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Michael D. Pierson. *Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans.* Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 264 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3228-8.

Reviewed by Judith Gentry (University of Louisiana at Lafayette)
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Mutiny and Unionism in Civil War New Orleans

The title of this book is misleading, as very little of it is about the mutiny at Fort Jackson. It might better be titled *A Study of Unionism and Other Disaffection in Confederate Military Units and among Civilians in or near New Orleans in 1862.* Michael D. Pierson has done an excellent job of describing and analyzing the small number of sources focused on the night of the mutiny, but the heart of the book is a discussion of the impact of the mutiny on Admiral David G. Farragut's ability to rescue New Orleans from the Confederates; the extent of Unionist sentiment (or at least disaffection from the Confederacy) in New Orleans and southeastern Louisiana; the background and the social, economic, and political context that caused the mutineers and deserters and other New Orleanians to have little affection for the Confederacy; and the role of Benjamin Butler in protecting existing Unionists and building additional support for the Union in New Orleans.

Pierson reveals, as the book unfolds, a series of provocative thesis statements. For the ease of the readers of this review, I have arranged them in chronological order. The peculiar Louisiana version of the Know-Nothing Party, which emphasized anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions, controlled the New Orleans government from 1856 until May 1, 1862, when Butler established martial law. Once Louisiana seceded from the Union, the New Orleans mayor used his direct control of patronage, which traditionally had been used to win elections for the Know-Nothings through violence and intimidation of opponents by police officers and government workers rampaging through the streets in what was commonly called the "mob," to support the Confederacy. By 1858, such tactics had reduced voting by immigrants by 50 percent and caused most immigrants to keep a low profile on politics. In 1861 and into the spring of 1862, both the mob and the police were used to suppress dissent and encourage volunteering for military service. Poverty and joblessness also coerced volunteering by New Orleanians who had no love for the Confederacy. By September 1861, the government had help from the mob in coercing military-age men to participate in local units of the state militia. In the emergency of February and March 1862, as Farragut's fleet entered the lower Mississippi River, several of the militia units were reorganized into units of the Confederate army and placed on ships that carried them to Fort Jackson or Fort St. Philip downriver from New Orleans. Others were sent to other forts nearer to New Orleans.

Although the police and mob were effective in keeping Unionists in New Orleans quiet, Pierson argues, Unionists existed. Some simply preferred the prewar U.S. life. Secession and war had closed down the economy of New Orleans and left the working class in extreme poverty. Other Unionists were immigrants who had never felt welcome in New Orleans and had endured Know-Nothing harassment. "Merchants and white wage workers, in addition to African Americans, came to support the Union in large numbers during the war.... New Orleans offered considerable aid and comfort to the United States" (pp. 49-50). The fact that much of this aid took place in 1861 and 1862 rather than later in the war made New Orleans unusual. An important reason why the Confederates in New Orleans suppressed Unionism was that the existence of Unionists undercut the central moral justification for secession: that secession was necessary because the Northern states were oppressing all white Southerners and trying to take away the rights of all Southerners to enjoy the prosperity and freedom of the nation.

The author argues that the importance of the mutiny at Fort Jackson has been underestimated. Capturing the two forts was necessary to the Union goal of occupying New Orleans. Farragut's run past the two forts and appearance at New Orleans on April 25 did not result in the occupation of New Orleans. He needed the soldiers

who were on the troop ships and the supply ships, which could not be run past the forts. Without those troops, the mob's control of the streets allowed the mayor to refuse to surrender the city and left Farragut only the options of bombarding the city, awaiting the capture of the forts, or retreating to south of the forts. The forts had six weeks of food. Neither the mortar attacks nor the broadsides from Farragut's gunboats damaged Fort Jackson's defensive works. If the forts had held out for six weeks, Farragut may have had to retreat. It was the mutiny in Fort Jackson on the night of April 27 and the refusal to fight any longer of the rest of the Fort Jackson garrison the following morning (except for the one unit raised in a plantation parish), along with the lack of confidence that the men of Fort St. Philip would fight that enabled Farragut to bring the troop ships to New Orleans and land a sufficient number of troops to control the streets of the city.

He goes on to argue that although previous accounts attribute the mutiny to unwillingness to persist in the unpleasant conditions in the fort, a week of mortar fire and a night of heavy direct artillery fire as the Union fleet ran past the forts, an alleged lack of food in the forts, or a conviction that it was fruitless to fight any longer after the fleet reached New Orleans, evidence exists that the mutineers may have had Unionist goals. The mutiny was clearly well organized and the mutineers were able to deceive the officers until ready to act. The soldiers who drew up on the parade ground that night and demanded to be allowed to leave the fort to surrender to the nearby Union troops were largely foreign born or born in Northern states; the former had little love for the Know-Nothing pro-Confederate government of New Orleans and the latter were likely to not have as strong an attachment to Confederate goals as those born and bred in the South. The experience of having been working men in New Orleans, accustomed to organizing to go on strike when not being paid, probably contributed to the success. Choosing to mutiny the first night that Union troops were nearby suggests that these men preferred the Union. After the officers surrendered the forts on April 28, all were offered a parole. All the officers and the enlisted men of the one non-New Orleans unit swore to not fight until an exchange had been arranged; they would then fight again for the Confederacy. The other seven units had many men who did not want a parole, for it would eventually mean returning to Confederate service. These men were offered an opportunity to sign an oath of future allegiance to the United States as an alternative to a Confederate prison, and many signed the oath; many of them also eventually joined the United States Army.

Pierson continues: From April 25 through May 1, the mayor used the police and mob to successfully suppress expressions of Unionist sentiment. During the next week, Union soldiers controlled the streets in the daytime, but during the night the mob killed visible Unionists, and even five Union soldiers. Butler enforced harsh penalties, including execution, for anyone harming Unionists. He then replaced all city workers and then all city police; each of those new appointees relied on Butler for their job. The mob disappeared, indicating that it indeed had been a creature of the government. Unionists slowly began to feel safe, although others feared that the occupation was temporary and remained invisible.

Pierson also argues that four smaller mutinies of troops from New Orleans in 1861 should be considered evidence of Unionism or at least a minimal commitment to the Confederate war effort. New Orleanians further undermined the Confederate war effort by deserting in droves during General Mansfield Lovell's retreat to Camp Moore after Farragut's arrival at New Orleans. As the soldiers of the upper forts defending New Orleans withdrew, many of the men of several units drifted away on the way to New Orleans, in the march across the city, at the train station, and along the train route northward to such an extent that their numbers were reduced dramatically. A large portion of Lovell's army had slipped away due to a lack of commitment to the Confederate cause. Southeastern Louisiana had to be abandoned.

Finally, Pierson adds two new elements to our understanding of Butler in New Orleans. Butler's prewar career as a politician in Lowell, Massachusetts, was important to his success in governing New Orleans. He knew how to run a political machine and used that ability to recognize and destroy the Know-Nothing machine and replace it with his own. He was pro-working class in Lowell, understood their needs, and supported their unions. This prepared him to support the people in New Orleans who were most likely to support the Union–the working class. Butler provided jobs for workers and made sure most of them were outdoor jobs; to get a government job, the worker had to sign the oath, and everyone knew that the workers they saw had signed the oath supporting the Union. His wife was a stage actress and together they used drama and displays effectively to support the labor unions and those who had taken the oath. Butler, in his short time as commander of the Union troops in New Orleans, registered enough men to vote (which required taking the oath) to exceed Abraham Lincoln's 10 percent minimum of 1,860 voters. (Pierson counts as Unionists no oath takers who signed the oath after the Confiscation Act required an oath of future loy-

alty to keep one's property.) Pierson finds no fault with any of Butler's actions, a major departure from previous accounts, which range from total disapproval of Butler's behavior to attempts to provide balance by crediting Butler with imposing a sanitation system and providing jobs or relief for the poor.

This book has multiple strengths. Pierson has brought together the work of scholars of the Know-Nothing Party and Civil War military history and his own previously published 2005 article on Butler's occupation actions and policies in a new and revealing way.[1] He has added to the primary source base for studying events related to the successful Union military campaign to capture and occupy New Orleans. Thirty-one manuscript collections scattered in libraries and historical societies in New England and the Midwest as well as the middle-Atlantic states include diaries and correspondence not previously explored for information on these events. In addition, twenty-seven newspapers published outside New Orleans have been searched, as well as the six city papers. The eyewitness observations of U.S. sailors and Northern newspaper correspondents, as well as news articles on the invasion and the occupation of New Orleans, are a valuable contribution for the study of these events. These previously unavailable sources provide a new perspective that scholars must welcome.

He has added to the previous histories of the Know-Nothing Party in Louisiana, which end with secession as though there were no party politics during the war. He depicts an active party governing New Orleans until early May 1862, which spent considerable time repressing dissent among the Irish, German, and foreign French (who were Democrats since soon after they arrived in the United States) and coercing participation in militia and home guard units by those who had failed to volunteer for Confederate service. Pierson has improved our understanding of the military situation after the Confederate government ordered the five thousand trained and equipped soldiers under Lovell's command to leave New Orleans to oppose General Ulysses S. Grant's army in northern Mississippi or Alabama in early 1862. The social, ethnic, class, and political context within which the military units that were left behind to defend New Orleans had been recruited have never before been explored in depth.

This book also has multiple weaknesses. Readers might have benefited had Pierson attempted to place this study in the context of the scholarly writing since about 1990 that describes and discusses Unionists, disaffected Confederates, and antigovernment Confederates throughout the Confederacy. These studies have taken the discussion beyond the major concentrations of Unionists in the North Carolina Appalachian Mountains to the scattered Unionists in the rural areas of most states and to the cities and towns occupied by Union soldiers.[2] He might also have placed the New Orleans experience in the broader context of dissent and Unionism in other parts of Louisiana. Stephen S. Michot has described Unionists and those who took the oath for practical reasons in the Lafourche area, and Robert Comeaux has explored Confederate deserters, Unionists, and jayhawkers in the northeastern parishes of Louisiana.[3] Almost every study of New Orleans during the Civil War depicts at least some who were disloyal to the Confederacy, and almost every study of Confederate military history reports with regret or disdain that there were deserters and those who evaded conscription. *Mutiny at Fort Jackson*'s description of Unionism and other disaffection in New Orleans fits in most respects Stephen V. Ash's 1995 depiction of "garrisoned cities" elsewhere in the Confederacy, except that New Orleans Unionists were lucky enough not to have been abandoned by a withdrawal of Union forces and Butler's effort to protect Unionists and convert disaffection into Unionism was the most successful of all the garrisoned cities. [4] Also, this book's depiction of the coastal areas of Louisiana having been abandoned by the Confederate government during the winter of 1862 and left to be defended mainly by inadequate numbers of poorly trained militia, home guard, and state units, which almost always refused to fight or scattered after receiving the first volley from obviously superior Union troops and never returned to their units, fits Ash's depiction of events in coastal areas elsewhere in the Confederacy.[5] Pierson has conformed to previous studies of the Civil War in New Orleans and its environs that, by the absence of context, imply Louisiana exceptionalism.

On the one hand, Pierson's evidence of Unionism and lesser forms of disaffection in New Orleans and its nearby environs is often suggestive rather than convincing. On the other hand, the evidence in previous studies of other possible reasons for the Fort Jackson mutiny, or the other smaller mutinies, or desertions, or oath taking, or joining the U.S. Army, or voicing love of the American flag, or cheering the Union victories in 1862 is also seldom more than suggestive and is sometimes just assumed. Louisiana historians may have been too quick to attribute the mutiny and desertions to the reasons Confederate officers put in their reports; those officers were, of course, explaining a failure and may not have been in a position to know why the men did what they did. How-

ever, a man may have been willing to defend his home in a home guard unit but not willing to be sent far away when the enemy was at his family's door. Inferring that the five thousand white Louisianians who served in the Union army during the Civil War were coerced by severe poverty or Union conscription officers is no better historical methodology than inferring that they had been sympathetic to the Union from the beginning but coerced by the New Orleans mob until it became clear that the Union troops were staying in New Orleans.

Before this book, inferences tended to provide base reasons for sympathizing with the Union or taking the oath of future allegiance to the United States; now, scholars must consider the possibility that there were more honest Unionists among New Orleanians than scholars have acknowledged. Or, at least, scholars must approach the matter with more awareness of the complexities of human behavior in wartime and the complexities of the evidence available to us.

There may be some problems with the methodology of Pierson's effort to assess the performance of the units that were at Fort Jackson. For five New Orleans units and the one plantation parish unit, he compares the number of soldiers who were present at the most recent muster that is available before the mutiny to the list of soldiers present at Fort Jackson after the mutineers had left the fort in the middle of the night. Subtraction, he says, produces (roughly) the percent of soldiers in each unit that mutinied. For the five units raised in New Orleans that were studied, the results ranged from a high of 59 percent mutineers in Co I, 22d Louisiana Infantry to a low of 46 percent in the four companies of regulars. None of the men in the unit recruited in the plantation parish mutinied. Two units apparently were not studied in this analysis. The percent that did not mutiny correlated roughly with the percent of soldiers born in the South. The units with more foreign immigrants and soldiers born in Northern states had higher percentages of mutineers. One of the problems is that the dates of the most recent muster rolls varied and Pierson does not provide the reader with the dates. The varying length of time between the most recent muster and the mutiny could have skewed the results. He acknowledges that his total is an estimate but concludes it was not far off. The second potential problem concerns a cause of being absent after the mutiny that Pierson does not discuss. Dying from disease may well have been high among soldiers newly introduced to the hostile disease environment of the swamps surrounding the two forts; death by disease sometimes was as high as 20 percent in units in such areas.

Pierson relies on letters home and Northern newspaper articles to support a statement that many of the mutineers signed the oath of future allegiance to the Union. My colleague Lawrence Lee Hewitt informs me that the best way to determine the number of mutineers who signed the oath rather than accepting a parole would be to look at the file of each soldier in the units involved, where the record of taking the oath would have been placed; these are in the Compiled Service Records at the National Archives. If the soldier accepted his parole upon surrendering and decided afterward to take the oath, then the oath should be found in Record Group 59: Pardon and Amnesty Records at the National Archives, which has an alphabetical master index by the name of the soldier. This method would have carried much more weight than citing a few Northern observers who reported having seen some mutineers sign the oath.

Other weaknesses of the book include the lengthy and often repetitive discussions of nearly every piece of evidence for every element of the author's argument. To a considerable extent, the book can be characterized as a discussion of the evidence rather than a history of events. Unfortunately, Pierson's conclusion on each point becomes blurred because he often reports that the evidence "suggests" and later conveys a sense that the evidence was strong or conclusive. Also, the organization of the book makes it unpleasant to read and difficult to follow the author's arguments. I regret that the University of North Carolina Press has modified Chicago footnote form by eliminating all full first entries for books and secondary articles. It makes the work of the scholars who read this book much more tedious.

Despite its weaknesses, this book is the most in-depth study of the mutiny at Fort Jackson and provides important evidence for a new perspective on many aspects of the Civil War in southern Louisiana–the mutiny itself and its importance to the ability of the U.S. fleet to take possession of the city of New Orleans; the amount of Confederate action required to suppress Union sentiment in New Orleans and to coerce military service for the Confederacy by arrests and threats during 1861 and the winter of 1862; and the latent Unionism of some New Orleanians and the extent of Butler's success in protecting existing Unionists and promoting Unionism to the extent of signing oaths and registering to vote. All who are seriously interested in the Civil War in Louisiana, Unionism, garrison cities, desertion and mutiny in the Confederate army, nativism, or politics in New Orleans should consult the relevant parts of this book.

Notes

[1]. Michael D. Pierson, "'He Helped the Poor and Snubbed the Rich': Benjamin F. Butler and Politics in Lowell and New Orleans," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 7 (2005): 36-68.

[2]. The author has not listed in his bibliography two prominent studies: Wayne K. Durrill, *War of Another Kind: A Southern Community in the Great Rebellion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). He has listed and cited a chapter on Louisiana in a third one, but has not used it for a broader context: Daniel E. Sutherland, ed., *Guerillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999).

[3]. Stephen S. Michot, "'War Is Still Raging in This Part of the Country': Oath-Taking, Conscription, and Guerilla War in Louisiana's Lafourche Region," *Louisiana History* 38 (Spring 1997): 157-164; and Robert Comeaux, "The Civil War in Northeast Louisiana: Life in No Man's Land" (master's thesis, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2000).

[4]. Ash, *When the Yankees Came*, 16-18, 76-92.

[5]. Ibid., 14-16, 21-24.

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