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Gary W. Gallagher. *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know about the Civil War.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 288 pp. $28.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3206-6.

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Union is the Lost Cause in Popular Culture

As Americans celebrate the two hundredth birthday of Abraham Lincoln and prepare to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, an understanding of the role popular culture plays in determining the ways in which people will view that powerful period of American history is certainly in order. Gary W. Gallagher, John L. Nau III Professor of History at the University of Virginia, has provided *Causes Won, Lost, and Forgotten* as the means by which to offer his insights into the question of "how Hollywood and popular art shape what we know about the Civil War." In four chapters, the author assesses the Civil War generation's appraisal of its conflict, the depiction of the South as Confederacy in film, the North's place in portrayals on the big screen, and the war as seen through the eyes and talents of artists.

Gallagher discusses Civil War culture and art in the context of four distinct traditions: Lost Cause, Union, Emancipation, and Reconciliation. He sees each of these as powerful influences at one time or another on what appeared in artistic renderings. While Gallagher offers context for his various discussions, he focuses by choice on works produced in the last few decades. Interestingly, the examination seems often to be as much a personal journey for the author as a professional one for the historian. Gallagher avers an interest in dissecting the individual works themselves, preferring to understand how they have affected the public's perceptions of the war specifically and history generally.

Regarding the Union cause that focused on maintaining the integrity of the nation in the face of secession and rebellion, the author notes his surprise at the ability of that theme to sustain its audience through recent years. He rightfully points out that this emphasis was "the most important tradition to the North's wartime generation" (p. 12). Indeed, it seemed that, in conjunction with Lost Cause advocates, anyone who had drawn a sword or saber wrote a memoir designed to reflect, and not infrequently rewrite, history for the sake of reputation, posterity, and sales to a general audience. Gallagher observes that since those earlier years, the Emancipation and Reconciliation themes that featured the effort to obtain freedom for millions of enslaved persons and sought to emphasize the restoration of harmony to the former enemies, respectively, have subsumed the Union one that prevailed for so long. Throughout the work, he particularly laments that the very cause motivating so many people to take up arms in defense of the nation should take a subordinate role in influencing modern cultural examinations of that conflict.

It is ironic that the success of the Union cause was the source of its own undoing. Once victory on the battlefield had saved the Union and the fate of the Republic itself was no longer in the balance, it was only logical that a shift of emphasis and a reordering of priorities took place. Reconciliation initially became the order of the day, and, not surprisingly, the clarion call of culture, followed much later by a shift to Emancipation as the modern civil rights movement took hold of the popular mind. Of course, in a sense it could actually be considered fortuitous that the Union cause did not require continual reproduction in art and film to demonstrate its strength and authenticate its validity.

The first chapter of Gallagher's work depicts the American Civil War as seen through the eyes of the generation that witnessed it firsthand. Key to the Lost Cause interpretation was sacrifice and struggle against overwhelming odds and technology. Adherents could hold their heads high with the knowledge that anyone in the same position would have been forced to bow to such insurmountable odds. The fact that many of these Confederate loyalists apparently believed, at one time or another, that the odds could be overcome did not prevent them from later insisting that such was not the case once the war was over. In addition, former Union figures were no less susceptible to hyperbole and contradiction. It would be hard to imagine the circumstances under which either set of antagonists would not want to embrace the values they claimed to cherish, and, at the same time, to denigrate the flaws of their counterpart's positions. But eventually the old veterans could bring themselves to shake hands across the bloody chasm of their personal histories, and art reflected this emphasis on reconciliation.

In the second chapter, the author bemoans the success of the Confederacy in surviving so well on celluloid when it could not do so in reality. Gallagher correctly underscores the lasting impact of such iconic films as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) upon the popular mindset. He asserts that while the Lost Cause influence waned in the wake of these films, it nevertheless remained significant. Finally, he sees *Shenandoah* (1965) as representing a break from the shackles of the Lost Cause, especially in the film's portrayal of the chief protagonist, Jimmy Stewart's Charlie Anderson, toward the conflict and his family's role in it.

Of more recent motion pictures, Gallagher contends that with the notable exception of *Gods and Generals* (2003), Hollywood has veered away from championing the Lost Cause. Yet in his determination to distance most contemporary filmmakers from the focus on Dixie's land, he occasionally goes astray. It is more than a quibble, for instance, to insist that *Alvarez Kelly* (1966), whatever its historical limitations and drawbacks, was no more than one of the myriad "westerns dressed up in ill-fitting Civil War garb" (p. 54). The film had a basis in the Wade Hampton/Thomas Rosser "beefsteak raid," of September 1864, with Richard Widmark's "Colonel Tom Rossiter" leading the cattle to Confederate lines.

Likewise, the subsequent explanation of Clint Eastwood's *The Beguiled* (1971), which was, as the author notes, "dark," could hardly have been "just as easily" turned into a "dark comedy set anywhere at any time" (p. 55). The film was certainly not like *Valkyrie* (2008), whose principals insisted at the time of its release that it was a suspense thriller that happened to take place in the Second World War. The flashback scenes of Eastwood as a Union soldier work precisely because they illustrate the hollowness of his claims of victimhood and expose the viewers to a despicable side that his Southern benefactors will discover in time for themselves. *The Beguiled* employed the elemental themes of deception, betrayal, and hubris, and therefore did not have to be set in the Civil War, but the film functioned in large part because it was.

Gallagher's third chapter follows the decline of the Union cause in motion picture depictions of the conflict from the Northern perspective. Even so, it could be argued that Reconciliation provided ample support for the Union cause in another form. In the movies, unlike the postwar South for much of its history, re-Union would become the paramount theme. Thus, when John Wayne's character lamented the continuation of hostilities in a hopeless cause to his Southern counterpart in the opening scenes of *The Undefeated* (1969) with the observation, "We're all Americans," Royal Dano responded with a sentimental tilt of the head, "That's always been the saddest part of it." Gallagher may be premature in dismissing the Union cause as an influential part of modern film culture since reunion in victory would mean the reassertion of the nation for such one-time enemies.

If "friends of the Union" appeared "irretrievably to have lost the war on film," as Gallagher contends, that loss was apparently not uniformly experienced in many of the films he assesses (p. 234). For instance, while *Glory* (1989) emphasized emancipation and the excellent *Pharaoh's Army* (1995) depicted an admittedly pained effort at reconciliation, both provided stories largely from the perspective of individuals fighting for higher national causes, even if they did not always appreciate or comprehend them. In the end, Trip (Denzel Washington) died carrying the national flag up the ramparts of Battery Wagner despite his earlier insistence that he would not do so in *Glory*, while Captain Abston (Chris Cooper) allowed his vengeance to carry him only so far toward a Southern woman and child before returning to his post in *Pharaoh's Army*. Even the Lost Cause elements the author decried in *Gods and Generals* (2003) seem to have been more the exception than the rule.

The fourth chapter offers a wide-ranging analysis of art relating to the war that amounts, as Gallagher sees it,

to a resurgence of the Confederacy, suggested by the sustainability in sales of anything related to Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, and Nathan Bedford Forrest. The historian is correct to point out the frequency with which these subjects are depicted and the almost religious fervor with which some of this material is presented, but he is on less solid ground when he attributes it to a concerted effort on the part of the artists or an indifferent public to enable the Confederate South to live again. Market forces certainly shape what artists, directors, and producers provide for their customers, and history inevitably takes a secondary position to broader and glamorized themes that too frequently distort the record.

The most problematic aspect of this work is Gallagher's unwillingness to avoid editorializing. Historical interpretation demands assessment, but assessment can be taken into a less helpful sphere as when the author castigates Shelby Foote's description in the popular Ken Burns television series on the Civil War (1990) of Forrest and Lincoln as "authentic geniuses" who emerged from the conflict. Gallagher can certainly take issue with what he deems "praise for Forrest" that amounts to a "mind-boggling observation" concerning an "unstable warrior," but he ought to realize that the comment was meant to recognize the innate skills that both men possessed rather than as a favorable, moral comparison between them (p. 242).

Similarly, the fact that Southern veterans are unable to hit Lieutenant John J. Dunbar (Kevin Costner), in *Dances with Wolves* (1990), "(or even his horse)," becomes more of an opportunity to critique these "unimaginably inept riflemen" for their inaccuracy than to view them as the cinematic devices they represented of a soldier who desperately wished to free himself from the civilized world's woes (p. 55). The Dunbar character must have recognized his opponents' prowess by attempting to use it to carry out his own suicide. In any case, it is not so much the assessments that the author offers as the tone he frequently employs that distracts the reader and detracts from the analysis.

Popular culture has often been unkind to the historical record, not least to the individuals or events that have not managed to appear prominently in film, in print, or on canvas. Joshua Chamberlain benefited greatly from his time on camera in ways that Gouverneur Warren did not, for example, despite the fact that the latter's statue still graces that portion of the Gettysburg battlefield in recognition of his role in directing troops to a timely defense of the ground. Likewise, the Round Tops that Warren, Chamberlain, and their Union colleagues defended have emerged as far more critical real estate in the public mind than the bloodied landscape on the opposite end of the Union line in that engagement. Motion picture and art depictions nevertheless have continued to do much to assist George Pickett in maintaining his connection with the famous "charge" on the third day of the battle.

It will be fascinating to see the ways in which art and culture continue to reflect and help to shape the ways "Americans" view one of their most important historical periods. Gallagher has assured that the discussion itself will not be forgotten, whether or not it can ever be won or lost.

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