

# H-Net Reviews

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Steven E. Woodworth, ed. *The American Civil War: A Handbook of Literature and Research*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996. xiv + 754 pp. \$99.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29019-0.

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Estimates of the number of writings devoted to the Civil War range from 50,000 to 70,000 books and pamphlets. Not surprisingly, no one can keep track of, not to mention master, such an extensive corpus of works. No sooner had Robert E. Lee's men stacked their arms at Appomattox, than participants, and later scholars, began to chronicle the war's history and meaning. Bibliographers, following closely behind, soon commenced the formidable task of identifying and classifying the growing mountain of polemical and scholarly writings.

As early as 1866, the Rhode Island bibliographer and librarian John Russell Bartlett published his 477-page compilation, *The Literature of the Rebellion: A Catalogue of Books and Pamphlets Relating to the Civil War in the United States*. Almost a half century later, John Page Nicholson issued his *Catalogue of the Library of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel John Page Nicholson Relating to the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1866* (1914), a bibliography that brimmed with more than one thousand pages of citations. Most of Nicholson's books went to the Henry E. Huntington Library in 1927. Through the years, other useful bibliographical works have appeared, including E. Merton Coutler's *Travels in the Confederate States* (1948, 1994); Charles E. Dornbusch's *Regimental Publications & Personal Narratives of the Civil War: A Checklist* (2 vols.; 1961- 1972); and *Civil War Books: A Critical Bibliography* (2 vols.; 1967-1969), edited by Allan Nevins, James L. Robertson, Jr., and Bell I. Wiley. In his recent *The Civil War in Books: An Analytical Bibliography* (1997), David J. Eicher lists more than thirty general and specialized Civil War bibliographical works. His own bibliography is a "selection" of what Eicher considers "the most important 1100 books on the Civil War" (p. xxi) and includes lengthy, often critical, annotations.

Steven E. Woodworth's hefty *The American Civil War: A Handbook of Literature and Research* takes a different tack. Far more comprehensive than Eicher's book, Woodworth's volume is by its very nature much less analytical. Covering several thousand titles, many of the works are either listed or mentioned in a superficial, uncritical manner. Despite the obvious limitations of this approach, non-specialists and specialists alike will benefit considerably from Woodworth's book. It will guide students at all levels through the maze of Civil War scholarship.

*The American Civil War* consists of forty-seven historiographical essays arranged in eleven parts that cover General Secondary Sources, General Primary Sources, Illustrative Materials, Causation, International Relations, Leaders, Strategy and Tactics, Conduct of the War, Home Front, Reconstruction and Beyond, and Popular Media. Forty-eight specialists contribute the chapter-length essays. References to works include in-text citations and complete bibliographical information following each chapter. One chapter includes endnotes.

Woodworth set intelligent parameters on the chapter coverage. "Emphasis," he explains, "has been placed on works of current usefulness over those of merely historiographical interest. Within this framework, we have also concentrated on works that would be readily available to modern readers without neglecting truly vital items, no matter how obscure. The goal has been to provide a practical guide that will do more than gather dust on reference shelves" (p. xii).

Indeed, Woodworth has compiled a highly useful book, one that scholars will consult frequently and with profit. New recruits and seasoned warriors will welcome the overviews of the secondary and primary sources by such veterans as Woodworth, Daniel E. Sutherland, T.

Michael Parrish, Alan C. Aimone, and Judith Lee Hallock. Mark E. Neely, Jr. and Michael Ballard, respectively, summarize the fruits of scholarship on Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. Evaluations of the literature on the military campaigns comprise sixteen chapters (231 pages) of the book. Authors include a veritable “who’s who” of established and rising Civil War scholars, including Mark Grimsley, Anne J. Bailey, Benjamin Franklin Cooling, John F. Marszalek, Grady McWhiney, William Garrett Piston, and Michael B. Chesson.

Among other valuable parts of the book, researchers will welcome the Home Front, which Woodworth divides into five chapters (“Northern State and Local Politics”; “Southern State and Local Politics”; “Industry, Agriculture, and the Economy”; “Northern Social Conditions”; and “Southern Social Conditions”). To round out his volume, Woodworth devotes sections to illustrative materials (maps, charts, atlases, photographs, and drawings) and popular media (novels, other fictional accounts, films and television programs, and musical and narrative recordings). T. Michael Parrish adds a handy guide to publishers and dealers of Civil War literature, including addresses and phone numbers.

The strengths of Woodworth’s book are the breadth of its coverage and the expertise of its contributors. In a thoroughly researched and well-crafted chapter, for example, Eric H. Walther concludes that “an enormous amount of scholarship...points to the centrality of slavery and race in the coming of the war” (p. 121). Writing on Union international relations, Daniel K. Blewett surveys traditional topics such as U.S. relations with England and France, but also examines critically the historical literature on American diplomacy with Canada, Mexico, Russia, Spain, Poland, and Japan. Evaluating the “War at Sea” (including a section on underwater archaeology), authors Stephen R. Wise, Robert Holcombe, Jr., and Kevin Foster comment that Civil War naval history tends to be “dominated by the [Alfred Thayer] Mahan school of naval writing, wherein the strategic view is stressed, with emphasis on big battles and famous personalities.” They regret that no scholar has yet produced a synthesis of such vital naval issues as commerce raiders, blockade running, naval ordnance, ship construction, and navigation. “The sources for such a work do exist,” the authors conclude, “and when a naval historian combines the primary sources with the secondary works, a nearly complete picture of the navy’s role can be produced” (p. 313). Gaines M. Foster contributes a timely and insightful review of scholarship on “Veterans’ Organizations and Memories of the War.” Foster notes the debate among scholars on

the degree to which veterans on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line accepted sectional reconciliation. He observes correctly that “Historians have done little to...explicate the African-American view of the war” (p. 595).

Woodworth, too, might have taken steps to ensure that racial questions—wartime slavery, blacks in the Confederacy and in the loyal slave states, contrabands within federal lines, the emancipation process, and the evolving status of the freedmen and women—received more thorough coverage and analysis in his book. To be sure, James Alex Bagget’s brief chapter on “Emancipation, Freedmen, and the Freedmen’s Bureau” (pp. 576-85) provides an overview. And Richard M. Zuczek offers some insightful remarks in “Southern Occupation” (pp. 548-60). But racial themes are too important, and the scholarship too vast, for such limited coverage. For example, “[m]odel state studies” (p. 579) on emancipation in South Carolina by Joel Williamson (1965) and in Alabama by Peter Kolchin (1972) are mentioned without commentary. Victor B. Howard’s book on emancipation in Kentucky is ignored.

Not only is coverage of blacks unsatisfactory in Woodworth’s book, but so, too, is the amount of space devoted to women and immigrants. Women receive no chapter treatment *per se* but, unlike immigrants, are well represented in the index. In case anyone misses them, the best analyses of the scholarship on northern women appear in Alan C. Guelzo’s “Union Civilian Leaders” (pp. 520-21). On southern women, readers should consult Bill Cecil-Fronsman’s “Southern Social Conditions” (pp. 536-37). The only mention of northern immigration appears in Howard Bodenhorn’s “Economics” (p. 568).

Readers also should beware that *The American Civil War* is sloppily produced. Again and again, authors’ names are misspelled in the text and in the index. Some book titles are garbled. Even several of the chapter contributors’ academic titles are wrong. More attention to analysis, depth of coverage, and editorial detail, then, would have made this book a more useful and accurate historiographical tool.

Having said this, scholars nonetheless will welcome Woodworth’s *The American Civil War*. Compiling such a work is a major task, and his book’s overall contributions outweigh its deficiencies. It is hoped that over time Woodworth and Greenwood Press will correct the book’s omissions and remedy its minor errors. Updating and reissuing it in an affordable paperback edition will help us keep in step with the forward march of Civil War scholarship.

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