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Gary W. Gallagher, ed. *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Decision on the Rappahannock.* Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. xiv + 243 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2193-0.

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This book of seven original essays by knowledgeable Civil War historians is a reinterpretation of bloody Fredericksburg. According to the dust jacket, the essays strive to set the Fredericksburg campaign "within a broader social and political context." With two exceptions (William A. Blair and George C. Rable), all of the authors' previous work has been in the field of military history. Most authors graciously acknowledge the assistance of Robert Krick, historian at the National Park Service Headquarters at Chatham, who might be called "Lord of the Files" for his extensive collection of material, although he appears less a lord and more a humble servant in his willingness to share them. Most of the authors use a wide array of sources, including official records, diaries, regimental histories, newspapers, and battle narratives.

Five of the essays are in the area of military, or "the new military," history. William Marvel asks the question whether Ambrose E. Burnside was responsible for the senseless slaughter of thousands of young Union soldiers. Despite his faults, Burnside cannot be blamed for the debacle according to Marvel. Due to the failure of subordinates to follow orders, he exonerates Burnside, whose postwar enemies spread negative images that were hard to shake. Relying almost exclusively upon *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Alan T. Nolan attempts to reconcile Lee's reputed preference for offensive warfare with his stunning defensive victory at Fredericksburg. His answer is that Lee's defensive stance on the Rappahannock was an exception to his career. Carol Reardon takes the experience of a single division, Brigadier General Andrew A. Humphrey's Pennsylvania Division, to show how young men faced their first experience of paralyzing fear and danger and how they later retold the war, sometimes in terms at variance with reality. Garry Gallagher surveys Confederate reactions to the Battle of Fredericksburg. Surprisingly, they were not always positive, despite the overwhelming Confederate victory. In "Morale, Maneuver, and Mud," A. Wilson Greene treats the politics of the campaign, focusing upon the political machinations within the Army of the Potomac, the morale of Burnside's soldiers after the battle, and the "mud march," an aborted effort by Burnside in January 1863 to recapture the town and his reputation.

Two essays treat the civilian population. Rable focuses upon the "carnage" of the battle, how Northern and Southern civilians came to terms with grisly scenes of death and dismemberment in terms of religion, morale, courage, and fault-finding. Blair gauges the impact on the homefront in general, including how African Americans reacted, the treatment of civilians, and how the reports of the Union soldiers sacking the town played out in the Confederacy. He concludes that the Union occupation and depredations actually may have strengthened rather than weakened Confederate morale and resolve.

Overall, the essays are lively, interesting, and challenging, in the long tradition of historical revisionism. Civil War enthusiasts will no doubt be stimulated by the debate over whether Burnside was inept, betrayed, disobeyed, or done in by the weather. Lee watchers perhaps will be captivated over whether defense or offense was the real Lee. Public opinion and morale come up repeatedly, all authors implying and sometimes claiming these as issues very important to the outcome of the war. It is good finally to get some treatment of the civilian populations in the midst of war. And there is plenty of evidence on the courage, the suffering, and the blood, surely enough to deromanticize this war.

The limitations of these essays are not with what the authors have done but with what their approach denies them the opportunity to do. Editor Gary Gallagher notes that "If defined to include their antecedents and subsequent impact, battles ... offer abundant opportunities to revise older interpretations, raise new questions, and enhance our understanding of the conflict as a whole"

(p. xi). Yet in political and military terms, the study of Fredericksburg never quite justifies itself to be of such strategic military importance as to deserve all this attention. Arguably, most of the damage, whether in terms of morale, mortality, or feelings of vengeance, was done in 1862 and but a memory by 1865.

When Civil War history attracts more of those trained in the techniques, methods, and approaches of social history, then we can expect "a different story," as the author of a local African American history of Fredericksburg called it, to be told. For example, the slave and free black populations appear on this Fredericksburg canvas as those to whom the war has come, not as the agents of change they are shown to have been in the collections of documents by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project at the University of Maryland. Women are similarly without agency. Another area in these essays that the social history approach could help elucidate is that of unity and division in Fredericksburg society and the Confederacy as a whole. These authors deal with division, but not seriously, more as an aberration. Division is muted, unionism is on the fringe, secessionism's prevalence is what is important because most who disagreed fled. Perhaps, but what decided loyalties and allegiances? Joseph Ficklin, a wealthy local flour miller, who is mentioned but whose story is not told, did not flee, nor did several of his associates. Moreover, here is a society that produced men and women, some of whom were rabid secessionists and others who were Unionists (like Rev. James Hunnicutt) and antislavery figures of national prominence (like Moncure Conway).

Microhistory is the search for answers to large questions in small places, as Charles Joyner so eloquently put it. We need to see the merchants in the town, the artisans and dock workers at the wharves, get inside the slave and free black houses, listen to the voices of women diarists, and hear the complaints of flour millers like Joseph Ficklin before, during, and shortly after the war. To be sure, plenty of scholars will complain that this kind of approach is too dismissive of the drama of great events, the influence of political leaders, and the force of ideology. Until we have more "decisions on the Rappahannock," however, than just those of political and military leaders, our understanding of this war will remain incomplete.

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