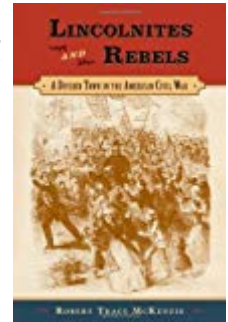


**Robert Tracy McKenzie.** *Lincolmites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. vii + 306 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-518294-1.



**Reviewed by** Karen Kehoe

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Robert Tracy McKenzie spent a good part of his youth fascinated by the Civil War. One could suppose that fascination was not unique among those who grew up in the region near Knoxville, Tennessee. What is unique is where that interest led. In *Lincolmites and Rebels*, he shows what a youthful fascination can become when coupled with mature training and scholarship. Focusing on Knoxville and its inhabitants, McKenzie deftly presents a narrative that showcases the interplay among society, politics, and the military, using the life and labors of William Brownlow, a newspaperman and politician, as a lens through which the "maddening riddle" of wartime eastern Tennessee can be understood (p. 5). The result is a volume that places the war in an unusual position, not as a string of connected and violent struggles that defined people's lives, but as a constant backdrop to the relationships among citizens. *Lincolmites and Rebels* is a fine case study of life in a war-torn town during the conflict that divided the nation in the mid-nineteenth century.

McKenzie presents his narrative in a series of eight chronologically arranged chapters that be-

gin with 1849 and end with 1877. He describes the changes in fortune of the people of Knoxville and its environs as the Confederate and Union armies traded control of the vicinity. More important, he describes those changes in fortune as the supporters of the two sides rose and fell in prominence. Rather than being the story of militaries, this is the story of regular people. To prepare the work, McKenzie explored a vast array of sources including the personal writings of numerous individuals and families, war department records on both sides of the conflict, Congressional deliberations, and records of local and state governmental agencies, churches, and financial institutions. The depth and breadth of his research allow McKenzie to draw a detailed account of life in Knoxville during this crucial period.

The volume begins with McKenzie introducing Brownlow, editor of a Whig newspaper and a polemicist of distinct abilities learned in his years as a circuit-riding Methodist minister. Through Brownlow's words, the author paints a picture of a young Knoxville, filled with social and economic strains, but mostly unified in the everyday goal of

making Knoxville "the 'Metropolis' of East Tennessee" (p. 11). In a theme that runs through the work, McKenzie reminds the reader that interest in the great political concerns of the day "existed against a backdrop of mundane challenges and commonplace concerns" (p. 26). This signals the unique nature of the study. For McKenzie, the war is in both the foreground and the background of the story. It exacerbated old wounds and was driven by old loyalties.

The presidential election of 1860 tested the people's common goals. In his second chapter, "Contemplating Calamity," the author shows how a speech by William L. Yancey, senator from Alabama, seemed to instigate an outbreak of partisan bickering that followed old fractures in the community. They were rifts caused by longtime "ties of party and region" as well as concerns over the fates of slavery and white men (p. 31). These multiple concerns informed the most outspoken advocates of the presidential candidates. The voters of Knoxville seemed to agree only that slavery should be defended.

Chapter 3, "A Town Dividing," is a study of how the community reacted to the election of Abraham Lincoln. The treatment of people struggling to make individual decisions within the context of community concerns set against the national debate is particularly well handled. Knoxville's people moved back and forth in their decisions, sometimes moved by party ties, sometimes by economics, and sometimes just reacting to personalities. McKenzie sums up positions and clarifies the arguments of the historical actors to help the reader keep the shifting alliances clear. The struggle was intense as the ties of tradition and current events tore at the hearts and minds of the people, and decisions made one day were reconsidered the next as different facets of the mix became more or less influential. In the end, both sides chose inflamed speech and subdued action.

The attempt by loyalists to maintain their neutral actions in the face of Confederate invasion occupies chapter 4. Confederate sympathizers, momentarily in control, countered neutrality by trying to even old scores. Loyalists, their friends, and relatives found themselves brought into court for "alleged acts of disloyalty" (p. 93). The frustration caused by the legal annoyances added to the concern generated by tensions between the Confederate military and local citizens. Brownlow exacerbated the tensions by polemical writings in his newspaper's columns, and his words marked him for Confederate arrest after partisan activity broke out in the region. The following chapter follows Brownlow into exile in the North, where he convinced Northerners of the overwhelming loyalty of Knoxville's residents. McKenzie does a very effective job of showing that the truth was far from what Brownlow described. In Knoxville, the number of those willing to be identified as loyal to the Union dwindled as people responded to the pressure of maintaining "families, churches, and neighborhoods, not to mention a host of other communities or reference groups" (p. 126). McKenzie found that neutrality in Knoxville meant many things, chief among them an unwillingness to commit to either side of the conflict. Many of the citizens reflected "a genuine ambivalence, even an indifference to the outcome of the national struggle" (p. 133). That ambivalence caused them to withdraw from civic life, seeking to stay out of the sight of authorities while quietly going about their lives.

McKenzie treats the return of Union control and the threat of a Confederate resurgence in chapter 6. It is in this chapter that he most heavily focuses on military matters. Yet, this section still puts the emphasis on how these events affected the populace of Knoxville rather than turning to analysis of the military course of the war. The presence of Union forces unleashed "A New Set of Strains," the title of the seventh chapter. When the blue clad soldiers moved in, the people of Knoxville had to face the reality of emancipation.

Since many stood by the Union at the same time they upheld the institution of slavery, the presence of soldiers dedicated to ending slavery, among them black soldiers, created new problems. Traditional beliefs in the necessity of defending that institution caused new shifts in sentiment.

McKenzie brings the story full circle in his final chapter, "Retribution and Reconciliation." Following the war, Confederate veterans and citizens who sought exile rather than submitting to the presence of Yankee troops in their hometown attempted to return to Knoxville. Loyalists who had suffered during the war were not ready to assimilate the returnees. In part, the reluctance stemmed from the conviction of the men back in power. Other stresses were the result of what many perceived as the arrogance of Confederates. The tensions played out in increasingly violent encounters that were most often blamed on black soldiers in the occupying forces and culminated in two attacks: the murder of a Union veteran and subsequent lynching of the Confederate sympathizer charged with the murder, and the killing of a white businessman and subsequent lynching of the black sentry charged with his murder. Those events drew the citizens of Knoxville back into a kind of unity in which "one was loyal not only to the Union but also to his race" (p. 223). Racial solidarity, evident in the election season of 1860, once again brought calm as Reconstruction came to an end in 1877.

The author's finely woven narrative ranges across the complex issues of social class, political philosophies, and personal relationships with great sensitivity and deep understanding. The only weakness in this study is the lack of participation by Knoxville's black population. McKenzie does include African Americans in the narrative at various points, but only a few become more than general figures in the movements of the day. Considering the depth of research undertaken for

the volume, it is more than likely that sources do not exist for much more detail.

*Lincolmites and Rebels* is a fine study. Narrowly focused and well researched, it helps to explain the complex and chaotic world of eastern Tennessee during the Civil War. It also serves as a model for anyone seeking to attempt a similar case study of community life and political tensions during the Civil War.

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