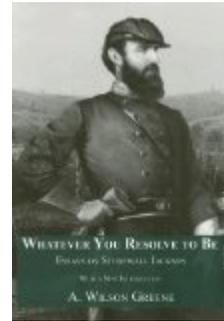


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

A. Wilson Greene. *Whatever You Resolve to Be: Essays on Stonewall Jackson*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005. lxxiv + 186 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-57233-430-4.

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Enigmatic Commander

Wilson Greene's well-written volume is a collection of five essays on various aspects of Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and his involvement in the American Civil War. While certainly not a hagiography, this study is by and large a favorable assessment of Jackson's performance during the Civil War, even during the Seven Days battles in 1862. Lucid prose is surely Greene's strongest asset, which no doubt will make this book appealing to a general audience. Scholars of the war and Jackson's role in it will also find the essays of interest as well, although they are not without their shortcomings.

The first chapter, "The Man behind the Legend," is a chronological exploration of the general as a person, from his childhood to West Point, on to the Mexican War and his Virginia Military Institute days, and finally through his truncated service in the Civil War. Rather than describe all of the events and battles of Jackson's life, Greene provides a look at Jackson's personality and that which influenced it. This includes a refreshing debunking of several old Jackson myths (the lemon-sucking, for example) and shows a very human Jackson as an unprepared student, a young officer in a ferocious foreign war, and a rather awkward professor. Additionally, Greene portrays Jackson as a devoted husband and father, who seems to have found the only true happiness in his life in the decade or so of domestic routine leading up to the Civil War. The essay also depicts Jackson during the Civil War as a dedicated soldier—perhaps too much so—who took his duty quite seriously, to the point that a number of Jackson's peers and subordinates came to resent him and his rigidity. Overall, however, what emerges

from this first essay is a picture of Jackson as a human being with strengths and weaknesses, not a quirky, oddball Presbyterian fundamentalist as he is sometimes depicted.

For all this, however, Greene's overview of "Jackson the Man" will strike the modern scholar as flawed, in part by the absence of any meaningful discussion of the general and slavery. Stonewall spent the better part of his life in a slave state; he owned slaves and gave his life for a cause dedicated to the perpetuation of this "peculiar institution." All the reader gets from Greene on this important issue is the already well-known tale of Jackson's 1850s Sunday school for blacks, and a brief mention of Jackson's support for slavery despite his recognition that slaves were "children of God with souls to save and deserving of humane treatment" (p. 26). Similarly, any discussion of Jackson's prewar politics and his motivation for serving the Confederacy is noticeably absent from the essay, which, coupled with the lack of discussion of slavery, makes for an incomplete and dated biographical sketch.

In the second essay, Greene provides a detailed look at Jackson's role during the Seven Days battles around Richmond in 1862, for which he has been criticized over the years—even by his contemporaries. In one of the significant strengths of this examination, Greene writes as if he were at Jackson's side during the campaign, so that the reader gets the vivid impression of knowing only what Jackson knew and only when he knew it. This approach has great merit to it, in that we see the difficulties of operating in unfamiliar terrain under exhausting conditions

without knowing the overall scenario in which the entire Army of Northern Virginia marched and fought. As a result, Greene shows Jackson making decisions based on the information at hand, which is of course how commanders have to conduct operations in the field. He largely exonerates Jackson from blame for the failures of the Seven Days struggles in an unconvincing defense that comes across in the legalistic fashion of a defense attorney seeking exoneration based on technicalities. Thus, to cite just one example that concerns Jackson's failure to extend his left at Malvern Hill and perhaps by doing so turn the Union right flank, Greene states "Lee issued no orders for such a maneuver, and, in fact, asked nothing of Jackson that day that required initiative or judgment" (p. 71). This is stretching credulity to put it mildly, since on one hand Greene wants his readers to believe that Jackson was masterful, legendary, and extraordinary, yet for all this, the general was not under any obligation to use his "initiative or judgment." That is certainly not the hallmark of an officer upon which the author showers such glowing praise.

The third essay on Jackson and the Second Manassas campaign of 1862 is perhaps Greene's best. Although it offers no particularly bold interpretations of Jackson's generalship in this operation, the author's narrative not only adds a sense of the drama, that must have enveloped the Confederates marching with Jackson to try to strike a blow against Union General John Pope and his army, it also amply demonstrates what a physically exhausting performance was made by Jackson's command, and the demands he placed upon his soldiers. Even more dramatic is Greene's depiction of the desperate, savage struggle Jackson's men endured when attacked by Union troops along the railroad cut, and Stonewall's exemplarily leadership and superb use of interior lines. Unfortunately, the book's fourth essay, about Jackson at Fredericksburg, does not equal such quality. This chapter focuses on the south end of the December 1862 battlefield, where Jackson commanded, and is not meant to be a study of the entire engagement. Nevertheless, Jackson is curiously absent from much of this essay and we learn little about his influence on the affair. In fact, there seems to be more concentration on Federal General William B. Franklin, the Grand Division commander in that sector of the field, and Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, commander of the division that ultimately bore the brunt of the fighting. As a battle narrative, Greene does a capable job describing events, including Meade's success in exploiting

a significant gap in Jackson's lines. The author does not, however, offer a satisfactory conclusion about who must be faulted for allowing the gap (obvious to the southern commanders, including Jackson) to have remained unfilled by the time of the Federal assault. Greene's lack of an explanation of Jackson's role in this potentially costly miscue is striking.

Finally, Greene offers a concluding essay on the "Generalship of Stonewall Jackson," an overview that is somewhat repetitive in that it covers a fair amount of what the previous four chapters already described. Greene goes on to assert that Jackson's success was dependent upon six strengths: "deception and secrecy; celerity on the march; strong discipline; decisiveness in combat; belief in total victory; and personal bravery and modesty" (p. 162). Greene also points out Jackson's primary weakness as well, a marked penchant to have difficult relations with some of his subordinate officers. Greene provides thoughtful, though brief, overview of Jackson's rocky relations with fellow Virginians Richard B. Garnett and A. P. Hill, which, in the case of the former, shows Jackson as petty and vindictive. The evenhandedness of Greene's evaluation of Jackson in this essay makes it particularly useful.

Conceptually, this book is something of an oddity. Although the book was first printed in 1992 by another publisher, the University of Tennessee Press has reissued it in 2005—a bit peculiar for an academic press in what have become lean times in publishing. Moreover, rather than have Greene revise his twelve-year-old essays for the reprint, which, without explanation, Greene states is "impossible" (p. lxxv), the book contains instead "Elaborations and Additions" to consult in light of more recent scholarship. This is an awkward and unsatisfying substitute for revising the essays, which is what Greene really should have been asked to do (although in his introduction, Greene states he has done so in his fifth essay). Perhaps the most useful and impressive part of Greene's book is his bibliographical overview on Jackson scholarship through 2005, which is not only handy but an enjoyable read. Finally, National Park Service historian Robert K. Krick's forward is a rather rambling piece that does not quite connect with Greene's work, and reads more like a casual dinner talk for a Civil War Round Table. Why the publisher included it is unclear; Greene's own work stands on its own merits, and needs no ill-fitting remarks to detract from it.

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