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Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors

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Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors, by Stephen D. Engle. Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. iii, 725 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Wallace Hettle is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of *Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* and *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and War*.

In this ambitious book, Stephen D. Engle traces the impact of Union Civil War governors on the course and outcome of the conflict. Without minimizing the impact of President Lincoln or Congress, Engle first shows how governors built regiments in 1861. Union governors rushed to provide troops after Lincoln called for the raising of militias in the wake of Confederate shots at Fort Sumter.

Because Republican governors ruled the majority of northern states, the group responded to Lincoln's calls for help with alacrity. Prior to Bull Run, though, Iowa's Samuel Kirkwood was hampered by geographical distance, a weak militia system, and the need to defend Iowans against potential Indian attacks. Kirkwood also worried that proslavery Missourians could prove a threat to Iowa's southern tier of counties.

It is hard to generalize about the governors across the board. While Republicans had more strength, Democratic governors often were obstacles for Lincoln. Governors' priorities diverged because their states differed so much. Through their governors, slave states like Maryland and Missouri stood with Lincoln. However, strongly antislavery states like Massachusetts supported the war with far more enthusiasm. In Engle's account, Massachusetts Governor Andrew Curtin emerges as a particularly formidable Union leader.

Engle ably demonstrates that most governors were ahead of Lincoln on emancipation. Further, many of them pressed him to escalate the war effort to include emancipation. This emerging view among governors became especially evident after an 1862 conference in Altoona, Pennsylvania. The group proceeded to Washington to share their views of the war with Lincoln. Although some historians have argued that lobbying efforts by governors had little impact on the president, Engle effectively makes the case that governors solidified his move from a war for the Union to a war against slavery.

At the Altoona conference, Iowa's Samuel Kirkwood recognized that the cautious General George McClellan had to be fired after his failure to follow through on the Union victory at the Battle of Antietam in 1862. In Washington with his fellow governors, Kirkwood had the backbone to confront Lincoln directly about McClellan. During the meeting, Lincoln pushed back, but shortly thereafter he adopted Kirkwood's point of view.

A thread running through the book is the creation of a strong national government, which the author calls a Union “leviathan.” The success of the war effort required leadership in both economic and military spheres; governors were extraordinarily cooperative in recognizing the need for strong national power. They created a nation, rather than just a collection of states.

This is a big book. In covering the stories of Union governors, Engle effectively retells the central story of the Union homefront. The work is based on massive archival research. It features accessible prose. However, its size, the plethora of characters depicted, and the scope of the argument may intimidate casual readers.

One should always hesitate before using the word *definitive*. Nevertheless, Engle’s book will be the indispensable source on Union governors for a long time to come.

Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865, by Thomas W. Cutrer. The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xiii, 588. Map, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Robert Wooster is Regents Professor of History at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His books include *American Military Frontiers: The U.S. Army in the West, 1783–1900* (2009) and *The Civil War Bookshelf: 50 Must-Read Books about the War Between the States* (2001).

Thomas W. Cutrer’s *Theater of a Separate War: The Civil War West of the Mississippi River, 1861–1865* represents the first modern attempt by a Civil War specialist to craft a comprehensive study of the entire Trans-Mississippi West from secession through the collapse of the Confederacy. This is operational and tactical history at its best, told in bold, sweeping terms. Wisely, Cutrer does not attempt to overstate the significance of the fighting west of the Mississippi for the overall war effort. As he acknowledges, “The Civil War was neither won nor lost west of the Mississippi River” (443). Still, as the fastest-growing part of the South and as a vital component of the campaigns for the Mississippi River, the region had strategic importance, especially in the wake of Napoleon III’s military intervention in Mexico. Thus, as Cutrer demonstrates, “It was of vital importance in and of itself” (448).

Those seeking a comprehensive narrative of the conflicts between Union and Confederate soldiers and sailors and their Indian allies from the Mississippi River to New Mexico need go no further. Printed primary materials are supplemented in some cases by manuscript collections, but the strength of the work lies in its narrative power. With an