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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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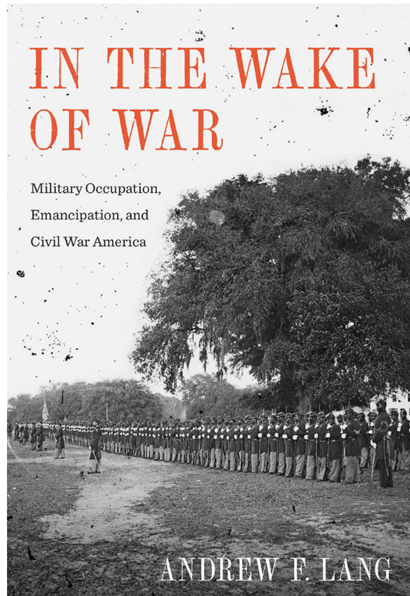
BOOK REVIEWS

In the Wake of War: Military Occupation, Emancipation, and Civil War America.

By Andrew F. Lang.

(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017. Acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 317. $47.50 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-8071-6706-9.)

For all the attention heaped upon the Union army's performance in battle, its most important task has been largely overlooked – occupation. The great task befalling the Union army from the beginning of the Civil War was to defeat Confederate military forces and hold Confederate territory until military forces surrendered and civilians acquiesced to restoration of the Federal Union. As the war unfolded, a third task of destroying slavery emerged, and its progress depended on the successful defeat of Confederate armies and white southern acceptance of the reality of emancipation. That these three tasks proved to be exceedingly difficult has been explained mostly as a matter of white southern intransigence and problematic Union military and civilian leadership.



In the Wake of War: Military Occupation, Emancipation, and Civil War America by Andrew F. Lang offers a different interpretation, and it is a deeply consequential one – occupation ran contrary to American republican values. The core identity of the nineteenth century American citizen-soldier was that of a temporary, volunteer warrior ready to defeat his country's enemies before returning to civilian life. American republican tradition rejected both standing armies of occupation and revolutionary military brigades imposing radical social change at the point of bayonet. The demands of an increasingly revolutionary Civil War incorporating vast expanses of territory put great strains upon this

military republican tradition. By the end of Reconstruction, most white Americans chose "faith in democratic majority rule and self-determination at the ballot box – however distasteful and violent – over the idealism of racial equality" (235).

Lang has contributed an indispensable book to the study of civilian-military relations, American political culture, and the course of the Civil War and Reconstruction. *In the Wake of War* is clearly written, richly informed by current historiography, and supported by a truly impressive array of sources including dozens of Union soldier letters and diaries as well as government documents. Lang allows the voices of soldiers and officers to speak for themselves, giving readers a textured analysis of military culture.

The book begins with the Mexican War, finding in that conflict early evidence of American discomfort with military occupation. Most of the boys wanted to go back home, comfortable that they had done their martial duty. The task of occupation fell to the much smaller regular army, which continued its professional, hierarchical, and un-republican ways in the 1850s garrisons of the Far West.

To the American soldier-citizen, long-term military occupation encouraged boredom, lethargy, corruption, and criminality. That would be true in the Civil War as well as in Mexico. It was especially the case in the Western Theater where Union forces successfully conquered the Tennessee, Cumberland, and Mississippi valleys by July 1863. Occupation duty remained a central task of the Union army in the state of Mississippi, for example, longer than in most other parts of the South.

As Lang notes perceptibly, the Emancipation Proclamation, along with the Militia Act of 1862, challenged this limited citizen-soldier ideal by turning soldiers into liberators and by enrolling African Americans into the Union army. The proclamation also reinforced the white republican ethos by relegating black soldiers to garrison duty so as to free up white soldiers for offensive operations. Black soldiers viewed garrison duty as less onerous, however, because it offered them direct opportunities to undermine the white supremacist racial order of the South.

Curiously, Lang pays scant attention to the Freedmen's Bureau, which was organized under military auspices and tasked with the sort of deep social responsibility that so disquieted white republican citizen-soldiers. At the same time, the Bureau foreshadowed a far larger Federal government presence in the twentieth-century South.

Students of Mississippi's Civil War and Reconstruction history will find *In the Wake of War* especially timely, complementing the recent work of Jarret Ruminski on Mississippi civilian life under occupation (*The Limits of Loyalty: Ordinary People in Civil War Mississippi, 2017).* Lang's book is essential reading in its own right as a study of the relationship between American republicanism and the American military, a tension that animates and complicates American politics into the twenty-first century.

Aaron Astor
Maryville College

Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women. By Steven M. Stowe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Acknowledgements, bibliographical references, and index. Pp. xxv, 199. $29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781469640969.)

In this elegantly-written volume, Steven M. Stowe explores the acts of diary writing and diary reading, specifically the diaries of elite southern white women during the Civil War. Stowe's foray into this subject begins with several important questions for himself and for the reader: How can we as diary readers, so far removed from the world and mentality of these southern women, begin to understand them? In what ways can diaries be used as historical sources and what can they tell us about the Civil War? What does the process of editing a diary for publication do to reveal and/or hide the woman writing?

Stowe insists that anyone who wants to read these diaries to understand the lives and times of these women must have empathy for them. He looks at the Civil War diaries of twenty different southern women, focusing on the years 1863 and after. Most of the women are younger, with a few of them middle-aged. Some started their diaries before the war, and some continued after the war, with the majority writing only during the war itself. Three women were Mississippians while many other featured diarists were from the Carolinas and Georgia. Although they may be worlds apart from their readers, "We do not understand in order to empathize; we empathize in order to understand" (xii). Whether the reader of his book is a historian, a mere student of the Civil War, or a connoisseur of memoir, diaries, and autobiography, all are encouraged to bring that attitude of empathetic listener to these women and their stories. In that spirit, Stowe's writing style is personal, with much of the text reading as stream-of-consciousness. This approach is fitting, considering diaries themselves are profoundly personal.

Stowe also understands that using diaries as sources introduces unique problems, as well as opportunities, for historians of the Civil War. Because diaries are written as life events unfold, their entries present moving targets. Thus, endeavoring to learn anything concrete about the big-picture Civil War through their diaries is akin to pinning down a shadow. However, as Stowe aptly notes, we can still learn about the war in the personal, day-to-day Civil War of these women: "A diarist wrote to fit brazen war into her life, not to fit her life into war" (48).

The editing and publication of these diaries reveals another set of complications. Who edits the diaries and what story or portrayal of the author they want to highlight most assuredly shapes what surfaces in a published volume. Stowe argues that this process can alter a diary's original form into something entirely different. Furthermore, editors can hide aspects of the author that might cast more light on who she was. If this is the case, can we really know the woman who wrote the diary? In addition to advising readers to learn as much

as possible about a published diary's editing process, Stowe contends that, as much as any diary can show us a person, we can still know her.

While Stowe could have easily teased out any number of topics from these diaries, he chose three: wartime, men, and slavery. These three topic chapters all utilize the key methods outlined in the initial two chapters ("Reading the Diary" and "Keeping the Diary"), then culminate in a final chapter, "Herself." Here he circles back to his argument about understanding the women themselves. With the last chapter, Stowe persuasively concludes that – for a reader who keeps in mind the nature of diaries and editing processes, while maintaining an attitude of empathy – a diary "will answer for all that it can and give us a woman as real as we are" (157).

Angela M. Alexander
University of Georgia

The Guerrilla Hunters: Irregular Conflicts during the Civil War. Edited by Brian D. McKnight and Marton A. Myers. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017. Acknowledgments, illustrations, maps, notes, index. Pp. ix, 399. $49.95, cloth. ISBN: 0807164976.)

As the editors of this volume acknowledge, edited books can be difficult to review. In this case, they need not have worried. *The Guerrilla Hunters: Irregular Conflicts during the Civil War* presents a well-organized, cohesive collection of essays. Featuring the work of seventeen historians, including both leading and emerging Civil War scholars, it demonstrates how irregular conflicts shaped the conduct of the Civil War and defined the experiences of combatants and noncombatants alike. In the process, *The Guerrilla Hunters* proposes a new synthesis in Civil War scholarship to better incorporate irregulars into the military history of the Civil War.

Although traditional military historians have long regarded irregular conflicts as a largely irrelevant side-show to the conventional Civil War, the contributors to this collection demonstrate that irregular conflicts played a significant, if complicated, role in its outcome. Ranging far beyond the front lines, irregular conflicts blurred the distinction between home front and battle front. They were also populated by unconventional actors—combatants and noncombatants alike—who operated on the basis of obscure personal motivations and conducted themselves beyond accepted modes of combat. Thus, the history of irregular conflicts in the Civil War fundamentally muddies the waters of a conflict historians thought they understood. It is no longer a clear-cut affair with two distinct sides, well-defined aims, and decisive battles. "Embracing that historical problem," *The Guerrilla Hunters* argues, "not running from it, will help us find a better synthesis of these very different kinds of warfare" (5).

Given that its ultimate objective is to prompt military historians to reconsider their approach to the Civil War, *The Guerrilla Hunters* is intended for an academic audience. That being said, there is still plenty for general readers to enjoy. The essays are grounded in a series of complimentary themes, including

the broad scope of irregular conflicts and the challenge of categorizing irregulars. *The Guerrilla Hunters* takes into account the geographic expanse of irregular conflicts, highlighting those raging across Appalachia and along the Missouri-Kansas border. None of the essays focuses exclusively on Mississippi, but both the Confederacy and the Trans-Mississippi Theater of the Civil War are well-represented. Many of the authors treat irregular conflicts as a particularly southern problem with disastrous consequences for the Confederacy.

The essays also grapple with the challenge of defining irregular combatants. Nearly every piece begins by categorizing its irregular actors variously as guerrillas, partisans, bushwhackers, warlords, wild men, or saboteurs. The authors take pains to point out, however, that their definitions are far from universal and, in some places, multiple types of irregulars operated at once. *The Guerrilla Hunters* also illustrates how fine the distinction between regular and irregular forces could be. For example, several authors address the unique role of partisan rangers, who were technically accountable to Confederate command even though they embraced guerrilla tactics. In an especially compelling essay, "The Union War on Women," Lisa Tendrich Frank argues that Union soldiers also employed irregular tactics—particularly against Confederate households. The bias of conventional military history towards what Frank describes as a "masculine understanding of destruction" has led scholars to overlook the devastating impact of soldiers invading intimate, feminine spaces (175).

The Guerrilla Hunters persuasively demonstrates the breadth, complexity, and significance of the irregular conflicts that shaped the Civil War, but still leaves room for further research. Taken together, the essays successfully complicate the accepted military history of the Civil War, but a greater emphasis on the chronology of irregular conflicts would have strengthened its argument. There can be no better way to challenge the conventional narrative of the Civil War than to challenge its very timeline. Several contributors hint at the potential of expanding the study of irregular conflicts to include pre-war Regulator violence and post-war vigilantism. Such research would further illustrate the need for a more all-encompassing military history of the Civil War and its era.

Amy L. Fluker
Youngstown State University

Strategic Sisterhood: The National Council of Negro Women in the Black Freedom Struggle. By Rebecca Tuuri. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. Acknowledgements, illustrations, notes, index. Pp. xi, 313. $90 cloth, $29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469638898.)

Strategic Sisterhood examines the National Council of Negro Women's (NCNW) activist challenges to racism, poverty, and sexism in the mid- to late twentieth century. Rebecca Tuuri probes the NCNW's strategic activism as the organization

cultivated alliances with presidents, foundations, and grassroots activists to enact important changes in black communities both nationally and internationally. She argues that NCNW members have largely been overlooked "in favor of more visible, outspoken, and radical" civil rights activists. At first, the NCNW embraced moderate and perhaps even conservative strategies that reflected the whims of a largely elite organization. Founder Mary McLeod Bethune formed the council in 1935 to galvanize the resources of black women's sororities, professional organizations, and auxiliaries to not only enhance their political and professional power, but to also center their concerns and those of their communities in national political debates (2).

The NCNW's positions evolved over time, however. While some members advocated a more conservative style of activism during the black freedom movement, under Dorothy Height's leadership, the council increasingly shifted its position to bridge a generational divide and to support moderate and radical activists. By mining archives throughout the nation and interviewing black activists, Tuuri has provided a more complex and nuanced picture of the NCNW's endeavors. The council's leadership included some of the most prominent black women leaders in the nation. Further, while black men assumed most of the formal leadership roles in the civil rights movement, Tuuri highlights NCNW members who were leaders as well and consultants to "presidents, business leaders, and leaders of voluntary organizations" (2). The NCNW consisted of organizations such as African American sororities that gave access to important networks. The council later labored to include poor and working class women but a socioeconomic and educational divide made it difficult to do so. But over time, the council's initiatives were increasingly informed by its ability to bring women together across racial, class, and political lines. NCNW members acted as "bridge-builders, communicators, and catalysts" as they engaged in civil rights activism (3, 5). For instance, following the 1963 March on Washington, the NCNW and an interracial delegation of women investigated the appalling conditions protestors endured in Selma, Alabama's jails. This inquiry led to the establishment of Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS), the NCNW's first significant civil rights project during Freedom Summer 1964. This coalition of elite women further cultivated local networks with Mississippi-based rural grassroots activists, most notably, Fannie Lou Hamer and Annie Devine.

The NCNW increased its focus on anti-poverty work in Mississippi and throughout the nation in the late 1960s, particularly after obtaining 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service. The council then applied for external grants rather than merely relying upon membership fees. Tuuri also explores how the council membership expanded to include non-elite women in its anti-poverty campaign. This infusion of new members and the genesis of

fresh ideas challenged older members' respectability politics, particularly as they engaged in what some considered radical activism during the Black Power Movement. Under Dorothy Height's leadership, however, the council embraced the movement's evolution and became an organization that represented all black women regardless of their politics.

The NCNW's uplift-minded activism was not merely limited to black women in the United States. By the mid-1970s, the council had become an international advocate for women throughout the African diaspora although it refused to disavow American liberalism. Because of its carefully measured steps, the council received funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in order to support conferences and economic development opportunities for women in southern Africa. In doing so, the NCNW followed a model similar to its own work to aid economically and politically marginalized African Americans in Mississippi.

Tuuri renders a convincing picture of how the council "displayed flexibility and creativity as it adapted to shifting political terrains." The NCNW's role in the black freedom movement has seldom been heralded, and Tuuri's stellar mining of myriad sources does this well. The NCNW's national and international networks permitted it to access important resources and remain a force for change in African-descended communities until the present day. In the final analysis, *Strategic Sisterhood* is an important addition to the ever growing scholarship on black women's organizations and their critical roles in the black freedom movement.

Cherisse Jones-Branch
Arkansas State University

Environmental Disaster in the Gulf South: Two Centuries of Catastrophe, Risk, and Resilience. Edited by Cindy Ermus. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018. Pp. 1-206. $45 hardcover. ISBN-978-0-8071-6710-6.)

The history of the Gulf South is wrought with challenges, most, if not all, tied to the volatile environment that shapes its identity. The new edited collection by Cindy Ermus unpacks this sordid story by reviewing select disasters plaguing the region over the past two centuries.

The collection is timely, building on the ever-expanding field of disaster and hazard studies that emphasizes how historical decisions shape long-term vulnerabilities. *Environmental Disaster in the Gulf South* emerges at a peak moment in Gulf South studies. As a result, the volume could easily find its way into a variety of college classes, least of all those that include a focus on the history of residents or environs of the Gulf South. In fact, not since *American Disasters* was issued in 2001 by New York University Press has a text attempted to do so much in the way of region-specific disaster history. This is mainly due to editor Cindy Ermus's efforts to seek out a wide range of collaborators. The volume contains articles by historians, geographers, sociologists, and anthropologists who

have produced essays on significant disasters. Well-known culprits such as hurricanes like Katrina, Andrew, and the 1935 Okeechobee Hurricane are included, as are less familiar disasters such as the 1849 Flood and global public health initiatives to eradicate yellow fever.

The collection does an excellent job concentrating on both biotic and abiotic disaster and draws "valuable lessons from the Gulf South's familiarity with natural hazards and social irregularities, which in many ways, are applicable across time and space" (3). For example, "Swamp Things," by Ermus and co-author Abraham Gibson, reviews the introduction of invasive species ranging from kudzu to pythons, all of which are moderately recent phenomena that have historical roots dating to the introduction of species like pigs, fire ants, and nutria. Meanwhile, Andy Horowitz reexamines the 1900 Galveston Storm by providing a necessary link between post-Civil War debates over lynching and the racial and poverty disparities that influence the perception of looters in post-storm periods.

Overall, the main critique of this collection is that it rarely shifts in focus from the Louisiana/Florida areas and their connections to the Caribbean. The essays do not give extensive coverage to Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama. Despite this concern, Ermus et al., should be commended for their efforts to provide a valuable addition to the environmental histories of the region. The compilation is an enjoyable read that exemplifies the future of its field and is highly recommended in its entirety.

Liz Skilton
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

In Remembrance of Emmett Till: Regional Stories and Media Responses to the Black Freedom Struggle. By Darryl Mace. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014. Preface, introduction, illustrations, acknowledgements, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 212. $40 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-8131-4536-5.)

A grocery store in Money, Mississippi, a watery grave in the Tallahatchie River, a hot courthouse in nearby Sumner—these are the places that the historian Pierre Nora called lieux de mémoire. Such sites triangulated the abbreviated life and the reverberant death of Emmett Till, the Chicago teenager whom at least two white men murdered for ostensibly having whistled at a white woman. Because the killing occurred after the traditional forms of Southern lynching had disappeared, because the victim was only fourteen years old, because the offense (if it occurred at all) was too innocuous to have merited death, and because an all-white jury expeditiously exonerated the murderers, the case attracted extraordinary attention. The breadth of the media interest, therefore, amply justifies Darryl Mace's effort to categorize and distill how newspapers covered

the case in the late summer and early fall of 1955. The press de-provincialized what in an earlier era would have been an ordinary racial crime, the sort of homicide that would have been vindicated by white supremacists and ignored by the rest of the nation. The glare of the media that Mace confirms inaugurated what the succeeding six decades have amplified: collective memory has ensured that the case never got cold. For black Americans especially, the force of communal recollections has guaranteed the significance of the death of Emmett Till.

The author argues that it "raised America's conscience" (136) and accelerated the drive for equal rights. The evidence can be located, he claims, in the press; Mace should be commended for having examined a huge number of newspapers. They range across both South and North, Midwest and West, and were aimed at black readers as well as everyone else. Mace has amply demonstrated how widespread the press treatment was, when the corpse was discovered, when J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant were arrested and tried, when Mamie Till-Mobley came down from Chicago to testify in an atmosphere of rampant bigotry, and when justice was thwarted when the half-brothers were acquitted. The extensive recognition in the press of the lethal implications of white supremacy, thus, became the prelude for the remembrance that this book seeks to record.

But, the author has not licked the problem that bedevils all such studies drawn from primary research in newspapers. Their accounts tend to blur into one another because the number of different ways that reporters can describe the same event is finite. By dividing what amounts to the same story into regional groupings, Mace has not established sufficient variety of perspective, and, thus, the attentiveness of readers is bound to sag. Nor has the research that he has conducted in newspaper archives (the term "morgues" hints at the danger of such an approach) yielded any real surprises. The wire services, like the Associated Press and the United Press, aimed at the asymptotic ideal of objectivity, so that the passion of particular voices was deliberately suppressed in that journalistic era. *In Remembrance of Emmett Till* also cites magazines like *Jet,* which featured the terrifyingly mutilated face of the youngster, and *Look,* which recorded the confessions (for profit) of murderers who were immune from further prosecution. But, Mace's indebtedness to newspapers as sources obliges him to miss the impact of the photojournalism of *Life,* which vividly portrayed the mockery of the trial.

Though Mace promises to "expound . . . on previous scholarship" (4), the gaps in his bibliographic apparatus are large enough to be noted. One egregious instance is the omission of Davis W. Houck and Matthew A. Grindy's Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press (2008). Though Christopher Metress provides a blurb for Mace's

book, its bibliography does not list a key work in the formation of collective remembrance about the case, Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination (2008), which Metress as well as Harriet Pollack edited. The first monograph to recount the episode and to trace its aftermath in the civil rights movement is A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till, which this reviewer published in 1989. It is not cited either. Nor is confidence restored by the persistence with which Mace describes the crime as a lynching. He provides no definition. Yet, Milam and Bryant did not belong to a mob that was seeking to exact public, communal vengeance. Their motives were racial, but their method bore no resemblance to the open, blatant vigilantism that had characterized Southern lynchings, say, half a century earlier. Like ordinary criminals, the pair hoped to conceal the homicide that they perpetrated. They failed to do so, nor has it sunk into oblivion.

Stephen J. Whitfield
Brandeis University

The Annotated Pickett's History of Alabama And Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, from the Earliest Period. Edited by James P. Pate. (Montgomery: New South Books, 2018. Notes, acknowledgements, illustrations, index. Pp. 600. $60.00. ISBN: 978-1-58838-032-6.)

Albert J. Pickett became one of the earliest historians of the South with his monumental two-volume *History of Alabama And Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period*. Pickett painstakingly wrote a comprehensive history that covered the time period from Hernando DeSoto's expedition to 1820 immediately after Alabama gained statehood. Pickett gathered primary documents and accounts of events and conducted multitudes of interviews to complete his seminal work. Regarded as the first important history of the state, it has been an invaluable source for scholars interested in this formative period of not only Alabama history, but of the surrounding area. Originally published in 1851, it has been reprinted sporadically since then, but this new edition is well worth the wait.

James P. Pate, professor emeritus from the University of West Alabama and former dean of the University of Mississippi-Tupelo campus, in celebration of Alabama's Bicentennial, has provided an updated version, edited and annotated, that enhances Pickett's initial volumes. Pate starts with a well-written introduction that introduces newcomers to Pickett himself, detailing his life and efforts of writing the work and discusses its publication and initial reviews. Pickett's narrative is then presented again with Pate including additional information. Having apparently devoted two decades of his life to this project, Pate checked original sources and more importantly added citations on more recent works that were not available when the book was originally published, making

this edition a complete treasure trove of sources relating to this early era in history.

New South Books has presented this original two-volume material in one wide format edition that readers will find easy to use. Pickett's first volume traces DeSoto's journey across the southeast, followed by descriptions of the indigenous nations and their cultures and then details European colonialism. For example, and of particular interest to historians of Mississippi, is the chapter detailing the Natchez Indians and their uprising against the French. Pickett uses primary sources compiled from French reports to narrate the events, and Pate cites the works of more recent authors such as Jim Barnett and George Edward Milne to provide a more accurate and complete picture.

Volume Two continues with more colonial efforts by Europeans but focuses heavily on the Creek nation and the eventual Creek War of 1813-14. Pickett's accounts of iconic events such as the massacre at Fort Mims and the famous Canoe Fight on the Alabama River have been used by hundreds of scholars over the years. Pate's new citations correct inaccuracies and flesh out details. Pickett ends his last volume with Mississippi achieving statehood in 1817 and Alabama's short territorial period before it also became a state in 1819.

Although Pickett wrote his wife that he wanted this "disagreeable job off his hands"(vii), his work has been the first account historians read when researching this time period. Pickett's work did contain many inaccuracies, which Pate has meticulously tried to correct, and Pickett's language can be considered offensive due to the time in which it was written. These issues aside, Pate's solid work has only increased this book's value, making this new edition of Pickett as a must-have for historians today. All that is needed now is to convince Pate to edit other classic works of history such as J. F. H. Claiborne's *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State.*

Clay Williams
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