

George C. Rable. *Damn Yankees! Demonization and Defiance in the Confederate South.* Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History Series. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. 216 pp. \$38.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-6058-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Award-winning Professor Emeritus George C. Rable has once again added to the historiography of the Civil War with his outstanding *Damn Yankees! Demonization and Defiance during the American Civil War*. In this book, Rable seeks to analyze the process with which the Confederacy defined its enemy by delving into the methods used in creating the distinction of good versus evil. He does so by compiling a multitude of sources that harmonize the voices of the South, ultimately producing the idea of the wicked Yankee.

While there are published works that have focused on opinions of soldiers from both sides of the Civil War, *Damn Yankees!* takes this further by combining views of soldiers and civilians, “everyone from politicians, preachers, [and] polemicists,” including women (p. 5). This component makes the book a more comprehensive examination of the mentality behind the Civil War. Due to the wealth of both primary and secondary materials, there was a need to maintain a tight focus on the South, and Southerners’ feelings toward Northerners. The concept of inhabitants of the North as Yankees was not a new ideal when the first shot was fired on Fort Sumter in April 1861. Historian William R. Taylor put forth the notion of two distinct factions inhabiting the United States

from the first colonies of Jamestown and Plymouth in the seventeenth century. Taylor’s book *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, first published in 1957, explains that from the beginning, the North and South had developed vast differences between them. Rable’s work further proves this to be evident. Clearly, the South had forged an identity that separated it from the rest of the country. Confederates mined the depths of their imagination to find ways to degrade the Yankees, turning them into something akin to a different race.

Rable’s synthesis of speeches, editorials, letters, diaries, and, to a considerable extent, newspapers generates a more complete narrative of the Southern mind. Many Southerners believed their purity aided in the prosperous future to which they were entitled. Immigration was believed to have deluded the Northern population with the “dregs of European society” (p. 42). Newspaper editors were exceedingly critical of Union men, calling them cowards in battle and monsters in polite society. Another caveat Rable points out is that this was not just a fight over the fate of the United States but a religious contest as well. Southerners believed that they were ordained by God to rule over his kingdom on earth. Therefore, in that mindset, the soldiers in blue

were actually seeking to overthrow the Almighty and remove God-fearing Southerners from the map.

Additionally, opposing factions during civil wars are largely more similar than dissimilar. This component tends to produce increased violence and a lengthy, drawn-out conflict. Justification for the means used to achieve victory are made more palatable as a result of the process of demonization. Newspapers and politicians used this catalyst, spreading tales of the savagery and atrocities committed by Yankees against Confederate armies and Southern people. Painting a vivid picture of the Northerner as their mortal enemy justified any means to bring about the war's end and a Confederate victory.

Damn Yankees! explores a concept that is relatable across generations. Parallels can be made between the creation of demonization during the American Civil War to wars from early recorded history and the conflicts of the twenty-first century. *Damn Yankees!* is an engaging read for everyone from the diehard Civil War enthusiast to casual readers of history owing to the prose and delivery that Rable uses to make his argument. The writings and speeches of Southerners during the conflict affected not only the fighting during the war but also the relationship between North and South as the nation tried to rebuild in the decades to come, as Confederates felt "compromise with such a people was impossible ... [and] Confederate troops must fight all the harder" (p. 67). The legacy of the American Civil War has greatly influenced the development of the United States, and vestiges of the rhetoric of the nineteenth century to demonize Yankees can still be recognized today.

Rable uses a specificity that demonstrates his ability to display the knowledge he has about the American South and the wealth of resources that he uncovered and sifted through in his research. Additionally, Rable's strength as a skilled writer is evident throughout. His ability to frame and cement his arguments adds to the worth of this text.

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