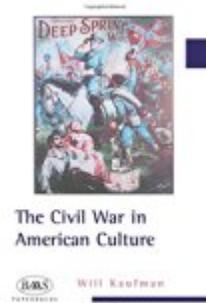


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Will Kaufman. *The Civil War in American Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. xi + 193 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-1935-1.

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Still Seeking a Cultural Appomattox

Will Kaufman's *The Civil War in American Culture* is a sweeping chronicle of the numerous ways in which the nation's bloodiest conflict has been appropriated as "cultural property" (p. x). Broadly conceived, "culture" consists of literature, film, symbols, martyrdom, gender roles, and virtual gaming. Written to challenge "those who deny the centrality of race and slavery in the Civil War and in the numerous cultural expressions and practices it has spawned," *The Civil War in American Culture* addresses disparate topics from postwar literature to the contemporary "what if" tales, as well as "Uncle Tom's Root Beer" to Playmobil plastic figurines of Union and Confederate soldiers manufactured in Malta and Spain (pp. x, 20, 131). Drawing heavily upon previous works in the field of Civil War memory, Kaufman concludes "the culture war being waged by neo-Confederates and their progressive adversaries shows no sign of abating" (p. 163).[1]

The Civil War in American Culture is organized into an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion. Kaufman opens the book with a chapter on antebellum culture that examines Northern and Southern views on race, particularly through an examination of minstrelsy and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Skipping the actual military conflict, Kaufman launches into the postwar cultural conflict with an examination of early cultural appropriation. Chapter 2 covers the standard material for scholars of Civil War memory with examinations of Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" tales, Thomas Dixon's "Reconstruction Trilogy" (1902, 1905, 1907) which became D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of A Nation* (1915) and a few thoughts

on Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936).[2] To this is added a brief discussion of twelve revisionist scholars known as the "Nashville Agrarians," which included such names as Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren. Martyrdom and heroification is covered in chapter 3 with discussions on John Brown and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, while the deification and demonization of President Lincoln stand alone as the topics of chapter 4.

In a chapter which blends both older and contemporary commercialization, Kaufman "explores Confederate apologia as a white supremacist enterprise of corporate scale and sophistication, impacting upon cyberspace, the musical arena, civic space and the marketplace" (p. xii). Consequently, chapter 5 examines the pro-Confederate messages of Southern Rock; the rise of organizations such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the League of the South; and a variety of symbols including the Confederate battle flag and popular t-shirt slogans. In a surprising return to the war itself, chapter 6 turns to the supposed destabilizing effect of the conflict upon traditional gender roles. Here, the stories of Sojourner Truth and Elizabeth Keckley are shown to disturb the racial dimensions of the "Cult of True Womanhood," while masculinity is disturbed by the military services of Jenny Hodgers, Emma Edmonds and Loreta Velazquez. Returning to the topic of commercialization in chapter 7, the virtual Civil War comes to light through photography, Ken Burns's *The Civil War* (1990), computer gaming and re-enacting. Kaufman finds that while the visual medium holds the ca-

capacity to connect Americans in way that words cannot, gaming and re-enacting often highlight the tactics of the conflict at the expense of ethical and political issues.

Chapter 8 is a particularly illuminating discussion of the international dimensions and cultural impact of the American Civil War. In an examination of Karl Marx's literature on the consequences of the war for the labor movement, the portrayal of the Irish in film and poetry, and the Abraham Lincoln battalion in the Spanish Civil War, Kaufman shows how the American conflict has captured the imagination of people across the world. In an aptly titled conclusion, "History is My Starting Point," Kaufman describes the continuing cultural battle over the legacy of the conflict that now continues in the absence of any witnesses. With "neo-confederates" and "their progressive adversaries" still fighting over the causes, meaning, and legacy of the war on a cultural front, Kaufman concludes, "in the wider realm of culture, there is—as of yet—no Appomattox" (p. 163).

The Civil War in American Culture has two particular strengths which merit further discussion. Although scholars are undoubtedly aware of the international interest in the American Civil War and re-enacting in particular, Kaufman takes readers a step further into investigating the cultural significance of the conflict. In the context of the Spanish Civil War, this began with the "invocation of Lincoln's name" by the 3,200 man Abraham Lincoln Battalion perceiving itself in another conflict where "an oligarchy of landowners is challenged by an army championing the rights of labour over property" (p. 140). Those sentiments were also commonly found in period literature such as John Dos Passos's *Adventures of a Young Man* (1939) and Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). As Kaufman informs readers, "the American Civil War contributed to the articulation of the Spanish struggle through its appropriated images of contest, victory, and defeat" (p. 145).

Secondly, *The Civil War in American Culture* is stylized in such a way that makes it an excellent reference guide. Kaufman frequently provides in-text citations of other scholars in a manner that synthesizes the current scholarly evaluation of historical memory and the Civil War. In an effort to make his work interactive and user friendly, Kaufman "made a point of accessing primary material from online sources where possible" (p. 164). Readers may check primary sources at reputable academic websites and even discover for themselves the nature of the cultural commercialization online. Consequently, the bibliography is an online guide to the cul-

tural war of which Kaufman speaks.

The foremost difficulty of this book will be finding an audience. With its readability and user-friendly bibliography, *The Civil War in American Culture* would appear to be written for a broad public audience. However, frequent reliance upon previous scholarship and a warning that some cultural items—Faulkner's literature is one example given by the author—are excluded because "they have been amply covered elsewhere" suggest the necessity of a general familiarity with historical memory scholarship (p. xiv). While general readers may be frustrated by the expectations of background knowledge, scholars are likely to be equally frustrated with areas where the scholarship is cut short. Although the information in chapter 6, "The Regenerated Civil War," is useful, Kaufman seems to have truncated the discussion of whether the Civil War altered gender roles, presenting only an affirmative case.[3] Fewer references requiring reader familiarity with scholarship—not to be confused with less use thereof—along with some coverage of oft-discussed cultural items would increase the accessibility of this book to the general public. It is in that arena, that specialists typically find dedication, or at least acceptance, of the neo-Confederate ideals which Kaufman seeks to discredit.

The Civil War in American Culture might also be improved with contextualization through the use of periodization. Kaufman presents readers with a broad sweep of how Americans have culturally incorporated the American Civil War over time; however, readers are left without any indication of variance in the past one 142 years. Have Americans become more or less involved in the culture conflict over the war? Does location matter? To what extent does neo-Confederate commercialization sell outside the former Confederate states? Answers to these questions would inform readers about the changing nature of the Civil War in American culture, instead of just providing a smorgasbord of how Americans have culturally appropriated the war.

Overall, it is my pleasure to recommend this book to scholarly audiences and for use in upper-level undergraduate courses. Although the application of scholarship is frustrating in some places, *The Civil War in American Culture* is an excellent overview for scholars and advanced students alike. Combined with a lecture on memory and the Civil War, the book would likely benefit undergraduates due to its readability and user-friendly nature. Knowledgeable buffs and other experienced readers outside of the academy are also likely to find this

book engaging. Kaufman will prompt readers to consider whether the Civil War is really over, and when and how the United States might reach a cultural Appomattox.

Notes

[1]. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Jim Cullen, *The Civil War in Popular Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Stephen Cushman, *Bloody Promenade: Reflections on a Civil War Battle* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999); Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); and Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation:*

Women's Writing and the American Civil War (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999).

[2]. "Reconstruction Trilogy" refers to *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), *The Klansman* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907), all by Thomas Dixon.

[3]. The notion of the transformation of gender roles is more complex than Kaufman admits. Scholars of gender history often contest whether or to what degree the Civil War changed traditional notions of gender roles. Drew Gilpin Faust, "Ours as Well as That of Men," in *Writing the Civil War: The Quest to Understand*, ed. James M. McPherson and William J. Cooper Jr. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 228-240.

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