

Civil War Book Review

Spring 2019

Article 1

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Recommended Citation

Barber, Tom (2019) "Spring 2019," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 21 : Iss. 2 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.21.2.01

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol21/iss2/1>

Editorial

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Spring has arrived and that means another issue of the *CWBR*. This issue's reviews highlight the historical experiences of ordinary Americans regarding war, freedom, and loyalty. Politics constitute the issue's other main thread with books that examine presidential campaigns, sectional partisans, and political machines.

George C. Rable assesses *Dear Delia: The Civil War Letters of Captain Henry F. Young, Seventh Wisconsin Infantry* edited by Michael J. Larson and John David Smith. Proving the devil is in the details, Rable finds the volume exceptional for Young's descriptions of picket duty, accidental deaths, and the other gritty realities of soldiering. Rable also recommends the volume for its subject index, which provides readers with precise accuracy when navigating Young's life in war and peace.

Turning from picket lines to campfires is John F. Marszalek's review of *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War Slave Refugee Camps* by Amy Murrell Taylor. Marszalek considers Taylor's book invaluable for vividly demonstrating the haphazard nature of African American freedom in Civil War America. Far from welcoming, as Marszalek points out, formerly enslaved people encountered a variety of road blocks once they reached Union lines.

Concluding this issue's look at how average Americans navigated civil war is Erik Mathisen's review of *The Limits of Loyalty: Ordinary People in Civil War Mississippi* by Jarret Ruminiski. Mathisen praises Ruminiski's work for characterizing war time loyalty in antagonistic terms. As Ruminiski shows, average Mississippians struggled to reconcile the "micro loyalties" of family, community, and friends against the wartime labor commitments required by the Confederacy's new government.

Three important reviews examine books regarding presidential campaigning, sectional politics, and political machines. According to reviewer Martin Hershock, *The Coming of Democracy: Presidential Campaigning in the Age of Jackson* by Mark Cheatham, usefully explores the political rituals that engaged the American electorate and inaugurated the nation's second party system. Reviewed by Randall M. Miller, *The F Street Mess* by Alice Elizabeth

Malavasic examines how a group of U.S. senators inspired by John C. Calhoun consolidated enough political power to challenge the Missouri Compromise. Returning to local and regional politics is *The Most Complete Political Machine Ever: The North's Union Leagues in the American Civil War* by Paul Taylor. Reviewer Timothy Wesley commends the book for convincingly showing how Union leagues shaped popular opinion and contributed to the broader Union war effort.

This issue, I interview Diane Miller Sommerville about her new book *Aberration of Mind: Suicide and Suffering in the Civil War-Era South*. Our discussion highlights suffering as a gendered experience for southerners throughout the war and its aftermath. We also discuss how changing ideas about suicide became racialized in the postwar South.

Both Civil War Obscura and Look at Lincoln are on hiatus this issue. Filling this void is LSU Special Collections curator John David Miles' looks at the unpublished novel "From Blue to Gray, or the Battle of Colfax" by Kate Grant. In this issue's other feature essay, author Robert Miller provides an important overview of religion and faith in Civil War America.

As always, I want to thank the reviewers, readers, and publishers that make every issue possible. See you in August!