

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Walter T. Durham. *Reluctant Partners: Nashville and the Union, 1863-1865*. 1987; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008. xxiii + 327 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-634-6.

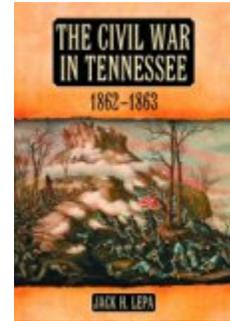
Walter T. Durham. *Nashville: The Occupied City, 1862-1863*. 1985; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008. xx + 307 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57233-633-9.

Jack H. Lepa. *The Civil War in Tennessee, 1862-1863*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2007. vi + 233 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7864-2978-3.

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Twice-Told Tales: Narrative and Analysis of the Civil War's Western Theater

The bicentennial of the Civil War brings with it the opportunity to reflect on recent scholarship and the reissuance of important work. Specifically, Jack H. Lepa's *The Civil War in Tennessee, 1862-1863* and Walter T. Durham's two volumes, *Nashville* and *Reluctant Partners*, underscore the strategic importance of the western theater during the war. They are both timely, considering the increase in scholarly attention that the area has received. Moreover, since the original publication of Durham's work, historians have explored the relationship between the military campaigns in and around Tennessee—the focus of Lepa's narrative—and civilian experiences within Union-occupied areas, which is the subject of Durham's books. The result benefits our knowledge of Civil War Tennessee and the greater Mississippi River Valley.[1]

The Civil War in Tennessee examines the two years during which, the author argues, "the fate of Tennessee, and possibly the nation, was decided" (p. 1). Organized in a tightly written narrative that weaves together the perspectives of Union and Confederate commanders, the book describes the river campaigns of 1862 through the Union victory at Chattanooga. Emphasizing the evolu-

tion of Union and Confederate military leadership, Lepa places the campaigns against Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in the context of Henry W. Halleck and Don Carlos Buell's struggle for power. Ulysses S. Grant's leadership, Lepa notes, was crucial to Union success, while on the Confederate side, Joseph Johnston was the architect of a Confederate military strategy. *The Civil War in Tennessee* synthesizes the scholarship of Stephen D. Engle (*Don Carlos Buell: Most Promising of All* [1999] and *Struggle for the Heartland: The Campaigns from Fort Henry to Corinth* [2001]); James M. McPherson (*Battle Cry of Freedom* [1988]); and Stephen E. Woodworth (*Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West* [1990], *Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chickamauga and Chattanooga Campaigns* [1998], *No Band of Brothers: Problems in the Rebel High Command* [1999], and *This Grand Spectacle: The Battle of Chattanooga* [1999]). He also draws on the postwar accounts of Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, William S. Rosecrans, and P. G. T. Beauregard, and accounts from the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. It is a brief, readable account of the military events in the struggle for control of Tennessee, providing the general reader with an overview of the careers of military leaders as

well as an understanding of the significance of the battles of Shiloh, Stone's River, Chickamauga, and Lookout Mountain. Even as the book offers an effective panorama of the military campaigns in Tennessee, the author notes that Tennessee's geography and natural resources made the state a central part of Union strategy. For example, whereas the Confederates fortified the Mississippi River, including the heights of Vicksburg, the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers were neglected by officials, leaving central Tennessee vulnerable to Union advances. The importance of Tennessee's geographic features and environmental resources in shaping military strategy and campaigns is just beneath the surface of the author's military narrative, and points toward the important emerging scholarship on the relationship between the war and the environment.[2]

Durham's two volumes on Nashville provide a close-up of the effect of Union occupation on the important southern city—the first state capital lost by the Confederacy—and the effects of occupation on its residents. When the volumes were published, in 1985 and 1987, they were praised for examining the many-faceted relationships between military officials and civilians. The author, who is the state historian of Tennessee, utilized the rich array of collections in the Tennessee State Library and Archives, the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, and private collections, to write a lively description of Nashville's occupation. Organized chronologically, the narrative contains important insights about the urban experience during the war, including civilians' difficult decision to flee from or remain during occupation, the challenges faced by Nashville's residents, and the wartime burden on its infrastructure. These challenges were exacerbated when the city became a destination for refugee Unionists from east Tennessee, freed people, and Confederate civilians forcibly evacuated from Atlanta. Readers today, benefiting from over two decades of extensive scholarship on Civil War-era communities and the social and political history of the war, will find interesting facts and potential starting points for further scholarship. For example, Nashville experienced difficulties reestablishing the federal judiciary; conflicts over the detention of political prisoners; hardships emanating from the requisition of buildings for hospitals, supply depots, and quartermasters' facilities; dissent over the federal oversight of the wholesale trade; and changes to its physical landscape. It also served as a site of experimentation and implementation for the construction of contraband camps and policies of political reconstruction. Such detailed studies are worthy of reconsid-

eration by historians interested in pursuing new areas of inquiry.

Readers who look to the 2008 prefaces in each volume for an assessment of how Nashville's occupation relates to current scholarship may come away underwhelmed. In both prefaces, the author acknowledges that scholarship has developed since the original publication and directs the readers to relevant bibliographies in the field. Footnotes identify work on Tennessee's Civil War cities, studies of specific southern communities, and work on Civil War memory, along with studies of military history in central Tennessee, as well as research on slavery and its demise in the region. The author acknowledges that the original volumes could have provided more insight into the lives of free blacks in Nashville and in the Union army, and notes scholarship that can fill that void. There are missed opportunities, however, to insert the volumes in larger historiographical debates. The preface mentions scholarship on national identity, for example, but does not engage with this body of work, explaining that Nashville's citizens' prewar sentiments and its early occupation made it unnecessary. By choosing not to place the books in a broader scholarly context, the author misses the opportunity to claim continued relevance for the volumes, especially since recent scholarship by Anne Sarah Rubin (*A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* [2005]), Margaret M. Storey (*Loyalty and Loss: Alabama's Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* [2004]), and Michael T. Bernath (*Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* [2010]) has shown that the construction of Confederate nationalism was very much alive and relevant throughout the war, even in areas occupied by Union forces. The author also misses the opportunity to reflect on the evolution of scholarship on Civil War-era regions, subregions, and communities, most especially how recent scholarship has succeeded in analyzing race relations, economic development, and political power within compelling narratives of local experiences (Jacqueline Jones's *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War* [2008], John Majewski's *A House Dividing: Economic Development in Pennsylvania and Virginia Before the Civil War* [2006], and Steven Tripp's *Yankee Town, Southern City: Race and Class Relations in Civil War Lynchburg* [1997]).

The Civil War in Tennessee, Nashville, and Reluctant Partners reveal why narrative historical writings are compelling, engaging, and seductive, leading scholars and readers alike to revel in the past but wonder, at times, what the interesting tales told, and retold, mean for our

larger understanding of the Civil War and its place in American history.

Notes

[1]. Foremost among this scholarship is the work of Stephen Ash, most specifically his three books, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (1988; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (1995; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and *A Year in the South: 1865: The True Story of Four Ordinary People Who Lived through the Most Tumultuous Twelve Months in American History* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2004), all of which provide a nuanced account of the interactions between Tennessee civilians, occupying Union forces, and the conflicts between Union and Confederate loyalists within the state. Robert Tracy Macken-

zie's *One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) uses longitudinal census data and additional quantitative sources to measure economic and social change between Tennessee's three regions, finding similar patterns of persistence before and after the war, including among elites, coupled with increased in-migration.

[2]. Lisa M. Brady, "The Wilderness of War: Nature and Strategy in the American Civil War," *Environmental History* 10, no. 3 (July 2005): 421-447; Jack Temple Kirby, "The American Civil War: An Environmental View," <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntuseland.htm>; and the forthcoming special issue of *Civil War History* on the environmental history of the Civil War, edited by Megan Kate Nelson.

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