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John McKivigan. *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. xvii + 291 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4673-3.

Craig Miner. *Seeding Civil War: Kansas in the National News, 1854-1858.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008. xiii + 305 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1612-1.

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The Lit Match in the Federal Arsenal: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War

Neither before, nor since, has the United States seen a conflagration equal in scope to the carnage of the Civil War. Wrought from a myriad of sectional differences that ranged from culture and politics to the economy and others, the struggle cost the lives of more American soldiers than all casualties of its other wars combined (except for Vietnam). The memory of that struggle both haunts and inspires Americans, prompting the nation to never again let internal disagreements escalate to that level of fervor.

Though sectional difficulties had occurred at the very conception of the American Union, it was in the Kansas Territory during the mid-to-late 1850s that a cold war escalated into a pogrom of violence and bloodshed. Intensified by sensationalistic newspaper accounts, the news of the conflict captured the nation's fervent attention. Unfortunately, such coverage also contributed to the carnage, inspiring migrants from North and South to move to the territory to engage the "enemy."

In his latest work, *Seeding Civil War*, Craig Miner paints a harrowing picture of the territory as a fraying rope in a sectional tug-of-war, powerless to establish order in the wake of the nation's insatiable mania. Unlike the tomes of Alice Nichols, Thomas Goodrich, or Nichole Etcheson, who sought to create comprehensive histories, Miner has written a clearly focused media history that brings to life the popular sectional perceptions, coupled with a discussion of both immediate and lasting consequences. Additionally, the most notable aspect of Miner's book is its objectivity. Though the author is critical of the methods used by both Northern and Southern journalists to stir up public ire, he makes a concerted effort to avoid value judgments favoring one side or the other. As such, though there are key events in the book that do not receive more than a fleeting mention–i.e., the Big Springs Resolutions or the terrorism perpetrated by territorial marshal Israel Donelson–one must remember the author's perimeters and purpose.

"Bleeding Kansas" was the ideal subject for popular media manipulation. As the Kansas-Nebraska bill fueled political debate in the spring of 1854, a sectionalized nation was polarized over its passage. If Southerners sighed relief over its passage, Northerners were determined to make every effort to "save" the territory from slavery (p. 80). When the popular fervor heated up following the bill's passage, the territory was far enough away to allow prejudiced reporters to easily exaggerate or invent facts that appealed to their specific readership. In turn, partisan presses rushed to print anything on the subject in an effort to influence people to pay the price of a newspaper to keep up-to-date on the deteriorating situation there.

One of the best examples of the polarizing effect of the media coverage is Miner's account of the 1855 Wakarusa War, which began with the killing of a "free-state" man by a "pro-slavery" man and soon escalated into a wave of destruction perpetrated by both sides. When the conflict culminated at the Wakarusa River, a stream outside of Lawrence, Kansas, hordes of armed angry men had gathered on its banks waiting for an opportunity to attack one another. Only the notable diplomatic efforts of the territorial governor, Wilson Shannon, kept a dire prospect from being realized. Of the incident, however, the author states: "It was a war because the press wanted to make it a war," and "the depth of the reaction [to it] through the United States was substantial" (pp. 137-138).

Another prime example of Miner's historical detachment is a brief account of the Pottawatomie Creek Mas-

sacre, perpetrated by John Brown. In reaction to the sacking of Lawrence by a pro-slavery group calling themselves the Kansas Regulars, a pro-slavery camp at Dutch Henry's Crossing was raided in the dead of night and five men were hacked to death by machetes upon Brown's orders in full view of their families. In recounting the press reaction to the incident, the author is careful to balance the coverage–from the South's hushed commentary to the denial of Northern news outlets–without ever sensationalizing it himself.

Yet such incidents beg much larger questions. How can order be established and maintained if federal or territorial laws and proclamations are either bastardized or ignored completely in favor of a "higher" authority? How does a governing power control the accuracy of information pouring from the pens of one-sided journalists seeking both a name for themselves and profits for the newspapers that employ them? How does one govern a country that does not want to be governed? Miner makes it clear that under such conditions there was no way to circumvent the carnage.

In his latest work *Forgotten Firebrand*, John McKivigan recounts the life of a journalist, James Redpath, whose biased reporting stoked the raging flames of sectionalism in the Kansas Territory. It is a lively volume written in unstrained prose, in complete contrast to its subject who seemed to be covering every injustice that occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century at once. At a time when "journalistic integrity" had yet to be defined in modern terms, Redpath proudly championed his causes with a partisan flair barely recognizable as "news." With a critical eye, the author portrays his subject as a genuine idealist and a self-perceived messenger who willingly used the media to shamelessly promote his causes.

It was as a correspondent for the *New York Tribune* in the Kansas Territory that Redpath made his reputation as a "firebrand." According to McKivigan, Redpath was a polarizing figure, who, to Northern readers, was a celebrity and , to southerners, a pariah who "intentionally covered up evidence" (pp. 22, 29). Such assessments hold up to the reporter's record: when Governor Andrew Reeder was fired for his insolence toward the territorial legislature, Redpath praised him; when events culminated in the Wakarusa War, Redpath urged free-state advocates to hold to their principles; and, when the public turned on radical abolitionist Brown following the Potawatomie Creek Massacre, Redpath defended him with a series of pointed articles and books. Furthermore, the reporter's partisan politicking led him not only to be active in territorial politics, but also to serve as a major in its militia and to participate in many of the violent skirmishes that gave "Bleeding Kansas" its popular moniker.

Following the tragedy that was "Bleeding Kansas," it is clear that, though he was not the founder of the "yellow" school of popular journalism, Redpath was certainly a master practitioner. During the American Civil War, he wrote scathing abolitionist-tinged articles for the *Boston Daily Journal* and the *Liberator* while traveling with General William T. Sherman's army during his 1864-5 Georgia campaign. At the conclusion of the Civil War, he was a zealous reformer whose causes ranged from the plight of both the Irish and Haitians, to the rights of labor unions and women. Redpath's lasting influence can be seen with the advent of the "muckrakers," newspaper reporters of the early twentieth century–e.g., Jacob Riis and H. L. Mencken–who openly championed social and political causes in their publications.

The essential message that comes from reading these volumes in sequence is that no party to "Bleeding Kansas" held the moral high ground. Both sides of this conflict sought to use "popular sovereignty" to flood the territory with like-minded people to turn the "will of the people" to their advantage–even if it meant perpetrating the most brutal forms of violence. The media coverage was not meant to report events, but to inflame the audience no matter what part of the country they inhabited–as evidenced by the efforts of Redpath. As such, both tomes provide fascinating accounts of how the media covered and contributed to the origins of the Civil War.

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