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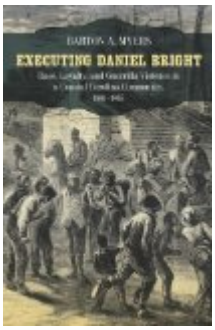

Barton A. Myers. *Executing Daniel Bright: Race, Loyalty, and Guerrilla Violence in a Coastal Carolina Community, 1861-1865.* Conflicting Worlds: New Dimensions of the American Civil War Series. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011. 193 pp. $32.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-3475-7.

Reviewed by Derek W. Frisby

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Commissioned by Judkin J. Browning (Appalachian State University)

Barton A. Myers's *Executing Daniel Bright* is a concise yet complex study of a coastal Carolina community's tribulations during the Civil War. While many others have chronicled similar struggles in countless communities across the South, Pasquotank County, North Carolina, appears as an exceptional example of the importance of location and its effect on the political, social, and military events that led to a rather unremarkable yet signature event, the execution of Daniel Bright.

Myers examines the political and social climate within Pasquotank and details how the polarizing effects of guerrilla violence and federal occupation ratcheted up the levels of violence and muddled the allegiances of the citizenry. In the aftermath of the secession crisis, many in this county sided with the Confederacy, yet Myers describes "two shades" of Confederate sympathizers composing a "class alliance" made possible by the ties binding the South's social and economic slave society (p. 32). Among the Pasquotank Confederates were a small core of Southern nationalists pulled from ardent antebellum Democrats, the slave aristocracy, and professional classes who formed the vocal minority, and a larger group of small nonslaveholding farmers who had remained somewhat politically apathetic or who were former Whigs in the antebellum period but whose loyalties lay with North Carolina more so than the Confederacy. Bright, like many other yeoman farmers, apparently saw Confederate military service as a means to achieve "upward mobility" in the South's hierarchy (p. 34). Myers outlines the Unionists in Pasquotank as "more economically diverse" than their Confederate counterparts, yet predominantly middle class, "fiscally pro-business and politically inclined to support social stability, the rule of law, and national market trade." Both groups, according to Myers, formed impressive "social networks" designed to communicate and support its members (p. 33). Secessionists later derisively termed the state's Unionists "buffaloes" (p. 49).

Federal naval supremacy made communities such as Pasquotank tempting targets for federal raids, and once occupied, these locations would

serve as essential bases for military operations and the restoration of federal authority further inland. Myers's analysis of the Confederate guerilla strategy (if there indeed was a coherent strategy) as a counterproductive one is insightful. Confederate guerillas in the area operated without or in willful defiance of any Confederate authority. Thus, these guerilla bands failed to or were incapable of fulfilling the fundamental objective of any insurgent force: the protection of citizens and their property in order to build loyalties to the insurgent political authority. As a result, the federal forces undermined Confederate support by providing what the guerillas could not. Not surprisingly, the guerrillas became increasingly more frustrated and desperate, leading the federals to initiate a more vindictive and punitive strategy to eliminate the threat.

Another inflammatory component of this strategy involved recruiting and installing former slaves to serve in Unionist regiments and assert federal authority among their former masters. It was during one of these punitive raids in 1863 conducted by the United States Colored Troops, "Buffaloes," and federal troops that Bright, a Confederate deserter and suspected guerrilla, was captured, court-martialed, and executed by hanging. Although Bright was an unremarkable guerrilla and his condemnation legally questionable, Myers utilizes the event as a window into the turmoil created by the activities of both belligerents, saying that "Bright's body became a declaration about who wielded power over the community" (p. 85). Bright's execution along with the federals' punitive raiding policies even incited the noted Confederate diarists Edmund Ruffin and Catherine Edmundston to mention the deteriorating situation in Pasquotank as among the worst outrages perpetrated during the federal occupation, and they lamented the reversal of the South's social and racial hierarchy as a result. Almost immediately after this highly successful raid, Pasquotank's citizens began to negotiate neutrality, validating a harsher counterguerrilla strategy to bring peace to the region. It was a strategy that federal commanders across the South had been increasingly drawn to and were widely adopting by 1864.

Few books have the ability to elucidate the intricacies of Civil War loyalties and strategy so succinctly. Myers's *Executing Daniel Bright* is a shining example of the Daniel Sutherland-inspired community-focused Civil War historiography. It will serve as an excellent introduction for survey-level students and as an essential tool for upper-division and graduate-level courses.

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