



**Thomas R. Flagel.** *War, Memory, and the 1913 Gettysburg Reunion.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2019. 192 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-60635-371-4.

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Thomas R. Flagel's *War, Memory, and the 1913 Gettysburg Reunion* follows a dual narrative, presenting veterans as they retraced the memories of their past, and as they experienced the future in the progressive showcase that was the fiftieth anniversary reunion at Gettysburg. Covering the event from the planning stages in 1908 to its completion on July 4, 1913, Flagel provides a broad overview of the reunion, while focusing on four veterans in attendance to provide some texture to his analysis. Beyond these men, Flagel uses a variety of newspapers to fill in much of the details. Through his analysis, Flagel finds that for many at Gettysburg in 1913, it was about individual experience, and that individual experience was often found beyond the expertly sanitized reunion grounds, out where the men had done their duty fifty years prior.

In this work, Flagel allows the Gettysburg reunion to unfold chronologically, with each chapter covering a specific day or moment connected with the reunion. Chapters such as "Planning Glory," "Getting There," "Arrival," and "Veterans' Day" take a concentrated look the various stages of the reunion, allowing for a level of description and analysis that is far more pointed than most works on memory allow. Throughout these chapters, Flagel focuses not just on memory, but also on the forward-looking nature of the event. As Flagel

notes, much of the reunion was not "a throwback to the war but a monument to the modern age of progressivism" (p. 32). Rather than the ramshackle nature of the 1863 encampments, the 1913 visit to Gettysburg included clean running water, state certified food thanks to the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act and Meat Inspection Act, and an understanding of medicine far beyond what had existed fifty years prior. On July 3, there was a fireworks display that lasted nearly two hours, a display made possible by the twentieth-century mass production of pyrotechnics. Those in attendance, and veterans of Gettysburg especially, could not help but be struck by a bygone past celebrated through an event so enamored with the future.

When looking backward, Flagel takes a targeted approach to the growing field of Civil War memory. Rather than expanding his scope, such as Nina Silber did in *This War Ain't Over: Fighting the Civil War in New Deal America* (2018), which traces Civil War memory into the 1940s, Flagel homes in on a singular event. From the vantage point of veterans returning "to a place of war memory," Flagel argues, we can better understand how veterans saw their role in promoting, or not, national reconciliation (p. xi). Counter to David W. Blight's argument in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), and more in line with Caroline E. Janney's argument in *Remembering the Civil War:*

*Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (2013), Flagel asserts that when former soldiers arrived on the field at Gettysburg, it was not their primary intention to seek reconciliation, and, if anything, it was the flames of sectionalism that burned in most men's breasts. But Flagel pushes his argument forward by breaking from the reconciliation versus antireconciliation binary, and instead argues that many, if not most, veterans had a rather myopic view of the Gettysburg reunion. Rather than wrestling with the larger ideological concept of reconciliation, veterans "almost invariably interpreted the site in personal rather than sectional or national terms" (p. xi). The veterans were interested in remembering and attempting to understand their own individual experience, as well as reconnecting with those men who had shared their experience. While the official program included speeches by politicians that pushed broader themes such as martyrdom of America's soldiers or national reconciliation, veterans were rarely present to hear them; Flagel quotes a newspaper article that claimed "99 out of every 100 veterans" were on the battlefield during the day, not under the great tent listening to speeches (p. 61). Instead, veterans went to find former comrades they had not seen in fifty years, to look for the patch of ground on which they had fought, to attempt to reconcile why they had survived while so many others had not, or to seek forgiveness for the things they had done or had not done all those years ago. For these veterans, the Gettysburg Reunion had so much more to offer than listening to a politician's speech in a hot tent.

With this work, Flagel has added a new level of insight to the field of Civil War memory, and his microhistorical approach to the personal nature of memory is a welcome addition. His focus on four veterans, though far from representative, works well in connecting the reader with the desires and feelings of veterans at Gettysburg. If there is a critique of this work, it is that at times it feels more like a cul-de-sac than an on-ramp, and this reader wanted to see Flagel dedicate more space to con-

necting his insights to the broader field. For example, what does his work tell us about veterans and reconciliation beyond the Gettysburg battlefield? But it is a successful book that leaves the reader wanting more, and his interpretation is one with which future historians of Civil War memory will have to wrestle.

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