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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Stanley Harrold, ed. *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Reader.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2008. Illustrations. xiii + 221 pp. $79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4051-5663-9; $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4051-5664-6.

James W. Loewen, Edward H. Sebesta, eds. *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader: The "Great Truth" about the "Lost Cause".* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010. Illustrations. 368 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60473-218-4; $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-60473-219-1.

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Documenting the Civil War Era

Documents provide historians with a window into the past, and collections, such as two recently appearing on the Civil War era, make valuable tools for students or general readers who want to explore the words of the past and think more critically about history. Document readers are most often assigned in undergraduate history courses, finding their place between textbooks and scholarly monographs, but rarely do they have much appeal for a popular reading audience. Two very different documentary collections are offered up in Stanley Harrold's *The Civil War and Reconstruction* and in *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader*, edited by James W. Loewen and Edward H. Sebesta. Harrold's reader, a slender volume of just over two hundred pages, is aimed at undergraduate readers, and is likely to be widely adopted as a supplemental text in Civil War era courses. In a hefty volume that includes nineteenth- and twentieth-century documents and commentary, Loewen and Sebesta aim to correct misperceptions about the Civil War that general readers and especially social studies teachers may have encountered through miseducation.

The Civil War and Reconstruction is everything expected in a documentary reader and a bit more. Part of Blackwell's series Uncovering the Past: Documentary Readers in American History, and edited by Harrold, a prolific scholar of the antislavery movement, the book easily achieves the series' goal of offering up classroom tools that reflect major themes and debates. The documents filling eight chapters were carefully selected to provide a balanced exploration of the era. Perspectives of Northerners and Southerners, African Americans and whites, slaves and free blacks, soldiers and civilians, and men and women are all represented.

Documents follow the chronological progression of sectional tensions, secession, war, and finally Reconstruction. Harrold's selections reflect his scholarly interest, with more than half of the documents in the "Causes" chapter related to abolitionism. Other chapters are more balanced, but although Reconstruction appears in the book's title, documents from that critical period are relegated to a single final chapter. Within the chapters, sequential organization helps to steer readers. Moving into the war, chapters treat battles, soldiers' experiences, the home front, and political developments. The selection especially moves beyond the standard documents in chapter 7 which emphasizes events and decisions affecting the trans-Mississippi West, including the Homestead Act, Indian relations, and the transcontinental railroad. Each document is accompanied by a brief headnote offering context and linking it with the chapter theme. One strength of the collection is that it pulls together many commonly taught texts, such as Alexander Stephens's 1861 Cornerstone Speech, and lesser-known examples. Chapter 2, "Disunion to War," also includes an illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* depicting Jefferson Davis taking the helm of the Confederacy, and an excerpt from Mary Boykin Chesnutt's diary.

Questions for discussion or further reflection are placed at each chapter's conclusion, and although not true of all eight chapters, several encourage students to link the documents critically to the broader chapter theme. *The Civil War and Reconstruction* will easily fit within the structure of most undergraduate courses on the Civil War and Reconstruction era, but will also find use in U.S. history survey courses. Harrold's introduction succinctly offers an overview of the events of the Civil

War and Reconstruction era that would allow students in survey or other nonspecialist courses to gain the solid grounding necessary to interpret and understand these documents. This book is a useful tool that will find its way onto many syllabi in the upcoming years, including mine.

Another kind of document reader altogether, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader* covers a much broader time period and is aimed at a more popular readership. Collected by Loewen, sociologist and public intellectual, and Sebesta, opponent of the neo-Confederate tradition, the book proposes to correct misperceptions about the Confederacy. Loewen is best known for his book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (1986). Sebesta, whose academic background is not readily discernable, calls himself the "leading national researcher on the neo-Confederate movement."[1] Combining their polemic sensibilities, the editors have brought together a series of documents that they argue form the core of the "key documents in American history about the Confederacy" (p. 3). The book pulls from a wide range of sources from the secession convention debates of the 1860s to a declaration proclaiming Confederate history month issued in 2008. The result is an interesting set of readings that will certainly be unpopular with those who reject the notion that slavery formed the root cause of the Civil War.

Loewen and Sebesta argue that the pro-Confederate, or perhaps more accurately the white supremacist, conception of the Lost Cause that developed in the latter nineteenth century has so permeated popular culture that most Americans are unaware that slavery caused the Civil War. Citing numerous history textbooks, they found that none explicitly named slavery as a causative factor, but point out that the contrary argument for states' rights or other causes has been widely available through a variety of common sources, and suggested by textbook authors perhaps to appease conservative school boards in charge of book adoptions. Because they have not read the "key documents," many teachers "continue to present and misrepresent this issue to the next generation of Americans" (p. 7). If readers are indeed unaware of the role of slavery in leading to war, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader* offers up a host of pro-Confederate documents certain to cure many of their misperceptions.

Organized chronologically in six chapters, according to their outlined method, the editors selected only pro-Confederate documents for inclusion. The first chapter reads history backwards beginning with the consideration of slavery during the debates over the adoption of the U.S. Constitution in 1787. Here it becomes apparent that the editors are concerned with pointing out evidence of proslavery or white supremacist ideology evident from the nation's founding. This is what they really aim to show when they talk about pro-Confederate or neo-Confederate writings. Many of the documents will be familiar to historians, including John C. Calhoun's Senate "Address to the Southern People," or Samuel Cartwright's writings on slave diseases, but these will be new reading for a popular audience. Scholars will be surprised, however, that no mention is made of the Nullification Controversy of 1832-33, despite the event's link in the trajectory of sectional tensions leading to secession and war. Each chapter includes a brief introduction that focuses on the argument contained therein. Additional commentary between or within individual documents helps to bring some framework to readers, but nonspecialists would be better served with contextualization of the documents in broader narrative history.

The most interesting and compelling chapters are 5 and 6, which outline the post-Reconstruction shift to codified segregation and the concomitant recasting of the Civil War and secession as resulting from a necessary defense of states' rights against federal and Northern attack. The final chapter includes a selection of documents and issues likely to be familiar to general readers and helps to pull the document reader's themes into context with the twenty-first-century political and social agenda. Not aiming for objectivity, *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader*, portrays the racist America of past and present, and hopes to incite readers to take action to break the influence of neo-Confederates that lingers in today's society. The editors charge "every historian, every teacher of history or social studies, to make sure to use the documents in this book to counter the mythology and mystification that still enshrouds the Confederacy" (pp. 392-393). Although it will not surprise many scholars, the writings and images collected here will certainly educate many about the influences and events that created the Confederacy and led to generations of racial discrimination.

Note

[1]. Edward H. Sebesta, "Temple of Democracy," http://templeofdemocracy.com/resume.htm (accessed April 3, 2011).

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