

# Civil War Book Review

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Summer 2009

Article 1

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## New Directions in Civil War History

Christopher Childers

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## Editorial

### NEW DIRECTIONS IN CIVIL WAR HISTORY

Childers, Christopher

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Once in a generation it seems, a historian writes a book that literally changes the landscape of the history of the Civil War era. Scholars dream of producing that one seminal book that changes the way people understand a portion of our history. And readers eagerly await the next great book that will leave its mark on the field—and on them. In 1956, Kenneth Stampp's *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* completely shifted how historians and students of the history of slavery thought about the institution that led the nation into civil war. In sweeping scope and fascinating detail, Stampp demolished several generations of past scholarship that portrayed slavery as a benign institution. He chronicled the brutality of slavery and its impact on those who endured the effects of bondage. But he also depicted slaves as "ordinary human beings," a superfluous statement by today's standards. But in 1956, and given the nature of what historians had written before that time on slavery, Stampp's statement and his book revolutionized the study of slavery.

Kenneth Stampp died on July 10, 2009, at the age of 96. Over the course of a long and celebrated career, he penned numerous books in addition to his opus on slavery. But *The Peculiar Institution* has endured, not because it is the last word on slavery. On the contrary, successive generations have built on and even revised Stampp's conclusions. But Stampp laid the groundwork for their efforts. *CWBR* commemorates the life and work of this giant in Civil War history.

The Summer 2009 issue of *CWBR* features a wide array of books on the Civil war era, pointing to the diversity of work that scholars continue to produce. Two new titles in slavery studies are featured. Marie Jenkins Schwartz reviews Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese's *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order*. And Thavolia Glymph's *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household*, recently named a finalist for the Frederick Douglass Prize, is reviewed by Jim Downs.

In this issue, we also continue our commemoration of the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth with a review of Harold Holzer's *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861* by Russell McClintock. Look in our next issue for the concluding installment of Frank J. Williams's *A New Birth of Freedom: Celebrating the Life of Lincoln*.

Historians have renewed their focus on economics and the Civil War. John Majewski's *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* looks at how economics influenced Confederate policy. Brian Schoen reviews this book. And A. James Fuller reviews Marc Egnal's *Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War*, a new interpretation of the role of economics in the sectional conflict.

In the *CWBR* Author Interview, Robert E. Bonner discusses his new book *Mastering America: Southern Slaveholders and the Crisis of American Nationhood*, a fascinating new interpretation of the concept of nationalism and the creation of the Confederacy. And Leah Wood Jewett's latest installment of *Civil War Treasures* focuses on the often strained relationship between freedmen and their former masters.

The Summer 2009 issue marks my last as editor of *Civil War Book Review*. Over the past two and a half years, I have been honored to work with the countless historians who contribute reviews and essays to the journal. Fortunately, I have had the support of the staff at the LSU Libraries' Special Collections division, a remarkable organization of professionals who have enthusiastically assisted me in maintaining *CWBR*. I know my successor, Nathan Buman, will continue to benefit from the expertise and camaraderie.

Finally, I must give special recognition to the over two million visitors who read *CWBR* each year. I look forward to joining their ranks as one of the faithful readers and supporters of *CWBR*.