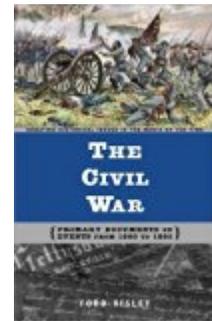


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ford Risley. *The Civil War: Primary Documents on Events from 1860 to 1865*. Westport and London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004. xi + 320 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32126-9.

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## Power of the Press

Intended for use in the classroom, Ford Risley's *The Civil War* is a collection of short editorials related to twenty-seven of the most important topics of the Civil War, ranging from secession to Gettysburg. Chronologically, the collection covers the election of Lincoln through his assassination. The editorials come from both North and South and from major and little-known newspapers. Each section starts with a short topical introduction, includes ten to fifteen editorials, and concludes with bibliographic references and review questions.

Risley's introduction provides valuable information about newspapers and their power in nineteenth-century America. The circulation, cost, and brief history of some of the major papers help highlight how important newspapers were during the Civil War. Risley also helps scholars by explaining the format and financing of 19th century papers.

The work's strength lies in allowing students to easily access some of the most important journalism of the time. The section on the Emancipation Proclamation is the best example, including the famous exchange between Horace Greeley and Abraham Lincoln, which concludes with Greeley writing "God Bless Abraham Lincoln" (pp. 125-128).

The variety of newspapers used is also a strength. While Greeley's *New York Tribune* is well represented, appropriate local papers are also used. The section on the statehood of West Virginia includes editorials from Wellsburg, Wheeling, and Charleston. Risley also does

a great service by including a variety of political opinions in the work. Abolitionists, Southern Fire-Eaters, Democrats, Republicans, and those somewhere in the middle all get their chance to be heard. The famous (Greeley, Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Walt Whitman) are here as are lesser-known editors and letter writers.

There are some nagging problems with this work. The overwhelming majority of editorials are anonymous and each selection seems to start with "An Anonymous Writer." After the first twenty occurrences of this phrase, most readers would assume the editorial is anonymous unless otherwise stated. It does seem as if both the South and West get short shrift here, although the explanation may just be that the Northeast was home to the overwhelming majority of newspapers. It would be helpful to know more about the newspapers being used; a line added to the introduction to the selection with the paper's circulation would help to know how much influence that paper might have had.

This work is most suited for mass communication or journalism classes, rather than history courses. The review questions are split between questions about the style of the editorials and historical issues, leaving them inadequate for either group. Historians will have serious questions about the choice of topics. Gettysburg gets a section while none of the major Western battles receive any discussion. Risley explains this in his introduction, saying some major events were not the subject of much editorial discussion. This explanation works bet-

ter in a journalism class than a Civil War class, however. The selections are extremely short which most students may love, while instructors will wonder where the rest is. Historians would be better off using *Major Problems in Civil War and Reconstruction* or a similar reader for their classes.[1]

Notes

[1]. Michael Perman, *Major Problems in Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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