

Matthew M. Stith. *Extreme Civil War: Guerrilla Warfare, Environment, and Race on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. 232 pp. cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-6314-6.

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Historians have published over fifty thousand books and pamphlets about the Civil War since its start in 1861. Moreover, Civil War battlefields, statues, and monuments keep the memory and narrative alive. What then of the "irregular" Civil War? You will not find monuments or interpretive trails for these battles, although Matthew Stith says these skirmishes "far outweighed the death and destruction of the largest set-piece battles" (p. 18). The irregular war on the Trans-Mississippi frontier, the borderland that connected Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Indian Territory, was multifaceted and just as unrelenting. In *Extreme Civil War*, Stith, focusing on the region between Fort Scott, Kansas and Fort Smith, Arkansas, uncovers the complex guerrilla contests in the context of racial and environmental forces on the Trans-Mississippi frontier.

Stith engages a historiography roughly twenty years in the making. As historians came to recognize guerrilla warfare's role in shaping the Civil War, understandings of irregular fighting emerged to offer perspectives on conventional methods. Stith follows the footsteps of Phillip Shaw Paludan and Michael Fellman, historians who explore the conflict from the civilian perspective, as frontiersmen became both victims and combatants. Daniel Sutherland's *A Savage Conflict* (2009) added to this

burgeoning scholarship with its focus on rebel citizenry, a motif similarly explored in *Extreme Civil War*. A spectrum of guerrilla fighters existed during the Civil War, ranging from partisans, small conventional forces given unconventional roles to more reprehensible characters, bushwhackers. Sutherland asserts that Jefferson Davis welcomed partisan warfare for disrupting supply lines and attacking Union counterguerrilla forces and civilians. The military strategy of utilizing partisans at first proved beneficial in generally causing military obstacles. However, it evolved into a wholly heartless and devastating affair that the Confederate War Department could not control, leading to the South's defeat. The rugged individuals found on the Trans-Mississippi frontier generally shared traits of independent motivation, they lived closer to home and therefore avoided action on the battlefield, and, as older and wealthier males, they remained socioeconomically connected to their communities.

Scholarship on the region concerning civilians generally emphasizes regular or guerrilla warfare alone, not civilian participation. Regional inquiry into the manifestation of rebel warfare during the Civil War seeks to explain the preponderance of such actions throughout the South. Michael Fellman's *Inside War* (1990) focuses on Missouri, a re-

gion well documented and where irregular warfare was widespread. Brian McKnight, with *Contested Borderland* (2012), studies the isolated region of central Appalachia and the Union and Confederate deserters who threatened local citizens. These scholars therefore offer specific encapsulations of the brutality of irregular warfare throughout the South. However, nowhere did this occur more intensely than on the Trans-Mississippi border, which has, until now, been on the periphery of Civil War historiography.

The understanding of frontiers and borderlands as historic concepts is increasingly important in the study of interactions on the American frontier. The Trans-Mississippi border was a geographical frontier that for soldiers and civilians was the furthest in westward movement in 1860s America. But Stith also describes this region as a cultural borderland, with an amalgam of Native American, African American, and a host of military and civilian peoples interacting there. These spaces were at the center of the civilian-centered conflict as the Civil War intensified.

Fittingly organized, the chapters chronologically chart the war's progression. Chapter 1 describes the prewar conditions that allowed for irregular war to occur. Chapter 2 highlights the border war occurring in 1861 and the Trans-Mississippi border's devolvment into chaos. Chapter 3 goes into the regular and irregular war combination that plagued the region and its inhabitants in 1862. Stith starts to conclude the war in chapter 4, "The Devolution of War, 1863." The Civil War had largely ended but there was still guerrilla fighting confirmed along the border. Chapter 5 describes the "deplorable condition of the country" from 1864-65 as residents returned to find a "wilderness of war" (p. 122).

Much of the southern Trans-Mississippi border thrived during the 1850s, despite the localized violence of Bleeding Kansas. The western parts of Missouri and Arkansas remained the principal frontier by 1860. The civilians there contended

with a diverse terrain with harsh weather extremes that would serve to complicate civilian and military life. The people themselves were unkempt and rugged, fitting of the unpredictable borderlands. In that sense, communities on the border almost expected the change towards a war-induced lifestyle. The introduction of soldiers into border towns lent to the chaos of the ensuing conflict. In order to defend their livelihoods, civilians and Confederate irregulars took up arms. Anti-guerrilla Union soldiers plagued civilians, torching houses and stealing livestock. The legacy of Bleeding Kansas and disputes between pro- and antislavery forces made the issue of slavery most alive in this theater of the Civil War. Anarchy had arisen on the border by the end of 1861 and it would only get worse.

Regular warfare on the Trans-Mississippi border intensified the irregular fighting; when armies left, irregulars attacked Union sympathizers, further collapsing the fight into a civilian-centered conflict. Here the environment played a critical role in the fate of soldiers, guerrillas, and civilians. After the Battle of Pea Ridge, the bloodiest battle west of the Mississippi, the land was devastated. Excessive drought, the destruction of agriculture, intense heat, and the inconsistent water supply played no small role in the growing discontent on the border. With the resumption of conventional warfare in the fall of 1862, the First Kansas Colored Infantry set out to hunt irregular forces, fighting "desultory skirmishes" (p. 73). This exemplified race relations in a proslavery region wherein white officers and black soldiers fought side by side against Confederate insurgents, according to Stith.

The desperation of Confederate irregulars manifested in their robbing of a smallpox hospital toward the end of the war. The region plunged deeper into civilian-centered guerrilla conflict, reflected most outwardly in Fayetteville, a once thriving town that was largely abandoned. Pro-Union Native American refugees returned from

northern parts of Kansas only to find devastation, their communities playing a role in the economic growth of the Cherokee Nation and the Trans-Mississippi frontier. A majority of civilians died or remained in exile to escape the guerrilla-fueled chaos. By summer, all Confederate armies had surrendered and the irregular bands had mostly stopped fighting, but with the damage done, the conflict wrought widespread economic and social destruction.

Stith relates that the irregular war on the Trans-Mississippi border involved violence much worse than the "regular" Civil War concurrently happening. Because of the nature of fighting in this region, the violence and damages incurred far surpassed that of conventional battles. The suffering of women and children, berated and abused by fighters as well as antiguerrilla Union soldiers, over the course of the extreme Civil War exceeded that inflicted by William T. Sherman's campaign to the sea, which only lasted a few months, an assertion no less telling of the measure of destruction irregular warfare caused.

Several factors made the irregular war, or extreme civil war, as the title denotes, into such a brutal conflict. Unlike the regular war fought between Union and Confederate soldiers, the irregular war was civilian-centered, wherein civilians participated as victims and combatants. More often than not, Stith suggests, the environment remained highly unpredictable and dangerous, serving as a further detriment to citizens on the border. Perilous winters and parched, war-torn farms did a number on residents, Confederate- and Union-sympathizing alike.

Stith uses poignant, firsthand accounts and letters to portray the dogged lifestyle of civilians, namely women and children, living in this volatile borderland. Women's roles involved manipulating those who showed up on their doorsteps in order to protect their property and often the lives of their male relatives. Showing strength in the face of imminent death, one elderly woman refused to

balk when a soldier, trying to pilfer livestock, "emptied his bowels of [a] stinking load in her presence" (p. 111). Much less foul, a young woman being plundered by Union soldiers of her coffee, in an act of defiance "rushed for an iron poker and dealt [one] such a blow that he fell limp to the floor" (p. 95). Families that remained in the region fought to preserve their livelihoods upended by the genesis of war. Their experiences factored prominently in the irregular war occurring on the Trans-Mississippi frontier.

Race played a central part in the conflict, as Stith calls the region a cultural borderland as well as a geographic frontier. The cultural diversity of this region, where African Americans and Native Americans comprised more than 30 percent of the wartime population, contributed to the scale of fighting on the border. The Cherokee in southern parts of Kansas and northern Indian Territory played the role of victims, suffering destruction, abuse, and sometimes forced removal on par with white civilians. The Cherokee contributed significantly to the political and social webbing of the Trans-Mississippi, owning four thousand slaves and having more than a hundred thousand acres under cultivation. In a predominantly secessionist region, pro-Union Creek chief Opothleyahola and his followers became refugees, escaping from irregular fighting and the Confederacy-siding Cherokee and suffering from exposure and malnourishment after Federal aid failed to come or proved inadequate. When they were not civilians though, they enlisted to fight the regular and irregular Confederate forces. The "Indian Expedition," the first significant Union operation into Indian Territory during the Civil War, sought to secure the pro-Confederate Cherokee Nation and return displaced Native refugees. The Indian regiments' "skulking" abilities, as described by Union commanders, were ideally suited for warfare and proved invaluable to the otherwise ill-fated expedition, illuminating the racial and ethnic diversity on the Trans-Mississippi frontier.

Extreme Civil War is a groundbreaking work defining a subject overlooked by historians or overshadowed by other topics: the Trans-Mississippi's fringes and its entanglement with guerrilla warfare. Stith provides a new perspective in the study of guerrilla warfare and the Civil War as a whole. The four years of fighting directly affected everyone on the border, with the environment and complex race relations intensifying the civilian-centered conflict. This book will help historians understand how the Civil War might be better defined as a total war, one that pervaded every sphere of society.

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