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William C. Harris. *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011. xii + 416 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1804-0.

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Preserving Border State Loyalty

In *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union*, William C. Harris has reinvigorated a much-studied issue by reformulating the questions surrounding it; namely how Abraham Lincoln managed to keep the four border states of Missouri, Kentucky, Delaware, and Maryland in the Union. Many historians who have studied the border states present the story as how Lincoln *won* control of the border states. Harris's contribution rests in explaining–as his title suggests–how the sixteenth president *preserved* their loyalty to the Union. In doing so, Harris has broadened considerably the scope of the Civil War in the border states most notably by exploring the relations between civil authorities and military leaders in each state and how the often strained relations between Union commanders and state government officials made the process of preserving the loyalty of the border states far more difficult than scholars have realized.

With few caveats, Harris gives Lincoln praise for his management of the border state issue–and of the all-important border state politicians who would play no small role in determining whether the four states would remain in the Union. Failure, Harris argues, "would have ensured the independence of the southern slave republic" and "would have forever tarnished Lincoln's reputation and his presidency" (p. 8). But where many historians have found the key to Lincoln's success in the early months of the conflict, Harris maintains that ever-changing circumstances forced the Union president to remain vigilant in his efforts to maintain border state loyalty and constantly monitor events afield.

Harris begins with the familiar narrative of Lincoln's position during the secession crisis, in which the president-elect tried to remain distant from the struggle in Congress and in state conventions throughout the South. Border state opposition to secession remained firm, but was far from certain in those months leading up to the war's commencement at Fort Sumter. Here Harris introduces a new cast of characters who played a pivotal role in border state affairs: the border state congressmen and the state governors from whom Lincoln would have secure loyalty. These officials–former Whigs and Democrats–controlled civil affairs and stood as the barometers of loyalty within their respective states. The civil unrest in Baltimore, for example, presented the president with a difficult challenge: suppress the secessionists and risk a backlash of secessionist sentiment from the governor and his associates, or attempt negotiation and conciliation with authorities who demanded that the Union army cease moving men and materiel through the city. Ultimately Lincoln did both by suspending the writ of habeas corpus and by rerouting soldiers around the city. In doing so, Lincoln established a policy that he would rely on in the future by combining conciliation with a firm hand in stanching secessionist movement.

Lincoln faced his greatest test in negotiating the frequently tense relations between civil authorities and military commanders in the border states. Harris has made his greatest contribution in chronicling the wrangling between local authorities and military officials over a host of concerns related to troop movement, battles within the border states themselves, efforts to suppress radical secessionist activity through the suspension of civil liberties, and the use of African American troops–among other concerns. In many instances, the commander-in-chief faced the difficult challenge of supporting firm and

often drastic action taken by his subordinate commanders in the field at the risk of destabilizing the always-precarious political support for the Union within the border states. Moreover, the problems persisted far later than historians have generally recognized. Border state enmity over the enlistment of African American troops, emancipation, and the ongoing use of Union soldiers to suppress the activities of secessionists strained civil-military as well as state-federal relations throughout the war. The election of a constitutional convention in Maryland during April 1864 highlighted continuing divisions within the border states over Lincoln's emancipation policy. A pro-Union government in Maryland controlled the state's political affairs, but only with the presence of soldiers ready to defend free elections against proslavery forces. Lincoln went so far as to give a speech at Baltimore encouraging Marylanders that, in Harris's words, "they were coming down on the right side of the definition of liberty–freedom for the slaves" (p. 294).

Along with his careful analysis of the labyrinthine political and military calculations that Lincoln made over the war's course to preserve border state loyalty, Harris also evaluates the merit of the measures taken by the president. Harris generally praises Lincoln for his adroit handling of border state affairs, thereby adding to the prevailing historiographical interpretation of the sixteenth president as a masterful politician. Yet Harris does not resort to hagiography. He criticizes the president for his mishandling of affairs in Maryland during the early months of the war. And like many Lincoln scholars, he is puzzled by the president's endorsement of compensated emancipation and colonization schemes for freed African Americans. Lincoln seemed out of touch with reality as Radical Republicans, border state spokesmen, and even some of his fellow Republicans dismissed the idea as impractical. Harris explains away Lincoln's support as part of his ultimate strategy of enacting a "state-controlled, gradual end of slavery" in the border states as well as within rebel territory (p. 219). Others might counter that Lincoln was grasping at any possible solution at hand–some of which had the potential to succeed while others faced certain failure.

Harris has written an important book that will serve for some time as the key source for understanding how the border states remained in the Union. By treating their loyalty post-1861 as hardly inevitable, he reminds readers that the porous, fluid border between free and slave domains experienced divided loyalties throughout the course of the war. Each state had one foot in the Union and the other foot in the Confederacy; each state's stance changed constantly. Harris's contribution rests in explaining how Lincoln and his military subordinates worked closely–alternatively with a firm hand and judicious restraint–in conjunction with civil authorities to maintain the loyalty of the state political establishment and the people. Though *Lincoln and the Border States* analyzes the former admirably, scholars must consult other works to understand the latter. Harris pays close attention to the delicate political situation in Missouri, for example, but he only briefly touches upon the stark and bloody "inside war"–as Michael Fellman has put it–that ensued among the state's citizens.[1] Such criticism in no way detracts from Harris's exhaustively researched, closely argued study.

Note

[1]. See Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri during the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

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