

# Civil War Book Review

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Fall 2018

Article 1

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## Editorial

Barber, Tom

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Welcome to the *CWBR*'s Fall 2018 issue. Secession, Frederick Douglass, and the Border South all loom large this season.

Two books examine the Secession Crisis from unionist and secessionist positions. Leonard Richards reviews Michael Robinson's *A Union Indivisible: Secession and the Politics of Slavery in the Border South*. Robinson's book underscores the region's loyalty depended on a slave holding elite who vigorously campaigned to convince their fellow citizens that only the Union was capable of protecting the peculiar institution. Taking an opposite approach is Craig Berry's *Kentucky's Rebel Press: Pro-Confederate Media and the Secession Crisis* reviewed here by David Raney. In contrast, secessionist writers used humor, historical and literary references, and personal attacks to characterize unionism as a force dedicated to the eradication of white supremacy.

This issue our reviewers tackle two new biographies on Frederick Douglass. Resident Lincoln expert Frank Williams takes on David Blight's *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*. The culmination of ten years of research, Williams lauds Blight's effort for his ability to bring Douglass into singular focus as an iconoclast who refused to let pro-slavery orthodoxy overcome the principles of liberty and equality. In contrast to Blight's comprehensive biography is D.H. Dilbeck's laser focused *Frederick Douglass: America's Prophet*, which examines the abolitionist's spiritual life. Reviewer Allen Carden finds Dilbeck's emphasis valuable for truly understanding Douglass, a person who took many of his rhetorical and intellectual cues from the Bible's prophets and gospels.

Fiction also returns this issue with Randall Allred's review of *Welcome Kindly: A Novel of the Shakers in the Civil War* by Linda Stevens. Set along Kentucky's southern border, Allred finds the book compelling for its tragic arc. As both the war's participants and its victims, Stevens' Shaker communities become enmeshed in a violent conflict they desperately sought to avoid.

Both Civil War Treasures and Civil War Obscura are on hiatus this issue. Fill the void by listening to my interview with Michael Robinson, author of *A Union Indivisible*. We discuss what led him to study the Border South, and what forces transformed the region into a political paradox whose members preached non-violence as a means to secure the nation's most violent institution.

Other points of interest this issue include Johann N. Neem's review of *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship* by Carrie Hyde and Rob Baker's review of *Slavery and Freedom in Texas: Stories from the Courtroom, 1821-1871* by Jason A. Gillmer. Baker praises Gillmer for skillfully reconstructing the lives of African Americans who entered legal records as both sacrifices to white supremacy, and litigants who used courtrooms to win property and protect inheritance. Going beyond the courtroom, Hyde examines fiction and other kinds of literature, to suggest that many Americans before the Civil War defined citizenship in terms of culture, rather than law. Neem considers Hyde's literary approach a valuable addition to a subject overshadowed by legal sources.

One final announcement, the *CWBR* is looking for contributors for our upcoming series on religion and politics between the Antebellum and Reconstruction eras. I am particularly interested essays that explore the relationship between religion, citizenship, and the state.

As always, I want to thank the reviewers, readers, and publishers that make every issue possible.