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Review of *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War*

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Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War

Edited by Ginette Aley and J. L. Anderson

(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. Pp. xvi, 196. Illustrations. \$39.50.)

Histories of the Southern home front have long outnumbered histories of the Northern home front. Lately, however, there has been a minor surge of books and anthologies on the Civil War in places other than the South and the Northeast; *Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War* is another effort to fill

that lacuna. As the editors point out in their very useful introduction, the Midwest differed from the rest of the North in several ways: not only was it “newer” than the East (with several states entering the Union during the decade or two before the war), it was also more ethnically heterogeneous, more rural and more dependent on

cash crops, more anxious about internal threats, and less united politically. The editors argue that the book supports “the premise that multiple Norths existed that were marked by regional differences and distinctiveness on several levels,” and that each, “like the Midwest, asserted its own counternarrative of the larger Northern narrative of the Civil War” (p. 3). Although the seven pieces in the collection all make excellent points based on solid research, only three meet the editors’ goal of providing “a usable regional past” (p. 3).

R. Douglas Hurt’s largely quantitative essay chronicles the changes in the technological and marketing processes of the region’s farmers, who replaced manpower with horse and machine power to expand production of traditional cash crops and even began growing tobacco, sorghum, and cotton, products they normally obtained from the South in peacetime. Ginette Aley’s essay shows how, unlike eastern and urban women, midwestern farm women defined patriotism less in terms of their contributions to sanitary fairs and other famous home front war efforts and more in terms of simply keeping their farms running by taking over men’s work—perhaps more literally than in any other part of the North. Finally, Brett Barker recounts the “chillingly effective” efforts by Republicans to quash dissent in southeastern Ohio—a particularly divided section of the state—through

intimidation and violence (p. 169).

One should not make too much of the extent to which the remaining essays do or do not take a particularly midwestern slant on their subjects, despite the editors’ stated purpose. All of them provide useful local studies of the home front North that connect pre-war conditions and attitudes to wartime developments: Michael P. Gray on prison camp tourism at Johnson’s Island, Julie A. Mujic on student patriotism at the University of Michigan, Nicole Etcheson on the intriguing relationships between Indiana soldiers’ wives and their in-laws, and J. L. Anderson on family dynamics in hard-pressed Iowa farm families. The essays about families, especially, help explain marriage and family relationships in ways that transcend the war itself.

Although historians will keep writing about the more dramatic and possibly more fraught history of the Confederate home front, books like this one are helping to close the gap between our knowledge of the lives of Northern and Southern civilians.

JAMES MARTEN is Professor of History at Marquette University. He is author of a number of books, including *The Children’s Civil War* (1998), *Civil War America: Voices from the Home Front* (2003), and *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union & Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America* (2011).

