



Frederick E. Hosen, ed. *Federal Laws of the Reconstruction: Principal Congressional Acts and Resolutions, Presidential Proclamations, Speeches and Orders, and Other Legislative and Military Documents, 1862-1875*. Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2010. ix + 195 pp. \$49.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7864-4668-1.

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Published on H-CivWar (August, 2010)

Commissioned by Martin P. Johnson

Documenting Reconstruction

Frederick E. Hosen's *Federal Laws of the Reconstruction* is an edited volume that consists of thirty-seven federal statutes, forty-four presidential proclamations, one presidential order, eight congressional resolutions, Lincoln's second inaugural address, two War Department circulars, and a military field order. The stated purpose of the book is to "provide an important research tool that gives a unique sense of the Reconstruction process."^[1] While it may be convenient for scholars to have all of these laws compiled in one place, this volume unfortunately lacks the analytical apparatus necessary to make it a valuable research tool for either undergraduate students or scholars of the Reconstruction period.

To start, it is unclear why this book is necessary. The documents included are all available elsewhere in print and on the Internet.^[2] In fact, the original versions of most of these documents are available online. Researchers can easily access high-resolution scans of all federal laws and presidential proclamations from Reconstruction directly from the *U.S. Statutes at Large*, which is available through the Library of Congress's "American Memory" Web page.^[3] Transcriptions of the other documents included in the volume are also widely available online. Hosen would have done well to have included documents that are not as readily and freely available—perhaps some congressional correspondence or excerpts from debates that would have shed light on the other ma-

terials in the book.

Hosen's transcriptions contain a few minor errors. For example, on p. 13, Hosen correctly indents the end of Lincoln's 1863 Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction (the indentation would have created space for the presidential seal on the left-hand side), but rather than place the Latin abbreviation "L.S." (which means "the place of the seal") inside the indented space (where the seal would have been), Hosen inserts it into the text so that it reads: "Given under my hand at the city of Washington the eighth day of December, A.D. one thousand eight hundred and [L.S.] sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth." Such a transcription will certainly confuse an undergraduate working with this text.

Another problem for the volume is that Hosen provides no legal or historical context for any of the documents he selected. Thus, for example, one is left to wonder why President Lincoln issued a proclamation in March 1864 limiting the scope of his December 1863 Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. Or what the significance of President Johnson's 1868 "Christmas Pardon" was. And why were the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871 necessary? Readers of *Federal Laws of the Reconstruction* will have to look elsewhere to find the answers to these questions. A collection of primary sources like this ought to include head notes that explain the con-

text and significance of the documents it contains.

Scholarly aids could have perhaps made *Federal Laws of the Reconstruction* a convenient handbook for Reconstruction historians, but such aids are either missing or deficient. Even the index contains significant lapses. For example, the page numbers listed for “emancipation” inexplicably do not direct readers to Lincoln’s Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (pp. 7-9) or the final Emancipation Proclamation (pp. 9-11). Similarly, the entry for Jefferson Davis does not point to Andrew Johnson’s December 25, 1868 proclamation (pp. 74-75), and the entry for “fugitives” does not direct readers to the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 (pp. 182-189).[4]

Finally, the \$49.95 price tag seems exorbitant for a paperback of less than two hundred pages containing no annotation and documents that are available freely online. Libraries should avoid wasting their precious resources on this volume and historians should spend their hard-earned cash on books that have real scholarly value.

Notes

[1]. Advertising flier enclosed in the book; also on the back cover.

[2]. Hosen does not provide the original citations for any of the documents. Furthermore, his bibliography suggests that he may not have gathered and transcribed

these documents from their original congressional and presidential sources but rather from other published documentary collections. The sources listed in the bibliography include: Howard Wilford Bell, ed., *National Documents* (New York: Unit Book Publishing Co., 1906); Erik Bruun, and Jay Crosby, eds., *Our Nation’s Archive: The History of the United States in Documents* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 1999); Henry Steele Commager and Erik Bruun, eds., *The Civil War Archive: The History of the Civil War in Documents* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, Inc., 2000) (Hosen mistakenly calls this book *The Civil War in Documents* and he misidentifies editor Erik Bruun as “Eric Brunn,” a mistake he also made in his citation for *Our Nation’s Archive*); and June Foley, Mark Hoffman, and Tom McGuire, eds., *The World Almanac, Commemorative Edition: The Complete 1868 Original* (New York: World Almanac, 1992).

[3]. <http://memory.loc.gov/>

[4]. Hosen’s decision to reproduce the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 in a documentary reader on Reconstruction is curious. It might have been more sensible to have briefly discussed the acts in a head note introducing the 1864 act repealing those earlier laws (p. 15) rather than to have transcribed them in their entirety and placed them, completely devoid of context, in an appendix at the end of the volume.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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Citation: Jonathan W. White. Review of Hosen, Frederick E., ed., *Federal Laws of the Reconstruction: Principal Congressional Acts and Resolutions, Presidential Proclamations, Speeches and Orders, and Other Legislative and Military Documents, 1862-1875*. H-CivWar, H-Net Reviews. August, 2010.

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