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Mark M. Smith. *The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 216 pp. $31.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-975998-9.

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In the well-trod field of Civil War history, claims to methodological innovation are ever more important. By adopting a new analytical framework, academics can revitalize seemingly staid topics, whether that involves examining the sources anew or including overlooked material. Mark M. Smith achieves this feat in ***The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege: A Sensory History of the Civil War***. Through brief and highly readable prose, he advances a compelling reinterpretation of soldiers' and civilians' experiences. The author contends that America's bloodiest conflict, "veined with meaningful talk about the nobility of the Union, the morality of Emancipation, and the nonnegotiable need to preserve American civilization, was also a war whose sensory experience overwhelmed refined sensibilities and effaced the very notion of civility" (p. 2). This is not simply an argument for the degenerative impact of violence. Smith distinguishes his contribution from that of prior scholars by historicizing each of the senses across five chapters. His selection of topics--Fort Sumter, First Bull Run, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and the *H. L. Hunley*--shows how a sensory approach can recast familiar narratives.

Smith first reminds historians that the secessionist tumult audibly transformed Charleston. During the antebellum period, it was "one of the most … highly regulated cities in North America" (p. 11). The restrained, genteel manner of the plantation elite reflected a social dominance they perpetuated by forbidding rowdy public gatherings and enforcing a strict slave curfew. The furor of secession shattered this effort at oppressive tranquility, as the bombardment of Fort Sumter followed months of boisterous politicking. More than novel, the sound of cannon fire made "martial sounds … part of everyday life" (p. 30).

The battle of First Bull Run challenged an American belief in the trustworthiness of sight. Opposing commanders Irvin McDowell and P. G. T. Beauregard, given their military training, believed "that the ability to visually imagine where troops were and would be, gave them the perspective essential for victory" (p. 43). Inconsistent uniform coloration as well as the smoke and roar of black powder weapons replaced such inspiring notions with the saddening reality of friendly fire and widespread confusion. Combatants turned to their hearing, which dictated advances and retreats, alerted them to incoming missiles, and aided them in determining the location of other troops.

Smith asserts that in the aftermath of the Gettysburg battle, "the always-thin line between soldier and civilian was obliterated" (p. 73). The smell of mass death contrasted sharply with expectations based on pre-Civil War improvements in street sanitation and personal cleanliness. Jux-

taposing wartime photography with accounts of the olfactory experience, he maintains, underscores the unprecedented nature of these scenes for American observers. The corporeal devastation of Gettysburg necessitated extensive oratory and commemoration as mechanisms for healing.

The siege of Vicksburg destabilized its residents' belief that "the choice of what to consume reflected refinement and civilization, the two touchstones of the South's social order" (pp. 88-89). Previously, they had enjoyed an abundant variety of foods, and popular racialized thought maintained that the thinner lips and tongue of white men were better suited to exquisite cuisine than those of enslaved African Americans. Smith claims this status quo ceded before a Union bombardment that deprived civilians of sleep and impeded their free movement in the city. Social elites therefore sheltered in dark and unpleasant tunnels that mocked their pretentions; given dwindling food stocks, "the color of the skin, by siege's end, held little sway over what went into mouths" (p. 101). The author finds that this period of suffering led the population to doubt their sense of propriety.

The crew of the *H. L. Hunley* served in "the most intensely intimate sensory environment experienced by soldiers or sailors during the Civil War" (p. 123). Americans embraced an impression of boundless space based on factors that included the country's vast territory, an affinity for reading that reduced personal contact, and a desire for solitary relaxation long promulgated by social superiors. Smith finds that the claustrophobic and cramped nature of mining expressed the very opposite of these conceptions. The equivalence between such labor and submarine conditions highlighted a departure from antebellum norms, and "it was this willing proximity to the experience of slavery that reveals the depth of sacrifice these men were willing to make" (p. 127).

Smith concludes that "[William Tecumseh] Sherman's march was a thoroughgoing sensory revolution" (p. 135) achieved by Union troops with sensibilities hardened by wartime service. The targets of Union ire were unprepared for the disturbing sounds of approaching armies, smelling and seeing the vistas of destruction left in their wake. It is in this reappraisal of the Civil War experience--one based on changing expectations of hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch--that the significance of this work becomes clear. Attention to how period Americans interacted with their senses does not merely expand scholarly understanding of Victorian social mores. Amid debates concerning whether the Civil War was a total war, its implications for nineteenth-century nationalism, and the long-term consequences of Union victory, the author reminds historians that "to … claim their place in modernity, Americans had to endure a wrenching war … that reminded them of the past they believed they had escaped but … overwhelmed them" (p. 146).

The Smell of Battle, the Taste of Siege foregrounds a question about interpretative emphasis: the degree to which scholars prioritize the conflict's destructive, rather than constructive, consequences. In a response to Susan-Mary Grant's review of his *The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters*, James M. McPherson underscored the rise of "recent studies portraying an 'increasingly grim and gruesome picture' of the 'dark side' of the Civil War."[1] Smith does not portray this national schism as pointless, barring an ostensibly negative yet debatable contention that "the violence … on human flesh was novel in its variety and scale" (p. 123). The grievous casualties of the Napoleonic Wars, the general continuity in arms and tactics over the early-to-mid nineteenth century, and Earl J. Hess's repudiation of the rifle musket as a revolutionary small arm, question the depiction of Civil War brutality as a historic departure.[2] Regardless, Smith illuminates how a conflict could require backward-looking means to achieve modern ends. Comparative analyses may clarify the applicability of the author's findings, whether across different Southern cities or battles at various stages of the war. An able demonstra-

tion of sensory history, its brevity leaves many research opportunities for others.

Notes

[1]. Susan-Mary Grant, review of *The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters*, by James M. McPherson, *Reviews in History* (review no. 1887), DOI: 10.14296/RiH/2014/1887. See McPherson's appended comment, entitled "Author's Response."

[2]. See Earl J. Hess, *The Rifle Musket in Civil War Combat: Reality and Myth* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2008), and *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015).