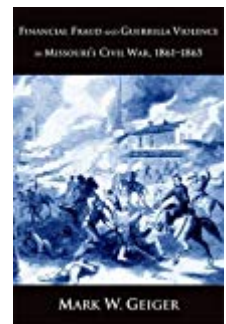
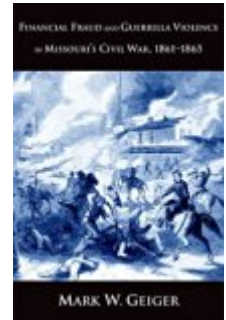


**Dennis W. Belcher.** *The 11th Missouri Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War: A History and Roster.* Jefferson: McFarland, 2011. x + 336 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-4882-1.

**Mark W. Geiger.** *Financial Fraud and Guerrilla Violence in Missouri's Civil War, 1861-1865.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. 320 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-15151-0.



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**Commissioned by** Martin P. Johnson (Miami University Hamilton)

Dennis W. Belcher and Mark W. Geiger have written two books that together make a powerful claim—to truly understand the Civil War, one must understand the role(s) Missouri played in the conflict. Perhaps this is not surprising. From its origins, the state of Missouri provoked controversy over the issue of slavery, and throughout the antebellum period it contributed to the intensifying debate over the institution. Missouri's border state status did make its participation in the Civil War relatively unique, as not only did the state see its fair share of battles, but the state also was infamously torn apart by violence beyond the traditional battlefield. The Civil War was a complex

event, of course, but at its core was the experience of suffering, and it is in the suffering that Missouri endured that the truth of what the Civil War was emerges.

The most familiar form of suffering during the Civil War was that of the soldiers who contested the conflict, and Belcher's work on the 11th Missouri Volunteer Infantry takes a traditional approach in constructing a narrative of the regiment's history. Readers seeking a detailed accounting of the regiment's formation, personnel turnover, and battlefield exploits will find much to enjoy here. Belcher succeeds in proving his assertion that the 11th Missouri consistently demon-

strated the “utmost bravery and loyalty” to the Union (p. 1). This important regiment roamed the Western theater of the war, participating in numerous actions in Mississippi, including leading a brutal frontal assault on Vicksburg, playing a decisive role at the battle of Nashville, and ending the war conquering the fortifications around Mobile Bay. Despite seeing intense fighting from Louisiana to Tennessee, the unit “never broke,” and due to its proud reputation frequently found itself engaged at the most critical moments of the Civil War (p. 228). The price the men of the regiment paid for their dedication to the Union was steep, and the strength of Belcher’s work is that he conveys how the war relentlessly reduced the unit, leading to its eventual reorganization in 1864.

In contrast to the quality of Belcher’s nuanced treatment of how the men of the 11th Missouri willingly sacrificed themselves for the Union cause, some relative weaknesses are apparent in the work. While there are appendices that contain postwar biographical summaries of many of the regiment’s officers, as well as some wartime letters from the unit’s soldiers, Belcher’s primary focus on retelling the story of the war means that the war, and these men, exist as if in a vacuum. Placing the sacrifice of these men in the context of their lives both before and after the Civil War would have helped the reader connect to the humanity of the conflict and appreciate the soldiers’ efforts all the more. And while Belcher frequently gives the perspective of the regiment’s men on the combat they experienced, there is little commentary included here on how these events relate to the war itself. The result is that at times the reader feels rushed from one battleground to the next. This may well have been what it felt like to the soldiers themselves, and of course, the limits of source material are legitimate as well. But the best regimental histories should aspire to more than just a faithful recounting of the war—they should offer perspective on the conflict. These comments should not dissuade readers interested in either the Western theater of the Civil War or of

the history of individual Civil War regiments, as Belcher’s contribution is valuable on both fronts.

The battlefield suffering of Missouri troops, as described by Belcher, is relatively well-known and understood. Also generally known, but as yet not fully explained, is the brutal guerrilla violence that engulfed Missouri during the Civil War. In seeking to identify the origins of that aspect of Missouri’s suffering, Geiger demonstrates that even at the war’s sesquicentennial much remains to be learned about the fundamental issues of the war. Geiger’s book functions as a detective story that reveals how the combination of family kinship networks, premodern banking practices, and the desire to maintain power created a financial whirlwind of self-destruction as the pro-Confederate supporters of Missouri essentially stole millions of dollars from their own banks in a scheme to finance the secession efforts at the outset of the war. When the Union successfully tightened its grip on the state, the lawsuits against pro-Confederate bankers and their cohorts began. Faced with the prospect of losing everything, many Missourians embarked on a vicious cycle of guerrilla violence. Geiger succinctly but convincingly explains that it was only natural “that forced sales of thousands of family farms would lead to communal violence and insurrection” (p. 101).

There are many strengths to Geiger’s work, such as its meticulous organization and the accessible quality of his writing, but the critical triumph here lies in how the author successfully manages to create a clear picture of the financial history of wartime Missouri. This may sound pedestrian but it is not. Geiger has pulled together, county by county, the kind of evidence that previous historians have overlooked, and for that he deserves considerable praise. Furthermore, he is able to show the reader, step by step, how and why Missourians first created and then abused the banking system that eventually doomed them. And while Geiger is most comfortable with the economic implications of his research, he ably

goes beyond the numbers. Ultimately the author shows how the internal conflict--within the larger Civil War--ultimately destroyed the traditional planter class in Missouri and led to the state being transformed, perhaps more than any other, by the intensity of the Civil War crucible.

Despite its originality and overall quality, there are significant concerns with Geiger's study. There is only one brief chapter on the guerrilla violence itself, which is curious. The author explains this lack of attention by pointing out that he is only concerned with the causation of the violence, and that thanks to numerous historians (and American popular culture in general), the actions of Missouri guerrillas, like Jesse James and William Quantrill, are already chronicled elsewhere. Nevertheless it still seems that an opportunity is missed here to explore further. Since the guerrillas are the pivot around which Geiger's main points occur--the financial chaos and resulting transformation of the state--more on the guerrillas themselves is appropriate. The concluding chapter also perplexes. After an entire monograph focused on Missouri's unique financial disaster, Geiger chooses to end with a general, and frankly tentative, discussion of how the increasingly centralized administration of the war effort "paralleled the shift toward professionalism in the banks" (p. 149). This may or may not be true, but the point about how modern bureaucracy displaced traditional paternalism either needs to be developed more fully or else omitted. Perhaps it is to Geiger's credit that he builds such a cohesive narrative in the rest of the manuscript, but the last chapter provides an awkward ending to what is otherwise a compelling and tight presentation.

Do not be dismayed by the comments above, however. This is an important book, and Geiger's work deserves a wide audience from veteran Civil War scholars to general readers alike who will hopefully question their assumptions about what we think of the Civil War experience. Geiger and Belcher successfully locate Missouri's suffering--

both external and self-inflicted--at the center of the Civil War story itself, which is a fitting place for a border state to be.

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