

Civil War Book Review

Winter 2021

Article 1

Editorial

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Recommended Citation

Hobson, Jeffery (2021) "Editorial," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 .
DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.23.1.01
Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol23/iss1/1>

Editorial

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Several writers whose works are reviewed in this, the first issue of the *Civil War Book Review*'s twenty-third volume, tell previously untold stories, while others provide new analyses and narratives about widely studied people in the Civil War Era. I say nothing revelatory when I write that with new sources, new lenses, and new frames, history is made, and remade. Though a subject may be old, this process yields new knowledge. Many of the books reviewed in this issue epitomize this process. The reviews, by junior and established scholars alike, note these enlightening works' revelations about the dynamism and diversity of well-studied populations: Antebellum white northerners, "politicized" white Confederate women, Freedpeople, and Confederate leaders and generals. Other reviewed books introduce previously undervalued and understudied characters from the Civil War Era: A John Brown co-conspirator, a pro-Confederate British politician, Lincoln's foot-doctor *cum* spy, and the very environment in and around which the Civil War was fought. A common theme among many books reviewed herein is identity crafting: the process through which nineteenth century Americans—individually and collectively—made and remade their personas to fit their wants, needs, and situations. Where these books engage the process of identity making, they reveal the plasticity of nineteenth-century American identity. Other books further expand Civil War studies beyond the United States' borders by examining the conflagration and the memory of it in an international context.

Historians have often portrayed Confederate general John Bell Hood as "drug-addled or rage-driven." Andrew S. Bledsoe explains in his review of Stephen Davis's *Into Tennessee and Failure: John Bell Hood*, that the author eschewed such characterizations. Instead, Davis provides an even-handed analysis of the general's "flaws and misjudgments." In sum, Bledsoe finds Davis's book "the most detailed and rigorous portrait of Hood the general that we currently have."

Though Hood has long been cast in a negative light, many southern Americans have memorialized his colleague, Confederate general Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson in prose,

poetry, and stone. One such memorial in Virginia was erected due to the work of British pro-Confederate conservative politician, Beresford Hope. Reviewer Niels Eichhorn was relieved to see that Michael J. Turner resituates the seemingly saturated topic of Civil War memory in an international context in *Stonewall Jackson, Beresford Hope, and the Meaning of the American Civil War in Britain*. With this book, Eichhorn writes that “Turner pushes ajar a door previously closed”—a tantalizing invitation to future scholarship on the subject of Civil War memory beyond the United States’ borders.

The Civil War itself has increasingly been analyzed in an international context, and Adrian Brettle continues that trend with his book *Colossal Ambitions: Confederate Planning for a Post-Civil War World*. With this contribution to the University of Virginia’s “A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Era” series, Brettle joins other illustrious Civil War scholars, including Paul D. Escott, who reviewed Brettle’s book for this issue. Escott shows that Brettle, through “extensive and wide-ranging” research, has pushed recent “revisionist” analysis of the Confederate nation “another important step further” by revealing Confederate thinkers’ high-flying postwar goals. In my interview with Dr. Brettle, he emphasized that, while we might see these men and women’s postwar planning as hubristic, they believed they were anything but; they believed they were pragmatic planners who adapted their goals to the ever-changing course of the Civil War.

The international dimensions of the history of the Civil War era are further investigated in Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga’s *War and Peace on the Rio Grande Frontier, 1830-1880*. Todd W. Wahlstrom writes in his review that González-Quiroga’s focus on US-Americans’ and Mexicans’ “day-to-day business of life and work” reveals how “cooperation ran parallel with . . . violence” on the often-unforgiving terrain of the Texas-Mexico frontier in the decades before and after the Civil War.

An ever-present, though marginal character in most Civil War histories is the environment in and around which the War unfolded. An environmental history of the entire Civil War, reviewer Matthew Stith worried, would overburden author and reader alike. However, Stith explains that in *An Environmental History of the Civil War*, Judkin Browning and Timothy Silver “skillfully blend history with science” to reveal that “sickness, weather, food, animals, death, and terrain,” exerted a semblance of “agency” on the war and its actors. Because Browning and Silver were able to “rediscover and recast the war in the same natural prism

through which the war's original actors viewed and experienced it," Stith believes their book is "a timely and significant synthesis of and for" the environmental turn in Civil War history.

In *Civil War Supply and Strategy: Feeding Men and Moving Armies* Earl J. Hess reveals the importance of efficiently mobilizing masses of men and munitions across the terrain Browning and Silver study. According to reviewer David Coffey, the "potentially yawn-inducing" subject of wartime logistics is, "in the capable hands of Professor Hess, nothing short of fascinating." As he makes his case for logistics' role in the United States' victory, Hess dismantles long held "yet often inaccurate beliefs about" the Civil War. Ultimately, Hess concludes that "'Without the protomodern logistics-and-supply system, the North could not have won the war.'" A conclusion Coffey found convincing.

When Union and Confederate soldiers were not marching, moving supplies, or fighting, Lauren K. Thompson shows that they often socialized across enemy lines in her new book, *Friendly Enemies: Soldier Fraternization Throughout the American Civil War*. Many have conjectured that the comity between enemies during the war is overstated. However, reviewer Andrew Turner writes that Thompson demonstrates such cordial encounters were more frequent than one might assume. Further, Thompson argues that intra-army fraternization provided soldiers escape from the violent vicissitudes of the war and offered "measures of agency in a war that often left them feeling powerless."

Though books about emancipation abound, Joseph P. Reidy centers his book, *Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom and Equality in the Twilight of Slavery*, on Freedpeople's narratives rather than impersonal systems and structures. In a series of "lyrical and powerful" microbiographies of Freedpeople, Reidy reveals how individuals' circumscribed choices caused emancipation to haltingly unfold across time and space—both literal and figurative—and through the nebulous concept of "home." Reidy's approach, reviewer Kathryn Angelica writes, "ultimately succeeds in demonstrating the truly labyrinthine—and perhaps unfinished—journey to freedom" these people trod.

Two books, Richard J. Ellis's *Old Tip vs. The Sly Fox: The 1840 Election and the Making of a Partisan Nation*, and Benjamin Arrington's *The Last Lincoln Republican: The Election of 1880* offer a fresh look at two nineteenth-century national elections. Reviewer Christopher Childers writes that Ellis's *Old Tip vs. The Sly Fox* pushes analysis of the 1840 election beyond the typical focus on its contributions to electioneering and modern political campaigning. Rather,

Ellis shows that the election was “about style *and* substance” as savvy voters were less swayed by slogans than they were by politicians’ stances on the issues. Childers insists Ellis’s contribution to the University Press of Kansas’s American Presidential Election series is now “the standard history of the contest between Martin Van Buren and William Henry Harrison,” and essential reading for any “student of the early republic.” Arrington looks ahead forty years from the Van Buren-Harrison election in *The Last Lincoln Republican*. Reviewer Mark Wahlgren Summers writes that the book is an attempt to “rescue” the 1880 election from its “forlorn eminence” as the “least noticed and written about” election of the Gilded Age.

Two books highlight the Civil War careers of overlooked immigrant professionals and the identities they crafted. Meg Groeling, like many readers, was first introduced to Issachar Zacharie through Gore Vidal’s *Lincoln: A Novel*. Upon reading E. Lawrence Abel’s *Lincoln’s Jewish Spy: The Life and Times of Issachar Zacharie*, Groeling was struck when she learned Zacharie was not a Vidal creation. Indeed, this “enjoyable” story of a peripatetic “foot doctor to the political elite” and, possible-Union spy demonstrates that truth is often stranger than fiction. Katherine Bentley Jeffrey’s *First Chaplain of the Confederacy: Father Darius Hubert, S. J.*, traces the pre-and-postwar career of the first official Confederate Army chaplain. Reviewer A. James Fuller finds Jeffrey’s analysis of Hubert’s life “engagingly written.” Hubert’s narrative demonstrates how adopted identities can be as meaningful as those into which one was born. The native French cleric joined his adopted southern state, Louisiana, when it seceded, and traded in his vestments for a First Louisiana Infantry uniform “to the shock and dismay of some of his fellow Catholics.” Loss did not dilute his Confederate sympathies, as Hubert proselytized for the Lost Cause following the Civil War.

In his review of Louis A. DeCaro Jr.’s *The Untold Story of Shields Green: The Life and Death of a Harper’s Ferry Raider*, John Brown scholar William S. King writes that DeCaro’s book helps resurrect Green from the “mire” of “pro-slavery propaganda” literature, and offers “an historically verifiable examination of Green” and other Brown co-conspirators.

Just as DeCaro shone new light on Shields Green, in *Women Making War: Female Confederate Prisoners and Union Military Justice*, Thomas F. Curran shines a new light on white Confederate women. Reviewer Sheila R. Phipps writes that Curran offers an “enlightening look” at white women in St. Louis whose pro-Confederate actions (giving aid and comfort to soldiers in gray and guerrilla fighters) resulted in their imprisonment in an abandoned state

penitentiary. While most of these imprisoned women were subject to “the same poor conditions at prisons as male inmates,” their experience differed based on class.

Both John L. Brooke’s *There is a North: Fugitive Slaves, Political Crisis, and Cultural Transformation in the Coming of the Civil War* and Adam I. P. Smith’s *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics* combine a cultural approach with political analysis to elucidate antebellum northerners’ attitudes toward the South, slavery, the enslaved, and self-liberated Black Americans. Brooke, like many historians before him, use Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to help explain the growth of northern antislavery sentiment. However, reviewer Kellen Heniford found Brooke’s use of the book “innovative.” The transformative process of reading Stowe’s book, when combined with political developments like the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, helped create a regional and antislavery identity among northerners. Though Smith treads familiar territory in *The Stormy Present*, reviewer Christian R. Esh finds Smith’s emphasis on northern conservatism and the book’s international context “fresh.” Despite sharing a similar approach, Smith does not find the widely shared antislavery sentiment Brooke found in the antebellum North. Rather, Smith argues antebellum northerners—Whig, Democrat, and moderate Republicans alike—shared a conservative “disposition” characterized by a determination to retain the nation bequeathed to them by the Founders despite rapid advancements in technology, expanded democratic political participation, and radical reverberations of revolutions in Europe. Both authors conclude northerners worried that an activist “slave power” threatened their nation. Once the war came, Smith finds that a shared conservative “disposition” cohered northerners more than antislavery sentiment.

You may notice there was not a fall issue of the *Civil War Book Review*. Just as COVID-19 ravaged the nation, it ravaged our reviewers and their families. I therefore decided to give the reviewers slated to contribute to that issue the opportunity to set their reviews aside. In history, absence, emptiness, voids, lacunae all tell their own tales, and the absence of a fall issue tells the tale of how COVID devastated our academic community and the world. I am especially thankful to this issue’s reviewers for contributing to our publication in these trying times.

Lastly, this is my inaugural issue as editor of the *Civil War Book Review*. I am indebted to our previous editor and my friend, Luke Hargroder for helping me transition to this new role. I am also grateful that Sigrid Kelsey, the Director of Library Communications and Publications

here at Louisiana State University entrusted me to serve in this position. I am excited to embark on this new role, and I hope to carry on the tradition of excellence established by those who came before me.

Thank you,
Jeffery Hardin Hobson
Editor, *Civil War Book Review*