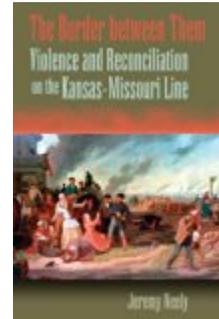


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jeremy Neely. *The Border between Them: Violence and Reconciliation on the Kansas-Missouri Line*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. xvi + 305 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-1729-5.

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Jeremy Neely's *The Border between Them* is an examination of the creation, disintegration, and reunification of the Kansas-Missouri border. This ambitious social history uses the categories of class, race, gender, and region to understand events along the border. It proceeds chronologically, beginning with the arrival of sixteenth-century Europeans and ending with the nostalgic memories of twentieth-century Americans. However, the central event in this narrative is the struggle of nineteenth-century Americans as they confronted the issues of slavery and freedom in the borderlands.

Beginning with the interactions between European traders and the Osage Indians, Neely quickly outlines three centuries of frontier, Native American, and environmental history as he explains the development of early-nineteenth-century American expectations that the land west of Missouri be a permanently separated Indian frontier. Next the author discusses the development of slavery in Missouri, emphasizing aspects of nineteenth-century life like the existence of a relationship between economic success, participation in the burgeoning market economy, and the use of slave labor. The year 1857, argues Neely, was the breaking point in Kansas-Missouri relations. In that year an ideological divide rapidly devolved into a guerilla struggle. The aggressive antislavery tactics of many Free-soil migrants arriving in Kansas caused numerous proslavery Missourians to resort to violence in defense of their interests.

By the spring of 1861, when the rest of the nation joined in the fratricide, settlers along the Kansas-Missouri border had been fighting for nearly five years. Guerilla fighting along the border continued indecisively until the Federal commander of the District of the Border,

General Thomas Ewing, issued his General Order No. 11, which called for many Southern-sympathizing Missourians living along the Kansas-Missouri border "to remove from their present places of residence" (p. 122). Ewing's harsh policy, adds Neely, reduced the violence along the border, but did not eliminate the possibility of guerilla attacks.

After the war physical, social, political, and economic forces combined to reorganize and reunite the Kansas-Missouri borderlands. Specifically, Neely argues that the synergistic effect of persistent racism, the arrival of railroads, and the development of mixed-farming practices associated with the Corn Belt proved so powerful that the prewar ideological divisions along the Kansas-Missouri border faded. In their place, "new alliances were born of mutual economic and ideological interests" (p. 200). By the turn of the twentieth century, Neely concludes, both Kansans and Missourians looked back to the mid-nineteenth century with nostalgia. The collective memories of these white men stressed consensus rather than conflict—a noble gesture made at the expense of most minority groups.

Jeremy Neely's study of conflict and conciliation along the Kansas-Missouri border may be best understood within the context of late-twentieth-century American historiography. Two trends from that era appear to have influenced Neely's approach to his subject. First, his work should be viewed within the context of increased professional interest in social history. Second, Neely's study may be seen as an alternative to the traditional (chronologically limited) approach to the Kansas-Missouri conflict.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, social historians dis-

sected American life in a multitude of ways. Class, race, and gender became the lenses through which many social historians viewed virtually every aspect of American life. Many of these social historians, however, overlooked the Civil War. Consequently, Maris Vinovskis published his provocative essay "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations" in an edited compilation titled *Toward A Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays* (1990). In his essay, Vinovskis lamented the fact that despite the deluge of writings regarding the Civil War little had been written on civilian life and the long-term effects of the war. As a result, scholars began to study communities and regions in an effort to better understand the Civil War's impact on average Americans. These scholars also began training the next generation of historians to do the same. Neely is part of that next generation.

Similarly, by the late twentieth century a common chronology appeared throughout much of the Kansas-Missouri scholarship. Most historians who studied the borderlands limited their analyses to the war years or to notorious individuals fighting along the frontier. A short list of these important studies includes Albert Castel, *A Frontier State at War: Kansas, 1861-1865* (1958); William Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865* (1963); Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (1989); Edward Leslie, *The Devil Knows How to Ride* (1996); and Albert Castel, *William Clarke Quantrill* (1999). All are exceptional works, but they are limited primarily to either wartime events or wartime combatants.

In *The Border between Them* Jeremy Neely attempts to fill an academic void within these two storylines—American social history and Kansas-Missouri scholarship. He focuses on the Civil War's origins, meanings, and consequences for the ordinary men and women living in six adjacent Kansas and Missouri counties located just south of the big bend in the Missouri River, where no natural boundary separated Kansas and Missouri. He delves deeply into the primary sources of the border area, including personal materials like let-

ters, diaries, and manuscripts, and public materials like court records, newspapers, and the population, agriculture, and slave manuscripts of the federal census. Consequently, Neely has produced a well-researched, longitudinal study of nineteenth-century life along a portion of the Kansas-Missouri border.

Despite its strong scholarship and its niche in American historiography, *The Border between Them* suffers from two weaknesses. First, it has several typographical and grammatical errors. (For examples see pages 16, 81, and 105.) Second, it fails to find an audience. The book neither makes a clear contribution to historians' collective understanding of the subject nor provides an engaging narrative for a popular audience. Regarding its scholarly contributions, Neely's monograph does little more than reinforce the historical narrative with which most American historians are probably familiar: Slavery brought on a brutal war by mid-nineteenth century, and reunification of the country was a long process which was influenced by the demographic, economic, and geographic growth of the nation. In other words, Neely shows that six counties along the Kansas-Missouri border developed in ways similar to that of the nation. Regarding the book's mass appeal, it is disappointing because of its awkward combination of frontier anecdotes (chapters 1, 4, and 6) and census data analyses (chapters 2, 3, 5, and 7). Perhaps greater interest could be raised by including some of the more infamous guerilla fighters of the Civil War (e.g., William Quantrill, Bill Anderson, and the James and Younger brothers). However, considering the fact that Neely's chapter on the Civil War is one of his shortest, it is clear that neither the war nor the warriors are his primary concern.

So what is the bottom line? If you are interested in a long-term social history of several border counties in Kansas and Missouri throughout the nineteenth century (a study that emphasizes postwar agricultural developments), then this is your book. However, if you are interested in the Civil War and the guerilla aspects of the fighting along the Kansas-Missouri border, then pick up one of the other books mentioned above.

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