

Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Cutter, Barbara. "Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War." *The Annals of Iowa* 65 (2006), 65-67.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1007>

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Failed Ambition The Civil War Journals and Letters of Cavalryman Homer Harris Jewett, edited by Tom Jewett. College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2004. 284 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Kenneth Lyftogt is a lecturer in the department of history, University of Northern Iowa. The most recent of his several books on Iowa and the Civil War is *Iowa's Forgotten General: Matthew Mark Trumbull* (2005).

Failed Ambition contains a Union cavalry soldier's collected letters and journal entries, edited by his grandnephew, Tom Jewett, who also published the book. Tom Jewett grew up in Des Moines in a home where a portrait of Homer Harris Jewett was prominently displayed in the family room. He edited the book as an attempt to get to know the man in the portrait.

Homer Harris Jewett saw service in Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Louisiana, and his letters give insights into the war's western theater. Tom Jewett deserves credit for his extensive research; between the actual entries, notes, and index, everything is here. The book, however, is a shambles, filled with padding and poorly edited. For example, readers must search through page after page just to find out Homer Jewett's company and regiment when such information should be in the book's title or some other obvious place. The letters and journal entries are good primary sources and are well served by the footnotes. If readers can get by the clutter, they will find much value in the book.

Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War, by Nina Silber. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. 332 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Barbara Cutter is associate professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. She is the author of *Domestic Devils, Battlefield Angels: The Radicalism of American Womanhood, 1830-1865* (2003).

Nina Silber's *Daughters of the Union* is an important addition to scholarship on women in the Civil War era. In this relatively recent but burgeoning field, scholars of northern women have focused almost exclusively on the experiences of women who engaged directly in war work—either those who worked for local soldiers' aid organizations, or most often those who left their homes and traveled south to become hospital workers, teachers, laundresses, spies, or soldiers, or to join male relatives in the army. Little attention has been paid to the experiences and the meanings of the war for the majority of northern women who did not leave their homes to engage in war work. *Daughters of the Union* fills much of that gap. Its author uses evidence from letters and

journals, newspapers, popular literature, and organizational and government records to examine the effects of the war on northern women.

If one strength of the book is its focus on the northern home front, another is Silber's effort to capture the diversity of northern women's voices by using sources from northeastern and midwestern, urban and rural, middle-class and working-class, and African American and white women. Of particular interest to readers of the *Annals of Iowa* is her focus on the experiences of midwestern women. Although most of her sources on Iowa women have been previously published, a substantial amount of the material on midwestern women is based on her research at the Minnesota Historical Society and other large and small archives in the Midwest.

Silber makes a nuanced argument about the effects of the war on northern women. She explores the differences between northern and southern women's conceptions of patriotism in the war. For southern women, she notes, protecting homes and protecting the nation were not separate goals, as the war was fought almost exclusively in their region. In the North, however, there was tension between these ideas, as sending a male relative to war to protect the nation seemed to threaten the welfare of the family. She uses this insight to suggest that as the nation took precedence over home in the North, it made women aware "of their secondary status in the nation-state" (39). This was disturbing for many women, Silber argues, because their power was so closely linked with the ideology of domesticity. Women's moral influence over men in their lives was being undermined by the government's claim that men were needed to protect the nation. Although northern women responded to this threat to their moral authority by more forcefully asserting that authority, they were often unsuccessful. As women moved into public life—as nurses or pension recipients, for example—their own morality was increasingly under scrutiny, their motives challenged. Silber finds a similar ambiguity in women's wartime political work. The war, she argues, encouraged northern women to become more politically active and aware, yet at the same time it created an environment in which military service was far more important than any other work a citizen could perform. Thus, women's exclusion from combat reinforced their secondary status in the nation-state.

Overall, Silber argues, the Civil War's legacy was an ambiguous one for women. In contrast to those scholars who have argued that the war was a "liberating" experience for women, Silber suggests that the situation was more complex: women's increased presence in civic life, she argues, led to economic and political "empowerment" but also to "a redefinition of women's subordination," as they learned to subor-

dinate themselves to an increasingly powerful state, which for the first time began to investigate their private lives (281). Thus, by looking at northern women, Silber is able to add a new dimension to the scholarship on the growing power of the state in American society.

In exploring the effects of the war on the lives of American women, Silber also does a fine job of linking women's wartime political activity to some of the newer historiography on women's prewar political involvement, in order to contrast prewar and postwar attitudes. However, the notions that even middle-class women were uninvolved in business, and that women's moral authority was tied to the home in the antebellum North, have been challenged in recent years by scholars. Some of the more recent works on the nature of domesticity and antebellum women's involvement in economic life could have helped her complicate arguments about the "liberating" nature of the war even further.

This important book fills a significant gap in existing scholarship on women and the Civil War. By focusing on northern women in general, rather than on the minority who left home to engage in war work, it reveals that paying attention to women—even those who did not play a large role in organized war work—changes our understanding of the legacy of the Civil War itself.

Illinois: A History of the Land and Its People, by Roger Biles. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005. x, 341 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$37.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.

Reviewer Cullom Davis is professor of history emeritus, University of Illinois at Springfield. He is the author of the chapter on Illinois in *Heartland: Comparative Histories of the Midwestern States* (1988).

Iowa and Illinois share a winding river border and many similarities in agricultural and manufacturing development, but socially and politically their histories have diverged. Roger Biles clearly and cogently traces the Prairie State's distinctive history, from its earliest geological and Indian eras to the present. It compares favorably to previous general Illinois histories, not only because it carries the story forward to our own times, but also due to several important features.

Chief among the book's notable achievements are the author's generous use and sound interpretation of demographic and other statistical data. These insights permeate the text, but a few examples should demonstrate the point. Combining explanatory text with a map (78), Biles illustrates the rapid spread of railroad lines and linkages in the 1850s, and then assesses their broad economic and social impact. Simi-