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Robert Cook. *Civil War America: Making a Nation, 1848-1877.* New York and London: Longman, 2003. 320 pp. \$37.35 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-38107-0.

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Although battle-hardened veterans of Civil War historiography will not uncover any new or revealing information in Robert Cook's *Civil War America: Making a Nation, 1848-1877*, instructors of undergraduate courses will likely find the book to be a refreshing and engaging introduction to the period. As a part of Longman's ten-volume series on American history, Cook, a Lecturer in History at the University of Sheffield, in the United Kingdom, acquaints students with the era through a general, yet instructive and detailed analysis; he presents his material through the framework of many of the profession's latest interpretations and popular arguments. Utilizing a voluminous collection of secondary sources and even leading newspapers, presidential papers, and major assortments from the Southern Historical Collection, this lucid, thoughtful, and intelligently reasoned textbook is designed as an introduction and guide to one of the defining eras in American history.[1]

Cook divides his book across nine chapters providing an even allotment to the antebellum years, secession and wartime, Reconstruction, and various post-war developments. He offers, however, a previously neglected dimension to traditional Civil War era studies by including several chapters on the closing and subsequent development of the West, as well as a discussion on post-bellum American economics and society as the nation traveled on the path toward the Gilded Age. Instructors may be averse to Cook's inclusion of such issues in a Civil War and Reconstruction course simply because these are the weakest aspects of the book. Although Cook writes in a learned fashion regarding these latter topics, this part of his book seems isolated in comparison to the larger and quite ambitious picture of the antebellum period, the actual war, and the complexities of Reconstruction.

Nevertheless, Cook's inherent purpose and contention is that the Civil War era represented a broad avenue of national contingency that affected a much greater spectrum that undergraduate students might otherwise recognize. Cook implicitly urges instructors to present the period as a progressive construction of the American nation. He sees the United States as a vastly different entity in 1877 than in 1848, and in many ways, he is correct. For example, he writes that "the evolving process of nation building begun during the Revolution was not over" following the Civil War. "The eventful twelve years spanning the death of Abraham Lincoln and the inauguration of President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877 laid the groundwork for future greatness" (p. 302). Further, Cook argues that northern victory during the war, combined with efforts during Reconstruction (in spite of its multitude of failings and flaws), provided a "legal framework for an inclusive civic nationalism" (p. 341). The uniqueness of American democracy, merged in concert with the nation's capitalist economic system, was simultaneously saved. Cook implies that American nation building could never have occurred in the first place unless the North emerged victorious in the war. The author implicitly agrees with James M. McPherson's contention that Lincoln's leadership instilled the North with the ingredients of eventual victory, the success of which allowed the United States to flourish as mankind's "last best hope." [2] According to the author, though, capitalism's victory, as a direct result of the Union's triumph, possessed its own "darker side"; one that nearly destroyed the Plains Indians, fostered an "environmental rape" of the Far West, and created wretched living conditions in big cities (p. 341). Even though some constituents of academia will take strong issue with elements of his word choice, Cook acknowledges that northern

victory in the Civil War was a fundamental key in placing the United States on the road to superpower status.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of *¬Civil War America* is the manner in which Cook treats the actual war. The author offers a terse insight on the war's major battles—a single chapter dedicated to the secession crisis, Fort Sumter, the slew of ensuing battles, and the eventual Confederate surrender—that reflects the general direction the profession is heading in terms of its treatment of military history. Then, Cook's interpretation of the war accents a socio-political and socio-ideological approach by focusing two chapters on the respective Union and Confederate home fronts. Cook includes standard insights on women's activities and even northern abolitionists' struggles to define the war in terms of the moral issue of slavery. Most significant, though, is Cook's interpretation of Confederate nationalism and southern loyalty. The author largely abstains from explaining the historiographical divide among modern scholars who debate the merits of Confederate nationalism. Instead, he subscribes wholly to Gary W. Gallagher's contention that southerners willingly dedicated themselves to establishing a Confederate nation, identified themselves as Confederates, and, in spite of hardships and low morale, accepted defeat only after their armies in the field were forced to capitulate to a more powerful foe.[3] Cook writes, "To blame the Confederates for their own defeat ... misses the point. Whatever the rights and wrongs of their cause, white southerners made a strong bid for independence from the United States ... Ultimately, only the power and persistence of the enemy brought them to their knees" (p. 188). Cook astutely recognizes that the profession is moving to appreciate the viability of Confederate nationalism, and he should be commended for including a chapter on the subject in his textbook. The problem, however, lies in

the fact that the chapters on the northern and southern home fronts are independent of the chapter on the era's military history. To assert that the Confederacy was defeated first and foremost on the battlefield requires an integration of home front and battlefield analysis. In many ways, the two fronts were inseparable from one another. Therefore, a combined examination might create a better understanding of the adversity that both of the warring sections were forced to endure as the conflict progressed.

Instructors can find great benefit in assigning Robert Cook's book as a reader in classes on the Civil War and Reconstruction. The text provides teachers with a basic framework with which to mold their courses, while students could gain from the text's comfortable pace and approachable presentation. Cook exposes students to several of the profession's current historiographical arguments; however, he does so in a manner that is not intimidating or monotonous. Although parts of the book (especially those dealing with the actual war) could profit from a greater amount of detail, Cook's work should be considered as a strong candidate for anyone interested in acquiring a straightforward introduction to the era.

Notes

[1]. The Southern Historical Collection is housed at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

[2]. For similar arguments, see James M. McPherson, *¬Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 55-56.

[3]. Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism and Military Strategy Could not Save Off Defeat* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4, 8, 63, 157.

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