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Barry A. Crouch, Donaly E. Brice. *Cullen Montgomery Baker: Reconstruction Desperado.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. xvi + 190 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2140-5.

Reviewed by Robert W. Frizzell (Bailey Library, Hendrix College, Missouri Life Trip)
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Although this book is competently researched and well-written, few readers will find it pleasant. Those who romanticize the Reconstruction era guerrillas and outlaws of the Southwest as avengers of the Lost Cause against lawless freedmen and a cruel and dictatorial army of occupation may be enraged. Crouch and Brice thoroughly debunk such a view of Cullen Montgomery Baker. Nor is any support given for Louis L'Amour's view of Baker as the first fast-draw artist. Readers unsympathetic to the guerrillas will appreciate the scholarship of Crouch and Brice, but even they may not enjoy the story told in this book. One does not like to be reminded that the human race includes people like the man portrayed here. Moreover, those of us with a regard for the people of the South take no pleasure in being reminded that so many ordinary white citizens of northeast Texas supported the man described in this study. Some of them lent assistance to Baker because they feared the consequences of not doing so. Others supported Baker in 1867 and 1868 because, however repellant his character, he acted on their hatred and fear of freed slaves and the federal officials who worked on behalf of the freedmen.

Baker was born in Tennessee, probably in 1835, but his family went to Texas just four years later. He began serious drinking as an adolescent. In 1853, he sustained a head injury in a barroom brawl. He married in 1854. Later that year, he claimed to have been verbally slighted by a boy. Baker beat the boy with a long whip so harshly that a conviction for assault ensued. Then he shot down the man who testified against him. This victim bled to death. Baker thus set a pattern to be repeated again and again: some verbal slight would result in a violent and often fatal attack.

A daughter was born to the Bakers in 1856. Two years later, they moved to Perry County, Arkansas, where Mrs. Baker died July 2, 1860. Until 1865, Baker traveled back and forth between the area just south of Texarkana on the Texas-Arkansas border and Perry County in central Arkansas. He stabbed a man to death. He remarried. He joined two different Confederate units, receiving a discharge for disability from one and deserting the other. He killed a slave woman because he did not like her looks.

At the end of the war, the citizenry drove him from Perry County. He tried to operate a ferry in Cass County, Texas. His second wife died in March, 1866. By April 1867, he had gathered a gang and was living by robbery. When the Freedmen's Bureau put an agent in Boston, Texas, in July 1867, Baker directed his ire at that agent, the troops who accompanied him, and the freedmen themselves. His first period of active violence lasted from June 1867 through December 25 of the same year, the day he was wounded. He emerged from hiding in July 1868 to terrorize the countryside and federal authorities until a local school teacher shot and killed Baker on January 6, 1869. Baker and the teacher had been rivals for a local girl's hand.

The authors tell Baker's story using primary sources whenever possible, especially Freedmen's Bureau archival material. Yet, the archives give no clues to large segments of Baker's life. For those periods, the authors have relied on secondary works, most of which are based on local legends which were recorded long after Baker's death. Of course, much of how the authors view Baker, and which of the many legendary stories about him seem credible to them, depend on their underlying interpretation of Reconstruction. Crouch and Brice fully accept and rely on Eric Foner's interpretation of the era.

The research and analysis underlying this book appear to be sound, but a few minor suggestions may be in order. The map on page fifty-nine could be improved by giving the boundaries of Perry County, Arkansas, as they stood in Baker's time instead of the present boundaries. One wonders if a folklorist could have provided insights concerning the Baker legends. Likewise, could the use of social psychology or abnormal psychology have helped to explain Baker's behavior? The authors state that the concepts of individual honor detailed by Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Edward Ayers are not used in their study, pre-

sumably because they are inapplicable. Still, Baker's behavior patterns may fit into some theoretical framework. This reviewer is no clinician, but he was able to draw parallels with people who have been diagnosed as displaying a "hereditary anti-social personality."

The authors do cite major studies of Civil War guerrilla violence in Missouri and Tennessee, but the relevance of that material to Baker and his ilk is not entirely clear. In both Missouri and Texas, guerrillas struck the U.S. Army and its supporters in the name of the South and its institutions. In both places, outlaws served the cause of reaction. But most of the Missouri violence happened during the war, when the chance of a southern victory still existed. The Missouri violence was seldom directed against blacks. Some outlawry did spring up after the war in Missouri, but it targeted the railroads and banks as agents of industrial capitalism. The central activity was stealing money. Postwar violence in Texas, at least as practiced by Baker, targeted federal officials and those blacks who wanted to farm independently in lieu of accepting peonage on the land. The central activity of this outbreak of violence was to kill those trying to change local society.

Although seldom a pleasant read, this study provides an important corrective to local and regional legend.

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