

H-Net Reviews

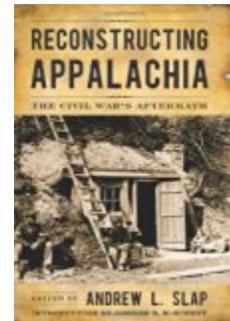
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Andrew L. Slap, ed. *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*. New Directions in Southern History Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. 390 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2581-7.

Reviewed by Scott Mackenzie (Auburn University)

Published on H-War (February, 2012)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



For years, Appalachian historians have labored to integrate their region with the rest of the country. Long burdened by myths, stereotypes, and “Otherness,” the mountaineers have seemed insulated, even innocent, of the issues facing the nation. So far the results have been promising. Appalachia now appears in the colonial period, Early Republic, the Gilded Age, and especially in labor history. Kenneth Noe and Shannon Wilson’s collection of essays in *Civil War in Appalachia* (1997) alone merged the region into that important topic. Andrew L. Slap (history, East Tennessee State University) seeks to do the same with *Reconstructing Appalachia*, with essays from new and experienced scholars discussing how mountain society experienced the post-Civil War period. The subject has received little scholarly attention from Appalachianists since Gordon B. McKinney’s *Southern Mountain Republicans* (1978). Slap builds on his work to include other form of politics, class, religion, the image of Appalachia, and memory. The result is a solid tome covering numerous geographic areas and experiences and reaching different yet valuable conclusions.

Slap’s book is not about Reconstruction per se, though Appalachia felt its effects. Rather, it is about how the mountaineers endured the war’s consequences. In his superb historiographical essay, he addresses two interrelated questions: first, how the region managed its connections to the nation, and second, the difficulties in defining Appalachia (p. 43). The essays here address both issues while retaining the region’s diversity. Several chapters debate the tension between localism and external forces at the war’s end. Keith Hébert’s study of the Ku Klux Klan in northern Georgia argues that Klansmen defended local autonomy over alcohol production

against federal agents and outside industrialists rather than targeting Republicans and African Americans. T. R. C. Hutton agrees. The actions of eastern Kentucky Unionist William Strong, he argues, indicate how areas of the mountain South not subject to Reconstruction reflected the same racial violence as elsewhere. Until his assassination in 1897, he fought a savage war against the former Confederates running his county on behalf of black and white squatters. His enemies’ denunciations of Strong as a savage became symbolic of Appalachian violence.

More articles cover how the mountains integrated with the nation. Steven E. Nash shows how the two merged in western North Carolina. Between 1865 and 1867, lingering wartime allegiances fueled factionalism. Conservatives, including reluctant secessionists or supporters of wartime governor Zebulon Vance, sought to gain power through amnesty and becoming Republicans. The resulting fight with their Unionist rivals, Nash argues, led to increased tensions and violence. Yet, both sides agreed that the status of African Americans must not change, prompting the rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment to preserve white home rule. Paul Yandle shows how western North Carolinians held the same racial views as the rest of the South. Led by Leroy McAfee, the uncle of “Clansman” author Thomas Dixon, mountain conservatives aided their lowland counterparts in removing the Republicans from power. Effective federal responses, he argues, merely changed their venue from the field to the state capitol, achieving the same ends. Kyle Osborn offers a different view, arguing that Parson William Brownlow’s career shows Appalachian race relations could improve. The East Tennessee politi-

cian remained loyal to the Union despite his proslavery views. As the principle state Republican after the war, Brownlow's slow but sincere embrace of blacks and civil rights, Osborn argues, was not mere pragmatism. Lastly, Mary Ella Engel's work on Mormon missions in north Georgia indicates the openness of Appalachia to new religious ideals.

Slap includes two useful if contrasting essays on West Virginia. Race mattered less there than did capitalist penetration. First, Randall S. Gooden offers a sedate, tensionless essay about the new state's postwar politics. Reconciliation, he argues, came slowly because of a growing consensus on economic development and industrialization. Initial hostility between radical and conservative Unionists gave way to mutual accommodation, permitting a "let-up" on ex-rebels, a new constitution and, subsequently, confidence in statehood. He finds a great deal of power among West Virginia's early leaders in founding their new state. Second, Kenneth Fones-Wolf offers a broader and less placid view in his study of West Virginia as a borderland of federal politics. Grafting a Northern-style industrial system on to a Southern-type agrarian polity, he argues, forced politicians to cope with a volatile electorate. Between 1863 and 1910, party strength varied according to economic activity. Republican industrial areas thrived but Democratic areas, unhappy with the pace and consequences of development, held back tax and land use reform. Gooden's contribution indicates how West Virginians broke with the past and found common ground. In contrast, Fones-Wolf argues for continuity that limited the new state's potential. Such different articles should lead to stimulating debates on West Virginia's history.

The last four essays deal with the place of the Civil War in Appalachian memory. Robert Sandow's work on Pennsylvania takes the debate into the North. As

in the South, localism directed responses to the war's strains. He argues that communal memories of resistance to lost economic opportunities before motivated fighting against the draft during the war, and against coal operators afterwards. Likewise, Tom Lee examines the origins of East Tennessee's postwar memory. Economic needs motivated forgetting the war's divisions while maintaining a Unionist myth. The last two essays extend into the twentieth century. John Inscoe's study of travel literature from 1900 to 1921 argues that little had changed from previous decades. Authors such as John Fox, Horace Kephart, and John C. Campbell all maintained the loyal mountaineer myth, if they mentioned the war at all. Only Emma Bell Miles included Confederates—the result, Inscoe believes, of her Chattanooga residence. Lastly, Anne Marshall argues that changes in memory allowed white eastern Kentuckians to accept a teenager wearing a Confederate flag to school. Historical amnesia about the presence of blacks helped turn the rebel symbol into a reflection of class rather than racial tensions.

Reconstructing Appalachia holds up but has some shortcomings. Despite the common thread about race, there is nothing about the effects of emancipation on African Americans. Some attention to the black perspective would have helped. Likewise, women receive scant consideration as workers, activists, and mothers. Labor too has been neglected, even though industrialization resumed its penetration of the rest of Appalachia after the Civil War. Gordon McKinney's introduction mentions these but the essays fail to catch up. These criticisms aside, this is a great book. Slap's collection contains valuable articles on important topics. They move beyond formal party politics as in McKinney's book, carry on the discussion of race, and help to redefine Appalachia by including the North and memory. This book will encourage new scholarship on this important subject.

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

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Scott Mackenzie. Review of Slap, Andrew L., ed., *Reconstructing Appalachia: The Civil War's Aftermath*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2012.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=34256>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.