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Gary Ecelbarger. *Black Jack Logan: An Extraordinary Life in Peace and War.* Guilford: Lyons Press, 2005. viii + 391 pp. $22.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-59228-566-2.

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Politics and Other Means: The Life of a Citizen General

Writers of military biography tend to face two pitfalls, one unique to the genre and one common to all biographers. Military biographies sometimes give short shrift to non-military aspects of the subject's career, creating an inaccurate or incomplete portrait of the individual's life and times. Secondly, biographers can fall victim to a "Stockholm Syndrome" of sorts, whereby they become so enamored of the subject, through years of research, that they become blind to, or refuse to acknowledge, the subject's failures and shortcomings. Fortunately for the reader of Civil War military biography, Gary L. Ecelbarger avoids both traps with his latest offering on Maj. Gen. John Alexander Logan, known to history as Black Jack. Ecelbarger is the author of two previous books on Civil War history, a study of the 1862 Battle of Kernstown and a biography of Union Brigadier General Frederick W. Lander. Logan is the subject of two earlier books by James Pickett Jones, but Ecelbarger's book is the first single-volume account to deal with Logan's entire military and political career.

John A. Logan was born February 9, 1826 into what would become one of the first families of southern Illinois. His father settled there in 1823 after the death of his first wife, in a region that became known as "Egypt" for its remoteness, harsh climate, and river delta geography. John had an idyllic childhood, received a good education, and entered the legal profession in 1851, after a short stint as a volunteer in the Mexican-American War, during which he saw no combat.

Logan's father was a slaveholding Democrat, putting him in the majority in a solidly pro-Southern, proslavery part of Illinois. He passed these political and racial views on to his son, who wasted no time in entering the political arena. Logan won a race for the Illinois General Assembly in 1852 and never looked back. In the state assembly he earned the sobriquet "Dirty Work" for his zealous advocacy of the Fugitive Slave Law and for securing passage of a draconian measure known as "Logan's Black Law" that imposed fines or indentured servitude on any free black who stayed in Illinois for more than ten days. He carried these opinions with him to Washington, where he served in the House of Representatives from late 1859 until the outbreak of civil war.

The late 1850s was a formative period in Logan's life. He married in 1855, and formed a political alliance with Stephen Douglas that brought him national notoriety. He campaigned for Douglas in his bid for the presidency in 1860 and subscribed to Douglas's calls for preservation of the Union above all, but retained his Southern sympathies and belief that slavery was both allowed by the Constitution and sanctioned by history. This position became politically untenable after Fort Sumter, as Abraham Lincoln called for volunteers from all loyal states to suppress the rebellion. In an epiphany of sorts, Logan realized that he could not support armed insurrection against the Union that he served politically; as such, he repudiated his ties to the South. This decision estranged him from his mother, who vowed never to speak to him again, and from several of his relatives, who went South to serve the Confederacy. Logan believed in his decision, though, and in the end brought Egypt with him firmly into the Union camp.

After a trip to the Manassas battlefield in July 1861 as a political emissary, during which he picked up a rifle and fired at the Confederates during a skirmish, Logan secured a colonelcy in the U.S. Volunteers. Thus began a meteoric rise through the ranks. He proceeded to raise a volunteer regiment, the Thirty-first Illinois, and led it in Ulysses S. Grant's early campaigns to secure the upper Mississippi River Valley. Logan's relationship with Grant set the course for his highly successful career as a soldier, but "Black Jack" (as he came to be known because of his swarthy complexion) was not the archetypical, oft-ridiculed political general in the mold of Benjamin Butler and Nathaniel Banks.

Logan was a quick study in tactics and the operational

art. He took care of his men, shared hardships with them, and led by example at all times, placing himself in danger to inspire his men on numerous battlefields. The units he commanded responded in kind, often stopping to cheer him when he appeared on the field of battle to reverse a deteriorating situation. Logan served the entire war in the Army of the Tennessee, commanding a regiment, division, corps, and, for a short time, the entire army. He participated in the Henry/Donelson, Vicksburg, Atlanta, and Carolinas campaigns, receiving three serious wounds at Fort Donelson. During the Atlanta campaign, Logan rose to army command when James B. McPherson was killed, only to find himself summarily demoted by William T. Sherman in favor of a West Point graduate, Oliver O. Howard. Logan recovered, though, and ended the conflict with a reputation as one of the best volunteer generals on either side. As Sherman embarked upon his March to the Sea in late 1864, Logan returned to Illinois at the behest of Lincoln to campaign for him in Egypt. His remarkable oratorical skills, military reputation, and personal magnetism were integral to the Republican landslide in that state, and in the end, his last formal act as a soldier was to command the Army of the Tennessee as it marched in the Grand Review in Washington, D.C., in May 1865.

John Logan's postwar political career enhanced his wartime prominence. In an astounding about-face, Logan became the most radical of Republicans, blaming all of the ills of the past decade not on the South, but on the Democratic Party. Most amazingly, he also became a champion of racial equality, declaring in an 1867 speech, "I don't care whether a man is black, red, blue, or white if he is a civilized man in a Christian community like ours … he has the right to say who the men shall be that control the Government" (p. 246). Throughout the book, Ecelbarger highlights key points at which Logan's opinions evolved on the question of race; his postwar stance was a product of his dedication to the cause of Union and his wartime experiences in the South. Using the support of the Grand Army of the Republic, Logan served in the House again from 1867-71, and served two terms in the U.S. Senate, from 1871-77 and 1879-86. During the latter term, he ran unsuccessfully for Vice President in 1884, and was considered the odds-on favorite to win the Presidency in 1888 with the support of the entire Northern free black community. Ill health interrupted his quest, though, and "Black Jack" Logan died of rheumatism on December 26, 1886.

In addition to his postwar support of African Americans, John A. Logan left modern America another legacy–Memorial Day. Established as Decoration Day in 1868 to honor those killed in the Civil War, this holiday became our annual Memorial Day. In 1870, Logan used his position as national commander of the GAR to establish the last Monday in May as a national holiday for this purpose. It was, he proclaimed until his death, the proudest act of his life.

Black Jack is a thorough, balanced treatment of the military and political aspects of Logan's life. Despite the often copious detail on Logan's private life, the narrative is fast-paced and interspersed with analysis and context. Ecelbarger does an excellent job in the first third of the book of merging biographical information with the history of Southern Illinois, showing how Logan was shaped by, and in turn shaped, his surroundings. It was largely because of Logan's stature that Egypt developed from a pro-Confederate enclave into a staunchly pro-Lincoln district. The chapters on Logan's military career are detailed but concise, but the complete absence of maps often prevents an understanding of the main character's place in the action. In his evaluation of Logan the general, Ecelbarger buttresses the argument of Thomas Goss in *The War Within the Union High Command* (2003) that Lincoln's political generals contributed to the Union war effort in multiple ways, and should thus be judged both for their political and military skills.

The book's sole shortcoming in this area is a somewhat superficial treatment of the problematic relationship between Sherman and Logan. One would expect the two generals, who were hard fighters and absolutely committed to the Union cause, to work together quite well. Ecelbarger assigns the dislike to Sherman's favoritism of West Point graduates, but there appear to have been other factors at work. A fascinating but puzzling statement from Sherman about Logan's contempt for the military arts of logistics and grand strategy deserves further analysis (p. 182), and could explain the relationship. Finally, the author judiciously balances secondary, published primary, and manuscript sources, and makes especially good use of newspapers, important to any discussion of nineteenth-century politics. He also offers an evenhanded look at the political scandals that marred Logan's time in the Senate, another window into Gilded Age politics.

Black Jack is a well-researched, informative, and entertaining book that will appeal both to the academic and the general reader. Those seeking another perspective on Union campaigns in the Western Theater will not be disappointed. Students of prewar and postwar U.S. political history will also find much that is useful in Logan's experiences, as will students of Illinois history. Because

of its comprehensive treatment of John A. Logan's life, *Black Jack* should stand as the authoritative account on this subject for some time to come.

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