

# H-Net Reviews

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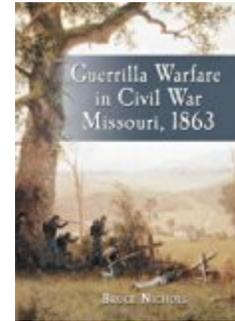
**Bruce Nichols.** *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri, Volume 2, 1863.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2007. viii + 389 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7864-2733-8.

**Silvana R. Siddali.** *Missouri's War: The Civil War in Documents.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009. xxi + 274 pp. \$18.65 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1732-4.

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## “The existence of non-existence of our country”: Missouri in the Civil War Era

Missouri refracts so many different historical angles and perspectives, and the state tends to defy any particular label or identity. Between the battles over slavery and statehood, and the wars over borders and allegiances, Missouri during the Civil War era proves an indefinite target for many scholars as lines that appear straight from a distance blur on closer inspection. Two books, with distinct points of entry, illustrate the complexity of Civil War-era Missouri by providing a variety of voices to tell the state's knotted tale. *Missouri's War*, edited by Silvana R. Siddali, is a concise and thoughtfully compiled volume detailing the complexities that defined the state during a tumultuous time. In contrast, Bruce Nichols, in *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri*, has composed a sprawling work focused directly on the guerrilla violence that defined the brutal nature of the war in the border states.

Siddali's *Missouri's War* provides a broad view of the Civil War era with the earliest piece dating to the 1820s and connects to the controversies surrounding slavery in the area with the last section incorporating pension requests and the mementos of Reconstruction. Overall, the author ably navigates a complicated story, not by reducing her focus, but by grappling directly with the myriad perspectives that contributed to the tense culture of the border states. With widely known pieces (Dred Scott's suit, for example) colliding against less familiar docu-

ments (such as diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings), Siddali gives a comprehensive take on the people who fought to claim and reclaim their roles in determining the future of Missouri. Certainly, Siddali's volume will appeal to scholars engaged with nineteenth-century Missouri and the border states, but this readable and scholarly book also serves as a strong example of how remarkably well a skillfully compiled collection of sources can work.

Where Siddali's book represents a measured yet wide-ranging look at nineteenth-century Missouri, Nichols's volume 2 of *Guerrilla Warfare in Civil War Missouri* takes a microscope to the particulars of guerrilla fighting in the state during one year, 1863, of the Civil War (a previous volume focused on the early stages of the war). Divided rigidly in terms of chronology as well as geography—the eighteen chapters are arranged around the seasons of 1863 and regions of the state—Nichols has compiled an exhaustive collection of “all known guerrilla operations in Missouri during 1863, the middle year of the Civil War, and the middle year of the darkest, most traumatic, terror-filled period in the history of the state” (p. 1). Overall, Nichols is less interested in the political and cultural issues of the war and is focused much more squarely on the military action, “irregular” or otherwise, no matter how minor a skirmish. Nichols's general purpose tends to derive from a desire to rescue

these stories from the dustbin as the “guerrilla warfare violence was personal, poorly documented, and faded into obscurity after a few years” (p. 21). Much of the book is dedicated to fighters far removed from the center stage of Missouri military history, forever in the shadow of William Quantrill and William “Bloody Bill” Anderson. To Nichols’s credit, he attempts to show the vast array of people not named Quantrill or Anderson who were involved in the complex fighting of Missouri, and yet by far the most engaging elements of the book involve the more infamous campaigns. Ultimately, Nichols’s prodigious research and a molecular approach toward guerrilla warfare raises the thorny question of audience. Historians interested in the reasons why this violence occurred and what this bloodshed ultimately meant to

the state may be disappointed.

Overall, these two volumes prove—with Siddali’s emphasis on the macro and Nichols’s interest in the micro—that Missouri continues to be a rich subject for historians, even if within that richness there remains a multitude of convoluted and elusive narratives. Read together, Siddali’s and Nichols’s books illustrate the blurred boundaries and hazy borders that stretch across Missouri’s history, but by capturing so many hidden voices they ultimately rescue the human aspects of a difficult past. The story of Missouri, as seen in the two studies, underscores the volatility of state political divisions, the brutal nature of frayed allegiances, and ultimately the messiness of Civil War history.

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