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**Stephanie McCurry**. *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010. 456 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-04589-7.

**Kenneth W. Noe**. *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1861.* Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. 320 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3377-3.

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## Different Civil War Actors

Kenneth W. Noe's book continues the rich scholarly tradition of examining groups that demonstrated behavior varying from the norm. Noe is curious about the 180,000 men (22.5 percent of all Confederate soldiers), what he terms "reluctant rebels" or "later enlisters," who entered Confederate service between 1862 and the war's conclusion. His study is based on a sample of 320 later enlisters whose letters and diaries reveal their motivations.

Noe identifies basic statistical characteristics of these later enlisters. He finds that they were "slightly older" at the time of enlistment than the vast majority of those who had already joined and that about half of them were already married (p. 14). Two-thirds were from landholding families and about two-fifths from slaveholding families. Three-fifths were engaged in farming and one-fourth were professional men (especially teachers, clerks, merchants, and doctors). Therefore, collectively they appear to be twice as likely to have been "professional men in various white-collar occupations," but half as likely to be skilled laborers compared to all members of the Confederate army. Significantly, they do not completely fit James M. McPherson's description as "nonslaveholding Southern married farmer[s] with small children" as Noe discloses that half were simply too young before 1862 to serve.[1]

These later enlisters' words reveal five aspects of their motivations. One, since very few, perhaps only one-tenth, expressed words supporting nationalism or defending liberty as major factors for entering the army, Noe concludes that "the ideological concerns that motivated the recruits of 1861 do not seem to have stirred most later recruits" (p. 37). Two, he notes that only 2.5 percent suggested that slavery was a reason why they fought–though virtually none criticized the institution. Three, they did not enlist because of feminine pressure; in fact, they were much more likely to delay entering the military because of it. Four, sentiments of hatred of the enemy, while surely present, did not dominate among them as only 17.2 percent cited Union invasion motivating their service. Five, very few mentioned enlisting for money or the fear of conscription.

The second half of Noe's book focuses on the role of religion, camaraderie, and war weariness. Noe finds relatively few later enlisters participating in the Confederate army revivals as most "remained oriented toward home and focused on a personal relationship with God" (pp. 142-143). Indeed, he suggests, "later enlisters still hesitated to let go of the spiritual center their homes had recently provided" (p. 143). Noe emphasizes that the role of their home also may have divided later enlisters from the ranks of veterans in terms of shaping camaraderie; of those who positively mentioned "relationships with comrades, just over half referred specifically to family members and friends from home" (p. 160). Thus, Noe claims that primary group cohesion represented "an extension of antebellum Southern localism transferred to army camps rather than as a function of the camps themselves" and concludes that "Unit pride simply does not seem to have been a major sustaining motivator for them" (pp. 160, 163). Finally, despite the lesser motivating role of camaraderie, these men did not grow more weary than the veterans; once they faced combat there were few differences between their service and veterans especially regarding cowardice or desertion. By far the factor that most separated them from veterans was their age. As older men, they faced severe "sheer physical limitations," and, as a result, "while youths came of age and

grew up in uniform during the Civil War, older men simply aged" and constantly worried about those left at home (p. 209).

Despite his many valuable statistical measurements, Noe may have further examined exactly when later enlisters entered the military. He groups men who joined in early 1862 with some who did not do so for another year or two. Did these initial later enlisters share more in common with men who began serving in 1861 (the vast majority of whom had not yet faced combat) than the subsequent later enlisters? Nevertheless, Noe convincingly demonstrates that the new soldiers who entered the military beginning in 1862 were composed of two different demographic groups: very young men who were only in their mid-teens when the war began; and husbands in their late twenties and thirties who understandingly were reluctant to abandon their families unless it was absolutely necessary. By 1862, with the Confederacy being besieged on all fronts, Noe successfully proves, these two groups concluded that their time had come.

Stephanie McCurry investigates the unexpected consequences of the Confederacy–particularly in regard to white women and slaves. She stresses how the Confederate government was forced to deal with both groups in ways unanticipated at the war's outset.

McCurry identifies "a reconfiguration of Southern political life" when "white women emerged into authority and even leadership on a range of issues at the heart of popular politics in the Civil War South" (p. 135). By late 1862 and into 1863, it became clear that the war would not be of short duration and that the absence of so many small farmers was devastating the welfare of their families, causing many women, particularly soldiers' wives, to write and petition government officials pleading that their basic needs be met. These "women's collective identification as soldier's wives," she explains, represented "a broad political reimagining" to which the government had to respond or face dire consequences (p. 145). This "distinctly Confederate development," she asserts, "represented a significant rerouting of power and authority on the home front, and, at least for the duration of the war, a striking realignment of state-citizen relations" (pp. 153, 163).

Shifting to the topic of slavery, McCurry also examines to what degree Confederate authorities had to adjust their thinking as it quickly became apparent that those who had optimistically claimed that slavery would emerge as an asset for the Confederate cause were proven wrong. McCurry bases her conclusions on the abundant evidence that the one thing that slaveholders refused to contribute to the war effort was control over their slaves. Their reluctance, she stresses, endured from the issue of slave labor impressment through the debates over bringing slaves into the military. At each step, McCurry uncovers a strange and previously unrecognized coalition of slaveowner and slave which resisted the process to turn slaves into what might have been a Confederate strength.

One question left unanswered by McCurry, perhaps because the sources may not be helpful, is the relative concern or fear Confederate officials had regarding white women and slaves. She is entirely correct that women used the phrase "soldiers' wives" to advance their cause by humiliating authorities into passing legislation to bring these women and their children relief. Clearly these women empowered themselves. But exactly what was it that the Confederate government feared if it failed to ease this situation? Was it the threat of further urban rioting by the impoverished women or the possibility that their husbands and sons would desert rather than let their loved ones continue to suffer? By contrast, it seems quite clear that the perception of potential slave insurrection proved a much more challenging concern for Confederate officials. While soldier's wives were not likely to endanger the Confederacy directly except by encouraging their relatives to abandon the military, the slaves posed a much greater threat, especially once they benefited from their growing allies in the Union army. Though it may have been too late for many and may not have succeeded entirely, in the case of white women and children, the Confederacy clearly demonstrated its ability to adjust. By contrast, slavery was a much more intractable problem, because, as McCurry so convincingly shows, it was not just a problem with the slaves alone but their masters as well.

Though focusing on two different topics, these books share three things in common. One, they discuss the entire Confederacy both geographically and chronologically. Two, neither Noe nor McCurry claim that the Confederacy lost the war either because of the role of later enlisters or because of its failure to consider the role of women or slaves earlier. Three, Noe and McCurry constantly refer to the existing literature on their topics in their books. Here, however, they also differ. Since Noe investigates a topic that has received very little attention, he points to previous scholarship to explain exactly where earlier works ended and where he picks up, particularly when these previous works provide a statistical point of comparison to his findings. By contrast, McCurry often emphasizes the shortcoming of previous scholarship for not stressing the role of women

and slaves. While most scholars will concede that McCurry makes a major contribution to revealing the role of women and slaves in the war, some may ask if her work represents more of a synthesis of the existing scholarship than she asserts. For example, she points out early in the book that "historians and the public already know a great deal about this Civil War history of dissent, about its class and regional bases and political consequences in guerilla warfare, secret Unionist organizations, peace movements, and desertion. But the Confederate government would face a whole set of other challenges as well, arising not from the band of brothers but from the great mass of the Confederate people–women and slaves–who had been purposely disfranchised and excluded from the ranks of the political community. The challenges they posed would prove even more threatening to the political prospects of the regime and are more unknown to historians of it" (p. 82). Therefore, when she asserts that scholars have not ignored the welfare crisis that led women to empower themselves, she suggests that these historians have placed too much emphasis on the welfare component and too little on the empowerment aspect of this topic. Some scholars may disagree with her, but many more will wonder if these really are mutually exclusive perspectives. Ultimately, McCurry's major contribution is her juxtaposition of the Confederate failure to adjust to the empowerment of both common white women and slaves and why women could be reckoned with (though rather late), while slaves, as well as perhaps their masters, could not be.

Scholars and the large audience of Civil War readers will find interesting insights in both books. Their varying approaches underscore how diverse actors shaped and were altered by the conflict.

Note

[1]. James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 102.

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