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Occupied Vicksburg

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Review

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Clampitt, Bradley R. *Occupied Vicksburg.* Louisiana State University Press, $48.00 ISBN 9780807163382

The Cultural Work of Military Occupation

With *Occupied Vicksburg*, Bradley R. Clampitt contributes a well-researched monograph about Union military occupation in the Confederate South to a field that has been slowly burgeoning over the years. Clampitt skillfully balances heady discussions of Union military policy with adept analysis of the tedious challenge of civilian affairs—topics that frequently overlap. And here is perhaps the book's primary feature. When he states "Federals found [in Vicksburg] a backward society that to their minds needed to be reshaped in the image of the North," Clampitt demonstrates how Union military occupation was, in addition to a military project, also a cultural project, sculpting the social landscape of the Confederate South even as it dominated the physical terrain itself (42). Military history then, in some or many ways, is social history as well.

For too long military history has been limited to studies of battles, tactics, and discussions of various army ordinance. But real men (and women) live in the ranks of the army, and every move of a massive ground force affects the civilians around it. So too, as Clampitt's occupation study finds, do the actions of civilians pressure the military. In the wake of Vicksburg's surrender in July 1863, Ulysses Grant, William Sherman, and a host of other ranking men in blue fretted continuously about policies concerning prisoner parole, food rationing, recently freed slaves, and rebellious Confederate women, all of which hampered further military operations in the region.

Conquest is a hard thing to maintain. Clampitt traces the evolution of Union war policy from one of reconciliation to hard war intended to break the back of the Confederate war machine and demoralize its citizens. Reconciliation policies did not translate into southern converts in Vicksburg, who appreciated Federal

welfare assistance they felt was their due anyway, but nursed continued resentment in their hearts toward Yankee invaders. African Americans who wandered around Union lines at will, sat in refugee camps and schools, expected payment for their labor, and even stole food to survive, incensed southern citizens in Vicksburg. When armed and trained African American troops appeared in town, southerners were even more outraged, attributing the defection of former slaves to the degenerative effects of Northern influence. Yet Clampitt discerningly argues that emancipation policy was always second to preserving the Union in the eyes of Federal military commanders like Grant. The exponential increase of freed slaves and their movements burdened an insufficient occupation system. Some time would pass—and no small amount of bickering between the Federal military command in Mississippi and the Treasury Department—before Northern policy makers in and around Vicksburg could develop a consistent labor program that did not exploit Black labor as the Union army often did throughout the first part of the war. Military and treasury administrators oversaw redistribution of land and its lease, secured physical protection for freedpeople against white backlash, established schools, and regulated African American labor on the new land portions. Northern missionaries, burdened nevertheless by paternalistic and condescending outlooks on African Americans, also contributed to the initial stages of economic and educational development that would come to characterize the brief reign of Radical Reconstruction. Through it all, freedmen and women shaped their own freedom as well, setting up communities within the city of Vicksburg and on plantations and camps in the area under Union control long before the military figured out what to do. In these communities, African Americans celebrated freedom, established families under the auspices of conventional white mores, and inaugurated a thriving church culture that presented even some Union soldiers with religious interest. As Union war policy slowly flexed to include emancipation as a war aim, so too did the Union soldiers in Vicksburg come to value emancipation as a moral crusade against the culturally backward South.

Clampitt deserves particular consideration (and some scrutiny) for his approach to the subject of gender in his book. Without using the word "gender" once, Clampitt discusses at length the troublesome opposition of Vicksburg's Confederate ladies against a Federal occupation that introduced "social revolution…upon their homeland" (188). Southern women visited rhetorical wrath on Union troops and commanders, constantly petitioned for greater consideration and aid, smuggled trade goods, and demonstrated their patriotic

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allegiance to the Confederacy through public displays of disgust for Union presence. In response, the Union military feared and jeered southern women, materially supported those whose homes they had destroyed through war and raiding, and even expelled some women from the city. It is important for Clampitt to note that Union occupiers never underestimated how imposing Confederate women's resistance could be. Acknowledging alternative figures and alternative resistance is crucial to understanding the hybrid military/social history to be found in occupation studies. That said, Clampitt could do more on this subject, and he could use a gender analysis far more thoroughly in a book with no shortage of valuable examinations on race and class prejudice in occupied Vicksburg. For instance, a short paragraph on page 130 represents Clampitt's entire discussion of Union sexual violence against African American women, who collectively experienced higher and more deadly rates of assault than their white counterparts before, during, and after the Civil War. Emancipation was an enormously complicated and ambiguous process; it was also gendered. Black men joined the ranks in formidable numbers, as Clampitt indicates, in search of masculine validation, adventure, and revenge, but what of Black women? What educational and labor opportunities did Federal occupation, especially in the urban area of Vicksburg, afford to formerly enslaved women of color? That the sexual conditions of Black women changed but little from antebellum slavery (which was a type of militarized occupation itself) to Union occupation surely merits greater in-depth discussion.

The capture of the Gibraltar of the Confederacy represented a stunning defeat for the struggling southern republic, but it rendered an equally challenging task to the Union occupiers. Federal military occupation represented much more than just militarily held territory where further Confederate military movements could be restricted. The Federal administration of the city attempted to patrol and "unionize" the behavior of paroled southern soldiers, recalcitrant Confederate women, and freed slaves. It controlled what churches, schools, theaters, and social events were permitted. It confiscated private property. It regulated markets, trade, material relief, and all printed material. It levied taxes in the city to augment operational costs. It reoriented African Americans in a free world that previously excluded them. It strategically implemented oaths of allegiance and punishments intended to enforce policy decisions. Yet for all its physical and cultural work, the social revolution of occupation failed to alter the hearts of southerners and ultimately contributed to "forging a Confederate identity for Vicksburg that outlived the Confederacy itself" (7). Bradley Clampitt's

thought-provoking book also indirectly urges historians to re-evaluate how we conceptualize our own work. From the nineteenth century and earlier, to a modern era rife with physical and digital wars, historians must acknowledge that social history and military history are at every moment closely aligned. Exploring how militarized societies operate will broaden the conventional limits of cultural, social, and labor history and provide more in depth answers about how modern America still functions using the engine of war and armed occupation.

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