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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**J. Matthew Gallman**. *America's Joan of Arc: The Life of Anna Elizabeth Dickinson.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. viii + 262 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-516145-8.

**Thomas P. Lowry**. *Confederate Heroines: 120 Southern Women Convicted by Union Military Justice.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. xvii + 212 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-2990-6.

**Reviewed by** Lisa Smith
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**Forgotten Heroines**

Much has changed in the field of Civil War history in the past twenty years. While the traditional emphasis on battles and leaders remains popular, historians and researchers have turned their attention to people left out of that narrative in an effort to construct a more complete picture of the conflict and the nation. Through this focus on those excluded, what has been discovered is that those who were traditionally believed to have played little or no significant role in the Civil War actually participated in a variety of ways that proved to have vital importance to the war effort. Two new studies, by J. Matthew Gallman and Thomas P. Lowry, make welcome contributions to that effort.

In *America's Joan of Arc* J. Matthew Gallman has written a highly readable biography of orator, author, and actress Anna Dickinson and the role of the "public woman" during the nineteenth century. Considered one of the most famous women of her time, Dickinson began her speaking career at the age of seventeen on the eve of the Civil War, when she challenged a speaker lecturing on the role of women. That encounter led to a series of invitations to speak on topics such as women's rights and antislavery. Dickinson soon became known during the Civil War as one of the leading stump speakers for the Republican Party, a voice for the antislavery movement, and as a woman who offered a radical's critique on the war. She attracted crowds wherever she spoke, as hundreds were drawn to the uniqueness of a young woman who delivered fiery critiques of the Lincoln administration's failure to call for emancipation and of the conduct of the war. She earned the wartime reputation as "America's Joan of Arc," and spent the rest of her thirty-year career attempting to capitalize upon this wartime image as she moved into the lyceum movement, became involved in the debate over women's suffrage, published several books, and became a stage actress.

Gallman divides his work into three parts, "Anna Dickinson's Civil War," "An Enduring Public Figure," and "Decline and Fall." While the Civil War era occupies a relatively small portion of the work, Gallman does an excellent job showing how the memory and the narrative of the war shaped Dickinson's postwar life and career. Part 1 details Dickinson's rise from a middle-class Quaker family to become one of the most formidable orators for the Republican Party and a national celebrity whose endorsement was sought on many of the issues of the day. Part 2 shows how Dickinson used the celebrity status she achieved during the war to maintain her livelihood. She also tried her hand at writing, publishing a novel entitled *What Answer?* (1868) that was a commentary on race relations in the North.

The final section of the book describes Dickinson's descent from national celebrity to forgotten recluse. Unfortunately for Dickinson, the Civil War marked the height of her public career. Her postwar life was marked by her struggle to support herself–as well as her mother and sister–as the public's desire to move on from the war led to a decline in speaking engagements. Her later years were also marred by poor health, alcoholism, breaks in relationships with close friends and family (including her lawsuit against the Republican Party for unpaid fees), and confinement in the Pennsylvania State Hospital for the Insane.

*America's Joan of Arc* is more than merely a biography of Anna Dickinson; it is also an examination of the role of the "public woman" in the nineteenth century. Using Dickinson as an example, Gallman probes the ways in which prescribed gender roles affected women's op-

portunities, noting that they both helped create Dickinson's celebrity and limited the outlets for her talents. Using Dickinson's letters and scrapbooks, contemporary newspaper articles, as well as the writings of her family and numerous friends and correspondents, Gallman reconstructs the life of this complicated individual and her importance in paving the way for other public women.

In *Confederate Heroines,* author Thomas Lowry details the wartime experiences of 120 Southern women convicted by Union military courts for war-related offenses. Nearly all of these women have remained anonymous in the years since the Civil War. The most famous, Confederate spies Belle Boyd and Rose O'Neal Greenhow, are not included in this account since, as Lowry states "their deeds are familiar to every student of the Civil War" (p. xvi). The women who remain represent a cross-section of Confederate society, from plantation mistresses to homeless widows, who, whether or not by their own free will, became caught up in the chaos of war.

Lowry's narrative recounts the stories of Southern women who did not support the war effort in the "traditional" female ways, such as nursing and sewing, but through activities the Union Army deemed as a challenge to the Union war effort. These women were charged with being spies, aiding deserters, cutting telegraph wires, and smuggling letters as well as military and luxury goods into the blockaded South. After being convicted in Union military courts, many were imprisoned in Fitchburg Female Prison in Massachusetts for time periods ranging from a few months to the duration of the war.

Lowry organizes his work by state, with each Confederate and border state having its own section. Within each state's narrative is an account of every known case of a female resident being convicted of a war-related offense by the Union military. It is clear that Lowry has done a prodigious amount of research. Over 75,000 trial transcripts of Union court marshals located in the National Archives were examined and any mention of female defendants and their stories is recounted, often in their own words. Lowry's work follows Elizabeth Leonard's *All the Daring of the Soldier* (1999) and *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the American Civil Wa*r (2002) by DeAnne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook in attempting to include women in the military aspect of the war as historical agents rather than passive victims.

In spite of the volume of research there are a few flaws in Lowry's narrative. Lowry does not ask, let alone attempt to resolve, any larger questions. Instead, he simply recounts the stories of these women without any attempt to examine the larger issues of historical context or what motivated them to undertake such activities. Lowry views these women as examples of female empowerment and does not consider other explanations for their activity. For example, when sources reveal relatively few cases of women being brought before Union courts in middle Tennessee, Lowry concludes that the lack of documentation suggests a "high degree of success in their undercover activities," without considering other possible reasons for the absence of women from the court records (p. 82). The other minor flaw is the use of the word "heroine," which Merriam-Webster's defines as a "woman of heroic achievements or qualities."[1] While some of the women presented earned that distinction through their activities, many–such as those who sold liquor to soldiers or prostitutes who spread veneral disease–simply took advantage of limited economic opportunities and may have sold their wares to paying Confederate soldiers as well.

Both Gallman's *America's Joan of Arc* and Lowry's *Confederate Heroines* attempt to place women, whose roles in the war effort have often been marginalized, back into the larger historical narrative of the war. It is clear that both have done extensive research on their respective topics and have illuminated interesting and little-known contributions of women during the Civil War. *America's Joan of Arc* can be recommended to university students, not only in specialized Civil War classes but also those interested in the public role of women and the way in which the memory of the Civil War influenced American society in the late nineteenth century. It can also be recommended to the interested general reader as it is written in an engaging, easy-to-read style free of academic jargon. *Confederate Heroines* is most useful as a starting point for those interested in doing further research on the role of Southern women who actively opposed the Union military. Lowry has laid the groundwork in identifying 120 such women from Union military records, yet more research needs to be done in order to flesh out the historical context and motivations of these women.

Note

[1]. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (New York: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1974), 333.

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