

# Civil War Book Review

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Summer 2024

Article 1

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## Civil War Lagniappe

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### Recommended Citation

Keiser, Kennon H. Jr. (2024) "Civil War Lagniappe," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 3 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.26.3.01

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol26/iss3/1>

## Civil War Lagniappe

### Editorial

**Keiser, K. Howell. Jr.**

The American Civil War era is a rich tapestry of stories and individuals. Moments of inhumanity and human kindness abound. *The Civil War Book Review* has the great pleasure of presenting this complex tapestry to our readers for our summer 2024 issue. From borderland guerrillas, naval warfare, historical memory, and the search for equality, historians have no shortage of stories to investigate and contextualize. Each of the manuscripts reviewed in this publication takes us through various moments throughout this period, and some even take us to the period long before secession, as the African slave trade knit together the Atlantic world and set the stage for the war to come.

If any individual encompasses this tapestry of complex faces it is the infamous Confederate guerilla, William Clarke Quantrill. Joseph Beilein's *A Man by Any Other Name: William Clarke Quantrill and the Search for American Manhood*, according to reviewer Bradley S. Keefer, offers readers, an "unconventional point of view" of the "series of masks" worn by the ruthless guerilla leader. Beilein takes readers through various moments in Quantrill's career before chronologically documenting his rise and fall. It is a complicated story, made difficult by the countless unreliable sources that surround Quantrill's legacy. Despite this, writes Keefer, "Beilein does an admirable job sorting all of this out." Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide whether Quantrill was "a noble Confederate patriot, an unrepentant brigand, or a product of cultural forces—slavery, racism, and the era's violent definition of manhood—that corrupted his impressionable personality."

Paul D. Escott's *The Civil War Political Tradition: Ten Portraits of Those Who Formed It* compliments Beilein's biographical study of Quantrill by exploring the prominent political leaders during the Civil War era. Henry Clay, Stephen Douglass, Jefferson Davis, and Abraham Lincoln are just a handful of the individuals sketched by Escott. Although each leader recognized the immense challenges facing the nation, as well as the need to address the stark contradictions between the nation's founding ideals and the reality of the present at the eve of the Civil War, "ultimately," writes reviewer Christopher Olsen, "they could not muster the convictions to resolve them through politics." War followed, forcing the nation and its leaders to resolve these contradictions through military force. Readers are sure to find *The Civil War Political Tradition* compelling, and it stands as a welcome introduction to the political debates in antebellum America.

Slavery, of course, remained the greatest contradiction plaguing the American nation. Kathleen S. Murphy's *Captivity's Collections: Science, Natural History, and the British Transatlantic Slave Trade* illustrates the earliest origins of the peculiar institution in the Atlantic world. Although the international slave largely served the needs of the rising plantation system in the Americas, it also served as a "conduit" for scientific enterprise. By weaving environmental history and natural science into this human story, Murphy reminds us that "the history of natural history in the early modern Atlantic world cannot be told without reference to the history of the slave, slavery, and colonialism." (183) This story continued well into antebellum America, and as Africans found themselves enslaved in a new landscape, they had to rebuild a sense of home while trapped in a world of dehumanization. Whitney Nell Stewart's *This is Our Home: Slavery and Struggle on Southern Plantations* tells this story of homemaking. She rightly asserts, reviewer Darian McCorvey observes, that historians have wrongly "assumed that homemaking was an impossibility," instead highlighting the ways in which "Black homemaking was never

entirely thwarted by white slave owners.” Of course, McCorvey notes that that Stewart does not dismiss the fact that enslaved people still perceived the home as a privilege of the white elite; nevertheless, one cannot ignore the personal attachment enslaved people had with the land on which they labored.

Homemaking, however, was just one way in which individuals pursued equality in nineteenth-century America. Robert Emmett Curran’s *American Catholics and the Quest for Equality in the Civil War Era* focuses on American Catholics’ search for equality. According to reviewer Jason Duncan, Curran takes on an “ambitious” scope to bring this story to readers. He not only focuses on the Northern states, but the Southern Confederacy as well. For readers familiar with Curran’s work, they will be excited to see his expertise come to “bear on this most complex of all episodes in the nation’s history.”

While battles for equality raged on the home front, other battles raged elsewhere. Readers are well-acquainted with the land battles that took place between the great Northern and Southern armies during the war, but there is still much to be said about the naval conflict. Jonathan White’s *Shipwrecked: A True Civil War Story of Mutinies, Jailbreaks, Blockade-Running and the Slave Trade* and Dwight S. Hughes and Chris Mackowski’s *The Civil War on the Water: Favorite Stories and Fresh Perspectives from the Historians at Emerging Civil War* are two notable examples of a continued interest in Civil War naval histories. White’s *Shipwrecked* largely follows Appleton Oaksmith, a slave trader, filibusterer, and Confederate blockade runner. This is, writes Gerald Horne, “a fascinating story” that even manages to shed new light on well-studied matters. *The Civil War on the Water* artfully compliments White’s work. Reviewer Stacey D. Allen observes that this collection of essays reminds readers and scholars alike that “neither the National nor the emerging Confederate war governments were prepared for sustained naval conflict when fighting erupted in April 1861.” This would change as

the war progressed, however. The North had the upper hand with industry and organization, but these essays nevertheless point to the marked early success on the Confederate side as well. For those interested in naval history and the interpretive skills of public historians, *The Civil War on the Water* will be an educating and enjoyable read.

We conclude this edition of the *Civil War Book Review* with a book that explores the sites where many Civil War soldiers concluded their earthly presence: the cemetery. Brian Matthew Jordan and Jonathan W. White's *Final Resting Places: Reflections on the Meaning of Civil War Graves* is a "panoramic collection of 28 essays" offering readers a scholarly yet sensitive study of death and memory in the Civil War. Reviewer Paul Ashdown writes that this collection presents "intimate and approachable stories," and readers will undoubtedly be drawn to the sections on Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, and Joshua L. Chamberlain.

Lastly, this is my final issue as editor of the *Civil War Book Review*. It has been a pleasure to compile these works of history and bring them to our readers. I am thankful Sigrid Kelsey, LSU's Director of Scholarly Publishing, gave me the opportunity to take over this journal in Fall of 2023. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my advisor and mentor, Aaron Sheehan-Dean. He has been a constant source of help and I have no doubt his letter of recommendation helped place me at the helm of this journal. Of course, I would also be remiss if I did not thank the countless scholars who contributed to the *Civil War Book Review*. I am grateful they took time out of their busy schedules to contribute to our review journal. It has been an absolute pleasure to read each of these works and get to know the authors and reviewers that make this journal possible.

Cheers!  
K. Howell Keiser, Jr.