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Jeffrey W. McClurken. *Take Care of the Living: Reconstructing Confederate Veteran Families in Virginia.* A Nation Divided: Studies in the Civil War Series. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009. Maps, tables, figures. 256 pp. $39.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-2813-5.

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Making Confederate Veterans Count

For all the scholarship that historians have generated about the American Civil War and its soldiers, Jeffrey W. McClurken thinks that there is more work to be done, especially on the lives of the white men who fought for the Confederacy, survived military service, and returned home to families facing an uncertain future. *Take Care of the Living* explores the difficult postwar conditions that Southern soldiers faced and the strategies that they and their kin used to endure. McClurken's main interest lies in the human impact of the war and its aftermath, but whereas many other scholars with the same interest have focused on veterans in the North or on the consequences of emancipation in the South, he seeks to remind us of the long-lasting physical and psychological ramifications for those who fought but were not victorious and did not have a triumphant national government to support them.

This is, therefore, a study about loss–soldiers losing arms and legs, battlefield survivors losing their minds, and once-independent, able-bodied men losing the ability to labor for the support of their dependents. This is also, however, a study of survival, of how families of dead, injured, or sick soldiers scrambled to make ends meet by altering the composition of their households; changing jobs; calling on local networks of support; and, ultimately, taking advantage of an expanding state welfare system.

In six chapters, McClurken aims to measure the short- and long-term effects of military service and defeat on military families of all classes living in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. In his study, the poor financial condition of many of these families did not readily improve over the course of the postwar period, largely because of chronic physical problems that the war had created for veterans. Here we see men from all walks of life–middle-class merchants, sizeable landowners, mechanics, and farm laborers–weakened by disease, hobbling on wooden legs, or struggling with deformed hands to make a living, to do the work that they had once performed as whole and healthy men. We also see glimpses of their female kin trying to make ends meet and often taking on greater responsibility for the economic welfare of their households. For a sizeable number of the women in McClurken's study, this meant entering domestic service.

McClurken uses personal letters and memoirs to capture some of the voices of veterans and illustrate their reactions to their new and trying circumstances, but it is in his analysis of a variety of government documents that he makes his unique contribution to the field. Using veterans' applications for state aid, which came in the form of artificial limbs, commutations, military pensions, and medical care in state-run mental hospitals and retirement homes, McClurken sees a shift in the strategies that many veteran families used to survive. Instead of depending solely on more established, private avenues of support–such as extended family, friends, community leaders, and neighborhood institutions, all of whom could place conditions on the assistance provided and the behavior of those they helped–veterans and their family members began tapping into new public funds and services that were designated for people like them, those considered *worthy* of need.

McClurken argues that while such aid from the Virginia state government was modest and certainly not enough to serve as a family's sole support, it helped struggling veteran families survive and recognized their sacrifice for the Confederate cause. It is important to note that the legislature limited its assistance, especially its Confederate pensions and space in retirement homes, to the most needy of its former soldiers. So while McClurken writes broadly about veterans' postwar experiences, his conclusions may be most accurate for only a

subset of veterans or their widows, those who remained in or fell into the working class or were downright destitute after the war. Given the fact that most historical scholarship draws disproportionately from sources by and about elites or the literate middle class, McClurken's attention to the poor and the laboring class is welcome. Nevertheless, he should have acknowledged the class constraints of this part of his argument early on.

Although important, the personal comments and stories of individual veterans do not form the core of *Take Care of the Living*. Instead, McClurken's most distinctive contribution is in the use of quantitative analysis. He obviously spent countless hours reading military service records and census records on microfilm, tracking veterans and their families through these and numerous other document sets, and then logging the personal details into two massive databases that he created. Out of all of this incredibly tedious work, McClurken has compiled lots of figures about soldiers' military service and the families living in all Pittsylvania households as reflected through the 1860 and 1870 censuses. This data allows him to draw some interesting conclusions about how Virginia veterans fared collectively after the war; how they compared to nonmilitary families; and how isolated elements of their military experience, such as incurring injuries, made the challenges of holding a job and retaining property greater for them in the postwar years. I am not convinced, though, that the benefits of this massive quantitative undertaking outweigh the costs, especially since the burden of the work necessitated that McClurken contain his number crunching to one decade's worth of data (1860-70) from one Virginia county.

In selecting that one county, McClurken had some good reasons for choosing Pittsylvania. It was Virginia's largest county by area and had the third largest population in 1860. Situated on the state's southern border, Pittsylvania was distant from the battles that raged in the valley and in Virginia's central corridor; it did, however, send an extraordinary number of its men (4/5 of those of military age) to fight in the war. Its small amount of war-related property damage and high number of veterans suit McClurken's interest in measuring the human, physical cost of the conflict. Newspapers from this county, however, are not available for this time period, which dramatically limits McClurken's ability to gain a full sense of the community and veterans' place in it. This is especially regrettable given that the county also included the bustling city of Danville, which undoubtedly was home to numerous voluntary organizations that might have served veterans well and whose records or coverage in newspapers might have illuminated a greater sense of connection between veterans, their civilian neighbors, Danville businesses, and other civic institutions.

To be fair, McClurken does examine closely the records of churches in Danville and throughout the county, but those are limited only to the Baptist congregations, and he does not appear to make much use of the records of nonreligious organizations. Danville had an active ladies' aid society during the war. How might this and similar associations in other parts of the county have related to veterans and their families after the war? Similarly, how many of the veterans in this study joined local veterans' organizations when these groups formed later in the postwar period? McClurken does not address these questions. I understand his decision not to incorporate Civil War memory into his study, because his concern is the living, not the dead, but veterans' organizations did more than just memorialize their fallen comrades and celebrate the Lost Cause. They actively called on the state legislature to fund veterans' pensions and appropriate large sums of money for other veteran services. It seems plausible, then, that they would have provided a strong community network for veteran families and may have also influenced the economic strategies veterans adopted as they grew older and weaker. If, like newspapers, the records of these and other important organizations have not survived in Pittsylvania, then perhaps another Virginia county would have been a better choice for this study. A fuller explanation of available local sources would also have been helpful in the book's introduction.

To some extent McClurken's quantitative research does accomplish what he set out to do: gain a broader understanding of the veterans as a group and identify larger trends in their postwar experiences. Numbers, however, cannot easily provide a sense of the human shape, attitudes, or personalities of these historical subjects. Perhaps combining the quantitative data with richer qualitative sources and a deeper examination of the lives of just a few veteran families from the larger group would have filled in more gaps and put flesh and blood on the silhouettes of these suffering survivors. In addition, though McClurken's focus justifiably falls on whites in the postwar period, taking into account the larger context of race and the postwar labor situation in the county would have strengthened the book. Before and during the war, almost half the residents of Pittsylvania County were slaves, and unlike most other Virginia counties, slaveholding in Pittsylvania was pretty evenly distributed, with a high number of smaller farmers owning a few slaves. A more complete examination of how veteran

households handled the loss of slaves and the transition to free labor, as well as consideration of how those challenges combined with veterans' other war-related problems, would have created a fuller picture of the realities that these families faced everyday.

I doubt that the aforementioned criticisms of *Take Care of the Living* come as a surprise to its author. I raise them, though, for those who will continue the important work that McClurken has begun. The questions he raises are good ones, and his book will serve as a valuable base for future research on the impact of the war and the development of social welfare in the South.

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