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Berry Craig. ***Kentucky's Rebel Press: Pro-Confederate Media and the Secession Crisis.*** Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017. 244 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8131-7459-4.

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In the swirling maelstrom of today's turbulent political climate, many journalists, pundits, and even some academics have claimed that the United States has never been as politically divided as it is at the present moment. Any serious student of history can immediately point out the exaggeration in such a claim and direct the curious to the social and political upheaval of the crisis of secession and the Civil War era as proof that the United States has weathered turmoil that overshadows the bitter divisions existent today. Historian Berry Craig seeks to put today's political divisions, and their journalistic expressions, in historical perspective with ***Kentucky's Rebel Press: Pro-Confederate Media and the Secession Crisis,*** a timely study of the hyper-partisan press of the Bluegrass State during a time that still ranks as the most bitterly divisive period in American history.

Although this work is a specifically regional study, the political and social divisions reflected in Kentucky's competing pro-Confederate and pro-Union newspapers vividly illustrated the wider conflagration of sentiment that so deeply divided the North and South. The socioeconomic and political developments that slowly began to characterize and differentiate both regions during the first half of the nineteenth century collided in the border areas between the two during the tumultuous decade of the 1850s. Border states like Kentucky quickly became focal points in the battle for the allegiance of citizens torn between their love of country and their affinity for a concept of liberty that was sharply defined by social and racial status and a strong distaste for too much government intrusion. The vitriolic partisanship reflected in the heated exchanges between the writers and editors of Kentucky's divided press vividly illustrated these national divisions. The state's newspapermen of all political persuasions likely thought that their passionate entreaties carried weight and meaning with a public reliant on their insight and wisdom. Yet the central claim of this work stands in sharp contrast to this idea.

Craig stakes his claim very early in the book's introduction. His first objective is an attempt to establish the extent of media bias present in Kentucky during the period in question. Determining bias was perhaps the easiest part of Craig's research as the newspapers of the era were not shy in making their political proclivities known. Craig quickly determines not only that numerous examples of both pro-Confederate and pro-Union outlets existed there, but also that this trove represents "a mother lode of media bias." He qualifies this statement with some historical context of the evolution of the American media, accurately highlighting the partisan nature of the American press from its inception during the revolutionary era

through the mid-nineteenth century, characterizing most antebellum newspapers as "virtually a branch of political parties" (p. 9). This bias established and placed in context, Craig then asks, "Did such blatant bias sway public opinion? Or did the media only reinforce pro-Union or pro-Confederate predilections?" (p. 10). Referencing parallels with today's partisan media, particularly cable news outlets such as MSNBC and Fox News, he argues that the partisan press of the Civil War was essentially "preaching to the choir" (p. 11). Despite their substantial number and vociferous exultations of perceived wrongs, manipulations, and corruptions, Craig's study highlights the failure of the state's Confederate-leaning press to convince a majority of Kentuckians of the worth of their cause. Again drawing modern parallels, he concludes that this failure "adds weight to the argument that the press mainly mirrors, not drives, public opinion" (p. 12).

The structure of the book follows a mostly chronological order. The first chapter establishes the sociopolitical paradigm that held sway in Kentucky's antebellum society and introduces the major journalistic sources used in the study. Craig describes antebellum Kentucky as a land of yeoman farmers with a more diversified agrarian economy focused on wheat, hemp, and livestock, as opposed to the cotton mania that held sway in the neighboring states to the South. The existence of the institution of slavery aligned Kentucky ideologically within the Southern sociopolitical domain. Almost all whites—rich or poor—"supported slavery as the foundation of white supremacy" (p. 15). However, an equally strong undercurrent of Union sentiment that stretched back to the establishment of the state in the late eighteenth century, coupled with an economy that relied less on slavery than the cotton-based economy to the south, provided a check on the pro-Confederate interest and created a quagmire of public opinion regarding secession. Yet the crux of Kentucky's dilemma did not revolve around the question of slavery itself. Both pro-Union and pro-Confederate forces agreed on the basic premise of the slave system and sought to preserve it. As bitter and antagonistic as the two sides became over the issue of secession, "the press largely argued over the means to an end—the preservation of slavery and white supremacy" (p. 16).

Craig attempts to navigate this quagmire by examining the war of words that was waged between pro-Confederate and pro-Union newspapers, with a particular focus on the staunchly pro-Confederate ***Louisville Daily Courier*** and its ideological antithesis, the ***Louisville Daily Journal.*** Although he provides details and examples from numerous other pro-Union and pro-Confederate papers, the bulk of Craig's work centers on the actions and interactions of these two papers and their respective publishers, Walter Newman Haldeman of the ***Courier*** and George Dennison Prentice of the ***Journal***. Further reflecting the internecine nature of the conflict, Haldeman and Prentice knew each other personally and had a long history. Prentice provided Haldeman with his first break into the journalism business when he was merely a teenager hired as a lowly clerk at Prentice's ***Journal***, only to have Haldeman evolve into his most vicious and vocal public opponent in the secession-fueled journalistic wars of the 1850s and '60s.

After establishing some context and introducing his major primary sources, chapter 2 focuses on the highly divisive presidential election of 1860. Almost no one in Kentucky supported the Abraham Lincoln candidacy. Lincoln's victory set into motion the same forces in Kentucky that reverberated through the slaveholding regions, with pro-Union and pro-Confederate camps quickly retreating behind their ideological battlements to lob words like artillery shells at each other. Chapter 3 covers the period between the election and Lincoln's inauguration, the heart of the secession crisis. Both camps claimed they represented the true sentiment of the majority of their fellow Kentuckians. Demagogues on both sides claimed their

opponents were radicals and traitors. When an attempted secession convention failed, the pro-Confederate press cried foul and charged their political opponents with corruption and collusion.

The fourth chapter covers the climax of the secession crisis, from the attack on Fort Sumter to the official declaration of Kentucky's neutrality. This is perhaps the most interesting phase of these events, and Craig navigates this complex political drama deftly, weaving a clear narrative spiced with numerous direct quotes from both sides while ably capturing the fervor of the passions these events invoked, the cognitive dissonance that lingered just below the surface of both sides' arguments, and the reticence of most Kentuckians to take up arms against fellow Americans. The declaration of neutrality represented the deep divisions and uncertainties of most Kentuckians at the time, but this compromise—in the spirit of the state's most famous politician, Henry Clay, the Great Compromiser—only mired the state in an even deeper quagmire as it was left in a sort of geopolitical limbo, not Confederate, but not fully within the Union, either.

Chapter 5 details the summer of 1861, which Craig dubs "Neutrality Summer" (p. 93). This chapter showcases the bluster behind the pro-Confederate press claims that they represented the majority of public opinion, as pro-Union candidates won the state elections of 1861 by a landslide. Again, the pro-Confederate press cried foul and performed feats of mental gymnastics to justify their failures. The war of words really became ugly during this period, especially from the pro-Confederate camp. Craig highlights one particular Confederate rabble-rouser, Len Faxon of the ***Columbus Crescent***. Faxon excoriated the "Yankees" with such epithets as "cowardly pups"; "sneaking skunks"; and, playing on the ethnic origin of many Union soldiers, "bow-legged wooden shoed, sour craut (***sic***) stinking, Bologna sausage eating, hen roost robbing Dutch sons of –" (p. 97). Faxon ultimately put his money where his mouth was and joined the Confederate army. Yet, despite numerous examples such as Faxon who left behind their home state to join the Confederacy, the majority of even the most ardent Kentucky secessionists begrudgingly yielded to popular sentiment and accepted neutrality "as eminently preferable to siding with the North against the South" (p. 107).

The next chapter describes the crumbling of this last hope of Kentucky's pro-Confederate camp as Kentucky's precarious neutrality was quickly challenged by outside forces that compelled Kentucky to choose a side. When both Confederate and Union armies entered the state, the war issue reached a crisis point. Despite attempts to maintain neutrality, the pro-Union forces proved victorious when the Kentucky legislature demanded that the Confederate army leave and the state formally cast its lot with the Union in September 1861. Chapter 7 describes a Confederate press on the run, ideologically outnumbered and outgunned. Some pro-Confederate papers were shut down by the Union army and a few editors and journalists were arrested and charged with treason, though most were subsequently released after swearing oaths of allegiance to the Union. Craig discusses at length the sordid saga of ***Courier*** editor Haldeman's stealthy evasion of arrest and attempts to reestablish his paper in Confederate-occupied Bowling Green where he continued his heated rhetoric with renewed fervor, only to be forced out of Kentucky altogether when the Confederates abandoned Kentucky in early 1862.

The vitriol and bombast of the dying Confederate press reached a fever pitch during this period, making the ham-fisted insults of Faxon seem tame in comparison. During the brief period that the Confederate army occupied the city of Columbus, Faxon's paper—now helmed by Edward I. Bullock since Faxon joined the Confederate army—was renamed the ***Daily Confederate News*** and unleashed the most vehement anti-Union rhetoric ever printed in Kentucky. Craig quotes: "We want

to kill a Yankee—must kill a Yankee—never can sleep sound again until we do kill a Yankee, get his overcoat and scalp. Indian-like, we want a scalp and must have it. We'd think no more of scalping a dead Yankee than cutting the throat of a midnight assassin—not a shade's difference between the murderer and the deceptious (*sic*) Yank" (p. 156). Such declarations, never before or since (as of yet) equaled in the pages of the American press, ultimately were naught but the last frenzied gasps of a conquered and humiliated foe, angrily lashing out at their opponents with stubborn fortitude in the face of defeat. Although a few pro-Confederate papers managed to weather the storm and remain in business during the war, they did so only by toning down their rhetoric and hedging their Confederate leanings with a large dose of moderation.

The story does not end there, however. Ironically, it was not until after the war that most Kentuckians discovered their Confederate sympathies. Craig quotes historian Aaron Astor in describing Reconstruction era Kentuckians as "belated Confederates" (p. 164). Many, even some who fought for the Union, embraced the Lost Cause and all of its accoutrements in the war's aftermath. Again supporting his central thesis that the press reflects more than shapes public opinion, many crisis era pro-Confederate papers found renewed life after the war. Haldeman "came home in triumph" after the war, reestablishing his paper and ultimately buying out his longtime rival, the *Louisville Daily Journal*, and establishing the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, still one of the state's major newspapers (p. 165).

Minus a few recurring writing quirks—such as a bad habit of beginning sentences with phrases like "At any rate"—Craig's writing is skillful and engaging throughout the work. Craig laments the fact that many potential sources have been lost or destroyed in the interim between the Civil War and today. He did attempt to mine manuscript collections for insights not revealed in the pages of the existent newspapers, but "none of these sources yielded significant information" (p. 7).

Despite these shortcomings in the source material (an issue all too familiar to most historians), Craig's study reveals much about the inner workings of the Civil War era press in Kentucky. Even with its limited scope, if the conclusions drawn in this study can be applied across all regions of the Union and Confederacy during the Civil War, Craig has greatly advanced our understanding of the role of the press during those turbulent times. More regional studies, especially focusing on other "border states," such as Maryland, Missouri, Delaware, and West Virginia, are needed to confirm the hypothesis. The implications of the thesis, if further studies support it, create new opportunities for historians to mine the newspapers of the Civil War era for new insights into the local political disparities that fan Civil War era tensions. Given the current political climate, which does seem to contain echoes of the Civil War era, ***Kentucky's Rebel Press*** is a necessary and timely work that provides much-needed historical perspective on the hyper-politicized interpretations of current events by today's partisan media outlets.

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