

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Steven E. Woodworth, ed. *The American Civil War: A Handbook of Literature and Research*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. xiv + 754 pp. \$99.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29019-0.

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The Civil War continues to fascinate Americans, judging by the vast outpouring of works that are published every year on the subject. In his preface to *The American Civil War*, Steven Woodworth claims that nearly 70,000 books (the articles may be too numerous to count) have been written about the conflict, or more than one work each day since the end of the fighting. In recent years, Civil War scholarship has spread to other media. Films such as *Glory* (1989) and *Gettysburg* (1993), appeared in movie theaters and on television, and Ken Burns's documentary, *The Civil War* (1990) gained large audiences. Civil War reenactments and living history demonstrations also continue to remain popular.

Woodworth attempts to make this almost incomprehensible amount of Civil War material manageable. Asserting that "this book seeks to ease some of the constraints of the sheer vastness of Civil War literature(xii)," Woodworth divides these sources into eleven sections. Each section contains from two to eleven bibliographic essays, written by different scholars, for a total of nearly fifty essays. For example, the section on "Leaders" contains essays on Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Union civilian leaders, and Confederate civilian leaders. The subject matter ranges from sections on "Strategy and Tactics" and "Conduct of the War" to less-studied areas, such as "Illustrative Materials" and "Popular Media." A

valuable appendix, "Publishers and Dealers of Civil War Literature," also is included.

Woodworth's book is an extremely valuable research tool for those studying the Civil War. By reading a particular essay, researchers may familiarize themselves with the important works on that subfield of the conflict. Additionally, most of the essays highlight new areas for research. However, two areas are not included among the book's subject matter. No essay on the participation of various white ethnic groups in the military or on their influence on the homefront of either the North or the South is included, nor is the topic very well examined in any of the existing essays. Certainly the contributions of Irish and German soldiers to the North's victory merits at least part of an essay. Also, the influence of CD-ROMs and the Internet in facilitating future research could be examined. Admittedly, this is a difficult subject to analyze because the technology is relatively new, but access to such resources by large numbers of people increases every year.

The American Civil War is an excellent complement to other reference works on the bloodiest struggle in America's history. The book's essays should be read by anyone attempting to become more familiar with the enormous amount of literature on the conflict, or by those who are beginning, or continuing, research into a particular aspect of the war.

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