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## We Need Men: the Union Draft in the Civil War

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*We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War*, by James W. Geary. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991. ix, 264 pp. Tables, illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$32.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RUSSELL JOHNSON, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

In *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War*, James W. Geary details the evolution of Union army recruiting from a system relying on voluntary enlistments spurred by bounties—or bonuses—of one hundred dollars, to a “carrot and stick” approach combining conscription—forced military service—and an enhanced bounty program. Geary has several goals: to describe the legislative history of Civil War draft policies; to demonstrate that the draft operated fairly; and, in particular, to assess the claim of contemporaries and historians that the Civil War was “a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight” (xvi). Ambitious in scope, *We Need Men* ultimately falls short of all three goals.

After Fort Sumter fell, volunteering initially provided more soldiers than the federal government could use. But by the summer of 1862 the flood of volunteers had slowed to a trickle, while the demand had increased. To meet the demand for soldiers, Congress that summer passed the Militia Act, which authorized states to draft men for up to nine months. Geary tells a very interesting story here. He argues that Senator Henry Wilson (R-MA) developed the Militia Act more as an emancipation measure than as a way to produce soldiers; it included clauses authorizing blacks to serve as laborers in the army (though not yet in fighting roles) and emancipating rebel-owned slaves who did so.

As a conscription measure, however, the Militia Act largely failed. Consequently, in early 1863 Congress pursued a more effective measure. Since one of the main problems with the Militia Act was its reliance on the states, the new draft law, as embodied in the Enrollment Act of March 1863, gave the federal government more authority. Provost Marshals in every congressional district answered to a central office in Washington, not to the several state governors. Eventually, this bureaucracy, and especially its chief officer, Provost Marshal General James B. Fry, became the focus of public antipathy toward the draft.

But in the beginning, two features of the Enrollment Act attracted the most attention: substitution and commutation. Substitution allowed a drafted man to hire someone to enter the army in his place; commutation, until its repeal in July 1864, allowed one to escape

service by paying three hundred dollars to the federal government. At first, working people and the antiwar Democratic press were outraged, and these groups originated phrases such as "\$300 or your life" and the more famous "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Soon, however, even poor people found ways to evade military service. Some communities raised money to pay the commutation fee for any drafted man; others offered their own bounties on top of the federal bounty, which had been raised from one hundred to three hundred dollars by 1863. Draft insurance societies formed; individual members contributed maybe twenty-five dollars each to a fund to pay commutation or furnish a substitute for any member drafted.

Although this part of the story — the legislative history of the draft laws — is the strongest part of the book, Geary devotes insufficient space to a full airing of the congressional debates on the subject. For example, he does not satisfactorily explain why commutation was set at three hundred dollars rather than a lower or higher figure. He mentions that an effort by Senator Lazarus Powell (D-KY) to lower the price of commutation in the original Enrollment Act to \$150 was defeated, but he gives none of the content of the discussion of Powell's amendment.

Although on its surface the Enrollment Act seems unfair, Geary argues that drafts under the act operated fairly, because individuals of any occupational status had access to draft escape routes. Geary uses the previously ignored records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau to develop quantitative data on the draft's impact. The data generally sustain his position, especially for the drafts before the repeal of commutation. Any apparent fairness, however, resulted more from the actions of communities and individuals than from the features of the draft law itself. Furthermore, a complete analysis of the fairness of the draft requires a class analysis of two groups Geary omits: draft evaders — the 161,244 men who failed to report after their names were drawn — and substitutes.

Even if one accepts Geary's conclusion that the Civil War draft operated fairly, that conclusion fails to refute the claim that the war was a poor man's fight. The Enrollment Act directly provided only 13 percent of the men who entered the Union army after its passage, most of those in the form of substitutes. That means 87 percent of the men raised in the last two years of the war responded to increased federal, state, and local bounties — the carrot of the carrot and stick system. Geary generally ignores the carrot side of the equation, and hence his data cannot dispel the poor man's fight notion.

In the final analysis, moreover, the issues of draft fairness and a poor man's fight involve nineteenth-century perceptions of the Civil War in ways Geary fails to acknowledge. Farmers, artisans, unskilled laborers, and other working people in the nineteenth century, not just Democratic politicians and editors, as Geary asserts, thought the war and the draft placed unfair burdens on them, and no amount of quantitative data generated in the late twentieth century can alter that fact.

*Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives from Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860s to 1920s*, by Mary Hurlbut Cordier. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992. xi, 365 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KATHY PENNINGROTH, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

In *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains*, Mary Hurlbut Cordier sets out to destroy the stereotype of the schoolmarm as either a reformer from the East or an ill-educated incompetent. Rather, Cordier emphasizes that many of the women who taught in Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas between 1870 and 1920 were very much a part of their communities, actively contributing to building and shaping the societies in which they lived. Furthermore, she argues that they were effective teachers because the rates of literacy in those three states were among the highest in the nation in spite of often primitive school structures, a lack of standard curricula or books, minimal educational opportunities for teachers, little formal support from state governments, and marginal financial resources. In her first section, Cordier uses census data, official and personal school records, personal diaries, writings and records of ninety-six women, education journals, and secondary sources to describe the educational and historical context for the succeeding (in part two) biographical accounts of five women who taught in Iowa and Nebraska in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

During the 1860s and 1870s, a rapidly increasing population and the desire of communities to educate their children dramatically increased the demand for teachers. For a number of reasons—the Civil War, other career opportunities, low pay, increasing lengths of school terms, and more demanding certification requirements—fewer men than women were willing to teach. This situation afforded opportunities to indigenous women for jobs outside of the home, for some economic independence, and for autonomy, while conforming to the

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