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Thomas A. DeBlack. *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874.* Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003. vi + 256 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55728-739-7; $18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55728-740-3.

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Turbulent Characters, Plundered People, and the Civil War in Arkansas

Despite a recent spate of books and articles on the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi, the theater remains to date the most under appreciated of the war. Within the Trans-Mississippi itself, the war in Arkansas holds the undesirable position as the state least understood. Historian Thomas A. DeBlack's recent contribution to the field of Trans-Mississippi Civil War studies, *With Fire And Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, fills a great need in the literature on both the theater and the state. While there are other works that furnish the scholar with critical analysis and insights into specific areas of the war in Arkansas, *With Fire and Sword* provides a comprehensive overview of developments before, during, and after the war. By mixing a smooth blend of primary and secondary sources, DeBlack serves up a four-star narrative that delivers a satisfying synthesis for those who wish to explore the far reaches of the conflict.

DeBlack's chapter on the prelude to the war whisks the reader into Arkansas's prosperous antebellum years and paints a picture of a state on the threshold of enormous economic prosperity and potential. The turmoil in neighboring Kansas barely caused a ripple across Arkansas, argues DeBlack, stressing that the "attention of most Arkansans remained fixed on events on the local and state level" (p. 9). While Arkansans may have been introspective, the state was far from unified on political and economic issues. DeBlack points to deep divisions within Arkansas over the issues of state's rights, secession, and slavery. Tensions simmered slowly, only to boil over during the secession crisis. The author demonstrates how these intra-state cleavages erupted and crippled Arkansas's economic development by exposing political fissures that led to an uneasy break with the United States.

Some of the colorful characters introduced by DeBlack in his antebellum chapter reappear as Unionists or Confederates in the chapters on the Civil War itself. These chapters make up the central portion of the work and the author's character development helps carry the reader though the war. This engaging approach makes the material reader-friendly to those who may be unfamiliar with Arkansas history or the Trans-Mississippi Theater. While the names of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant do not surface in lead roles in DeBlack's war stories, the reader gains insight into the minds and acts of other men who shaped the struggle in Arkansas. Confederate political generals Thomas Hindman and Albert Pike, in particular, emerge as intriguing figures in Civil War and Arkansas history.

As for coverage of campaigns and battles in Arkansas, DeBlack explains success and failure in terms of the state, the Trans-Mississippi Theater, and the wider war across the river. The author describes the battle of Pea Ridge as "one of the most significant battles in the entire Civil War" in that the Federal victory secured Missouri for the Union and dealt the Confederacy in Arkansas "a defeat from which it would never fully recover" (p. 49). In addition, DeBlack insists that the defeat at Pea Ridge spurred flamboyant Confederate general Earl Van Dorn to abandon the state in pursuit of a grandiose plan to capture St. Louis. The plan would amount to nothing and as a result, explains DeBlack, "in the annals of Confederate Arkansas [Van Dorn's] name would live in infamy" (p. 51).

With Fire and Sword also presents an insightful look at the common soldiers who fought in Arkansas. The author identifies a variety of characteristics that made service in the theater unique. Ranging from the use of cavalry, to racial diversity in the ranks, to the spread of guerilla warfare, combat in DeBlack's Trans-Mississippi takes on a dynamic of its own, tied to, but in many ways separate from, the combat experience in the Army of Northern Virginia or the Army of Tennessee. The reader soon learns that in the Trans-Mississippi "the rules of warfare did not apply" (p. 113). Accordingly, *With Fire and Sword* delivers an important lesson for those who seek an understanding of the nature of the war beyond

the confines of the Richmond and Washington corridor.

DeBlack's closing chapters on Reconstruction break down along traditional lines of approach to the topic. *With Fire and Sword* offers a potent examination of political, economic, and social aspects of an era that DeBlack labels "one of the most tumultuous and controversial periods in the history of the state" (p. 147). The author points to many lost opportunities for success in Arkansas during Reconstruction and his portrayal of heroes and villains make these chapters among the most compelling in the book. "Economic prosperity would remain an elusive goal" for all but white elites, DeBlack concludes, and he argues that political corruption, while prevalent across the reconstructed South, extracted a particularly heavy toll in Arkansas among freedmen and poor whites (p. 233).

Although *With Fire and Sword* is a sound entry into the Civil War and Reconstruction arena, the work is not without flaws. In his introduction, the author describes the "contradictory nature of much of the historical evidence" that has "colored much of the secondary literature" (p. vi). While that may be so, the reader cannot investigate this assertion because the book contains no citations. The lack of citations is clearly a problem for those wishing to delve deeper into the heart of the Civil War in Arkansas and the Trans-Mississippi.

The above criticism aside, *With Fire and Sword* provides a powerful introduction to Arkansas in the secession crisis, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction era. The limitations of this book should not diminish its overall usefulness to both the scholar and the buff, or as a student-friendly text in an undergraduate history class. For academics, the up-to-date bibliography of published primary and secondary sources is particularly useful. Series editor Elliot West explains that the Histories of Arkansas Series aims to provide readers with an "enlightening and entertaining survey" of Arkansas history and DeBlack's work fits quite capably into that cast (p. ii).

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