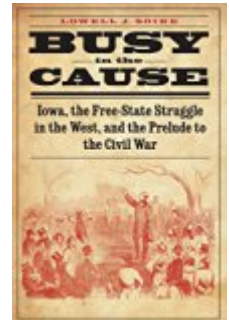


Lowell J. Soike. *Busy in the Cause: Iowa, the Free-State Struggle in the West, and the Prelude to the Civil War.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. xvi + 288 pp.
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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Lowell J. Soike analyzes the political interactions between Free-State supporters and proslavery advocates in Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri in the 1850s in *Busy in the Cause: Iowa, the Free-State Struggle in the West, and the Prelude to the Civil War*. His study provides insights into the political debates over slavery in Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri that have often been overlooked in the literature. According to Soike, “Iowa ... became a refuge, a source of arms and supplies, and a northern land route for the Kansas Free-State settlers” and as a result “developed into an escape route for persons fleeing Missouri enslavement through Kansas” (pp. xi-xii). Ultimately, the debates over slavery in the frontier West created “a more radicalized political mood without room for compromise,” which shaped and hardened many Iowans’ support for the North prior to the American Civil War (p. xii).

Although his thesis is unclear and unfocused at times, Soike divides his framework into two major parts: Iowa’s role in the Free-State struggle in Kansas and its development into the Underground Railroad in southern Iowa. Soike finds that radical

and often violent proslavery actions against Free-State supporters in Kansas cast Iowa decidedly for the North during the war. In response to attacks in Missouri on settlers migrating into Kansas, Iowa opened a new route beginning in Iowa City and later Mount Pleasant that led settlers westward into Kansas while avoiding Missouri. Several Iowa towns, specifically Tabor in southwestern Iowa, were pivotal in protecting and supplying settlers. As Iowans aided Free-State settlers, they also began helping slaves flee western Missouri. Once again, places such as Tabor were integral to southwestern Iowa’s Underground Railroad operation. Most notable in the process, however, was abolitionist John Brown. His radical actions during the Potawatomie Creek Massacre gained him the admiration of many locals, including Iowans, who then joined Brown. Brown and his men traveled through Iowa, liberated slaves in Missouri, and trained and prepared for an assault on the arsenal in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Even after Brown’s death, his actions inspired other Iowans, particu-

larly a group of unsuccessful Quaker men, to continue liberating slaves in Missouri.

Ultimately Soike concludes, “Neither Missouri nor Iowa were solid in their proslavery or antislavery outlook, but the slavery issue in Kansas moved its neighbors toward one side or the other, stiffening southern identity in Missouri and strengthening northern proclivities of Iowa” (pp. 209-210). Soike’s study relies heavily on newspaper accounts, as mentioned in the preface, but he augments his work by also consulting military records and archival collections and papers. *Busy in the Cause* is best suited for a general audience, especially those interested in Civil War military history, with an emphasis on slavery or the West, and Iowa history.

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