war, it should be noted that this display met with a fair amount of distain by many of the Unionists. The photo-op handshakes at the angle were not replicated at either end of the line, where some Union units pulled out before the last of the pseudo-Confederates had finished their hike to the wall. This brief, dramatic southern moment in the spotlight did not obscure the fact that the Army of the Potomac's victory at Gettysburg helped determine the nation's ultimate triumph over slavery and disunion. As Caroline Janney persuasively argues in *Remembering the Civil War*, the process of national reunion and sectional reconciliation in the decades following the war was uneven, inconsistent, and incomplete. Furthermore, the degrees to which past sins were forgiven differed widely among many diverse constituencies in both the North and the South.

Janney's timely work steps firmly into the debate between one set of historians (represented by David Blight, Nina Silber, et al) who argue that reconciliation between white Union and Confederate veterans was fairly

well-entrenched by 1900 (at the expense of African-Americans) and those like John Neff and William Blair, who insist that the process was never fully completed due to lingering hostilities over wartime atrocities, emancipation, and Reconstruction. While Janney leans towards the latter position, her nuanced study does far more than reconfirm the persistence of lingering resentments between the sections. Instead, it tries to separate the concepts of reunion and reconciliation, which are often used interchangeably, and looks at how different groups in both the North and South approached these overlapping issues. While she acknowledges and utilizes the existing historiography, she constructs her analysis using an impressive array of primary sources to allow veterans, women, African-Americans, newspaper editors, politicians, clergy, and citizens from both sections to express widely divergent and often shifting opinions on the war and its consequences.

Remembering the Civil War does not reinvent the historiographical wheel. It is a readable book that traces a familiar chronological sequence of events from the war itself through a few years beyond the last great veterans' reunion at Gettysburg in 1938. Chapter titles are simple and self-explanatory, giving readers a clear thread to follow. Within each chapter are more creatively-titled subheadings that explore the topic in detail. Employing this method allows Janney to examine the same event—Lee's surrender at Appomattox for example—through the eyes of people who saw it alternately as a great triumph or a stunning tragedy; too lenient or excessively harsh; an honorable laying down of arms or a cowardly collapse; or a victory over evil versus a necessary submission to superior numbers. Not only are strongly opposing positions represented in the author's selection of contemporary quotes, but expressions of uncertainty, longing, relief, and profound reflection conveyed by people occupying more moderate points of view also appear throughout the narrative.

As with most studies on war memory, the veterans take center stage in the quest for both reunion and reconciliation. For northern veterans, the restoration of the Union was the primary goal of their service and the most prominent representation of their victory over the rebellion. As long as their defeated foes recognized the sanctity of the reunited nation and its government, most Union veterans were willing to accept them as countrymen again. However, once the ex-Confederates began to espouse a Lost Cause version of the war that claimed defeat was merely a capitulation to superior numbers, some former Yankees, including members of the Grand Army of the Republic, withheld their support for unconditional reunion and insisted on more appropriate admissions of defeat.

Like Chandra Manning, whose 2008 work argued that ending slavery was a primary goal for many Union soldiers, Janney also suggests that emancipation was a prerequisite for victory among a significant number of white Yankees and virtually all African-American veterans. What differed between white and black veterans is the degree to which recognizing the rights of freed men and women should be a condition for the return of the former Confederate states to full status in the Union. While white veterans expressed outrage at the more egregious southern violations, like the Black Codes and the KKK, they did not fully embrace the rights of freed men and women as a key element in their attitudes towards reunion or reconciliation.

For Confederate veterans, defeat created a different set of challenges. While conceding the failure of independence and the inevitability of reunion with the North, many ex-rebels refused to give up their peculiar identity or their defiance regarding the outcome of their rebellion. In constructing the Lost Cause, ex-Confederates tried to ignore the issue of slavery altogether and held up Robert E. Lee as the symbol of noble southern manhood. Their reluctance to concede defeat at the hands of men they considered inferior (which included both white and black northerners), recognize the rights of freedmen, or acknowledge the treasonous nature of their cause, kept reconciliation at bay for several decades after the war. During and after Reconstruction, ex-rebels continued to display Confederate symbols while commemorating the war's key events and individuals, in spite of federal prohibitions against such expressions. By the last decade of the 19th century, the United Confederate Veterans managed to cling to their core values while praising the reunited nation and expressing a conditional willingness to embrace reconciliation with their northern counterparts. The joint dedications of several southern battlefield parks and the patriotism surrounding the 1898 War with Spain created what Janney calls a veritable "love fest" between veterans whose common experiences in combat gave them a workable platform for reconciliation.

The dissenting voices came from women in both sections and African-Americans (both male and female) who refused allow their opponents to claim that they had a monopoly on the truth about the late war. Janney skillfully draws from her 2008 work on the Ladies Memorial Associations to construct a larger analysis of the role that southern women played in the perpetuation of the Lost Cause myth. After emerging from the postwar years as the caretakers of the dead, women's groups continued to defend their cause, vilify all things Yankee, and demand protection from the menace of free black males. By deftly balancing

their image as lionesses defending their pride to vulnerable maidens needing protection, southern women countered the veterans' tendencies to reconcile and encouraged a younger generation of men to embrace the Lost Cause as a means of promoting and perpetuating white supremacy.

Northern women labored under the burden of allegedly not having sacrificed enough during the war to reach equal status with their suffering southern counterparts. However, over the intervening decades, the ladies of the Women's Relief Corps served as a strong counterpoint to the equally determined United Daughters of the Confederacy. Long after the veterans had constructed their mutually agreeable form of public reconciliation, their female auxiliaries continued to snipe at one another over their respective failure to show reverence to the nation or the cause. African-American women held WRC meetings in the South under great duress, while their white northern sisters refused to participate in joint activities with UDC women, even when popular causes like temperance and suffrage were involved. African-Americans in the South persisted in celebrating their emancipation at various times and places, while risking violent retaliation and with little or no support from either the government or most northern whites. Janney points out on page 211 that northern ambivalence towards African-Americans, even among the most ardent critics of the former Confederacy, illustrated the fact that "humans are inherently complicated, contradictory, and conflicted, untroubled by logical inconsistencies, and amazingly capable of compartmentalization."

With this excellent work, Janney makes a convincing argument that both reunion and reconciliation were the products of multiple perspectives and evolving social environments among the people who made up the post-war, reconstruction, and early 20th century United States. As she explains in her epilogue, and based on what we have seen during the sesquicentennial, many issues regarding reconciliation are still being sorted out in various public forums. Utilizing a plethora of primary sources, a solid grasp of the literature, insightful analysis, and clear prose, Professor Janney brings a fresh perspective to the debate and provides a book that will be useful to scholars and casual readers for many years to come.

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